

**EMMELINE PANKHURST AND THE GREAT WAR: RADICAL  
SUFFRAGIST, CONSERVATIVE PATRIOT OR  
POLITICAL OPPORTUNIST?**

by

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**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS  
in the Department  
of  
History**

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**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**

**September 1995**

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ISBN 0-612-16941-3

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**Title of Thesis**

**Emmeline Pankhurst and the Great War: Radical Suffragist, Conservative Patriot or  
Political Opportunist?**

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## ABSTRACT

The late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century English women's suffrage campaign has traditionally been studied in terms of the political gains that were made before the outbreak of war in 1914. Before achieving their goal of votes for women, suffrage groups were temporarily forced by the war to abandon their pursuit. This involved setting aside the momentum gained during the previous forty years of suffrage activity—including a decade of militant campaigning—in order to aid their country in a time of national crisis. Since the parliamentary vote was conditionally extended to women in the first year of the war and in the absence of an officially organized protest, the war years have been viewed as an anti-climactic end to a struggle that had already peaked in the spring of 1914.

The appropriate response to war would become a divisive issue among suffrage groups and the Great War would see the rise of a fierce patriotism that transcended political, class and gender boundaries, where allegiance to the state cut both to the left and right of political loyalties. Suffrage societies wrestled with the dilemma of participating in a war they had no political power to influence and with working with a government they had recently (and often violently) petitioned. In particular, the jingoistic support for war shown by militant leader Emmeline Pankhurst and the Women's Social and Political Union, was condemned for its uncritical acceptance of militarism, patriotic chauvinism and what was apparently a blatant disregard for the foremost issues of the women's movement's earlier campaigns.

A closer look at the wartime activities of Pankhurst, however, questions both the assumption that she wavered in her commitment to social reform and that the years 1914-1918 saw a suspension of suffrage militancy. Indeed, a review of the history of militancy and the implementation of various militant strategies by Pankhurst in the years preceding the war, provides evidence that Pankhurst's wartime activities were not only a continuation of her earlier tactics, but that they show a measure of political pragmatism that has been generally overlooked. Evidence drawn from suffrage literature reveals that Pankhurst and the WSPU continued to be motivated by the feminist concerns of the pre-war period, and that the suffragist's contributions to the war effort were as premeditated as they were patriotic.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

These projects are never the work of an individual alone and I would like to thank those who have made this work possible. The history department of Simon Fraser University has welcomed from the start this new historian. Trained in the literary arts, I have benefited from the help of Professors Richard Boyer and Robert Koepke in bridging the gap between the two disciplines. Martin Kitchen provided steady help with his knowledge of the First World War and I am grateful for his ability to translate that war for a non-military buff. Committee member Mary Lynn Stewart, through numerous courses and informal discussions, provided the encouragement and enthusiasm to embrace the difficult issues surrounding gender and history, and her suggestions have been invaluable.

I am particularly grateful to my senior supervisor Ian Dyck who has offered not only unstinting support for my studies, but who has also been a patient counselor and rigorous critic. I am indebted to him for his insights into the field of social history as well as for his guidance through the course of this degree.

Scholarship support from Mrs. Ruth Baldwin helped finance two summers of study and her funding of history students at Simon Fraser is greatly appreciated.

My mother Donna has had the longest influence on the direction of my career and her strength of character stands as one of my own guides. Though there may be no direct link between becoming a feminist and growing up in a family where one's siblings are all boys, I have also my

brothers Calvin, Brent and Clayton to thank for their persistent ribbing and refusal to let me take myself too seriously.

The late Louise Carpenter introduced me to Virginia Woolf, and I think she would be pleased to see my progression to the study of women's suffrage. Afternoons playing Canasta with my centenarian friend Beth Wright were both enjoyable and educational for in the process of winning most games, Beth would also share humorous stories of her early years and provide me with first-hand accounts of life in Edwardian England.

Finally, it is not possible to list all the ways I am grateful to my husband Tom Rimmer. He has been an ideal partner at every stage of this project, kindly listening to much talk of the Pankhursts, reading many drafts of this paper and providing still the warmest and most gracious support.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ILP	Independent Labour Party
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
SPD	Social Democratic Party
WFL	Women's Freedom League
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union

## PREFACE

In the autumn of 1993 at Simon Fraser University I was introduced to Emmeline Pankhurst by professors Mary Lynn Stewart and Ian Dyck. Coming from a more literary than historical background, I arrived fresh to the debate surrounding the writing of history and the construction of historical argument. The study of Emmeline Pankhurst was ideally suited to this debate for it provided not only a textbook example of widely opposing historical interpretations, but also an opportunity to take a detailed look at a remarkable character during a dynamic period.

Traditional interpretations of Pankhurst's wartime activities focus upon a series of vacillations that reflect apparent inconsistencies in her political thought and offer no evidence of an organized political agenda. But I wondered if an enquiry into Pankhurst's activities—one which kept in mind her primary objective of obtaining women's enfranchisement—would reveal these activities as well-conceived and thoughtful strategies rather than disordered, random responses to the events of the day.

In order to take a critical look at the historical interpretation of women's suffrage during the war years, it was first necessary to review the history of suffrage reform as experienced by men and women alike in the nineteenth century. Following this, the fifty-odd years of British women's suffrage activity and the movement's political frustrations were reviewed. The subsequent stalemate which led to the rise of militancy in the early years of this century, were also examined. The study of early militancy

provided a foundation from which to begin the search for an explanation of Pankhurst's controversial behaviour during the First World War.

In coming from a 1990s feminist perspective, my interpretation may present Emmeline Pankhurst and her wartime activities in a more sympathetic light than past authors. It is my hope that this work will offer fresh insight into Pankhurst and the role she played from 1914-1918.

*But the educated man's sister—what does “patriotism” mean to her? Has she the same reasons for being proud of England, for loving England, for defending England? Has she been “greatly blessed” in England? History and biography when questioned would seem to show that her position in the home of freedom has been different from her brother's; and psychology would seem to hint that history is not without its effect upon mind and body. Therefore her interpretation of the word “patriotism” may well differ from his.*

Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas

## CHAPTER 1

### HISTORY AND THE CONTROVERSIAL EMMELINE PANKHURST

*Mrs. Pankhurst became the most famous and most notorious woman of her day by means of violence . . . less striking as a form of political agitation than as a mode of personal dominance. It was maintained by a sectarian ruthlessness and a disposition to 'smash' those who challenged her autocracy. It was sealed by a turbulent determination to secure her place in the temple of fame not just by crusading for the women's vote but by embracing martyrdom.*

Piers Brendon, Eminent Victorians

*I sometimes think that she will live in memory not so much as a great reformer (as, of course, she was) but rather as a great woman-worker of magic-creator and destroyer-the Woman whom men all down the ages have dreaded and loved.*

Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence,  
My Part in a Changing World

The name Emmeline Pankhurst continues to be met with recognition in a surprisingly wide circle. Nearly a century after her first entry into the public arena, Pankhurst is generally remembered as the militant Suffragette who brought the issue of votes for women to national attention.<sup>1</sup> On an academic level Pankhurst has continued to inspire debate, and her introduction of militant activity into the British women's suffrage campaign has remained a contentious historical issue.<sup>2</sup> Had the Liberal government of 1914 extended the vote to women before the onset of war, militancy would have been heralded as a successful political strategy and Pankhurst regarded as the effective catalyst for democratic reform. However, the enfranchisement of women was not obtained in 1914. Instead came the Great War, and Pankhurst's contribution to the suffrage movement during that last period would be critically reassessed. Although the merit of militancy as a political strategy has generated the bulk of the discussion concerning Pankhurst's contribution to women's eventual enfranchisement, criticism of Pankhurst's enthusiastic response to the

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<sup>1</sup> On 10 January 1906, the *Daily Mail* coined the term "Suffragette" to distinguish the participants of the new more militant activities initiated by Pankhurst's Women's Social and Political Union from those of members in other suffrage societies. Although Suffragette militancy at times entailed deliberate acts of civil disobedience intended to result in arrest and imprisonment, the activities of militant and non-militant suffragists were in fact very similar. Pankhurst's Suffragettes, however, received from the outset a disproportionate share of media attention and were often perceived by the press and public alike as representative of the majority of women suffragists.

<sup>2</sup> "British women's suffrage" will be used as a descriptive term in this thesis even though this study shares, unfortunately, in the English bias of much of so-called British history. Although suffragists and women's suffrage societies existed in Scotland and Wales, the bulk of the evidence on which this study is based is in England.

Similarly, Nancy Cott has argued that the twentieth-century usage of the term "women's suffrage is incorrect and that to nineteenth-century American suffragists, the more common term was "woman suffrage." Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (London: Yale University Press, 1987). I am not convinced, however, that this was the case in Britain and especially not with the WSPU, whose very name and slogan (Women's Social and Political Union and "Votes for Women") would suggest a preference for the plural term.

war and her apparent disregard for the earlier concerns of the women's movement would be added to the charges that militancy was in effect counter-productive to the suffrage cause. Most frequently cited as evidence of the extreme shortsightedness of her political vision, Pankhurst's wartime role has come under severe censure. In light of this debate, current historical writing on women's suffrage has been as often critical as laudatory of Pankhurst's contribution to women's political emancipation.<sup>3</sup>

Critics of Pankhurst's wartime role have charged Pankhurst with deserting the issue of women's suffrage and embracing the war effort with a militaristic fervour.<sup>4</sup> Routinely, Pankhurst's cooperation with the government she had previously denounced, her chauvinistic support of the Allied cause, and her new-found interest in the debate over national conscription and munitions production are noted as evidence of an abandonment of her earlier suffrage concerns. For the most part, historians have agreed with the conclusions drawn by some of Pankhurst's contemporaries (including her own daughter Sylvia), that Pankhurst's

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<sup>3</sup> Principal historians of the women's suffrage movement include: Richard J. Evans, *The Feminists* (London: Croom Helm, 1977); Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957); Les Garner, *Stepping Stones to Women's Liberty* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1984); Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978); Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Leslie Parker Hume, *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies 1897-1914* (New York: Garland Press, 1982); Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us* (London: Virago, 1978); David Morgan, *Suffragists and Liberals* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975); Martin Pugh, *Electoral Reform in War and Peace, 1906-1918* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) and "Women's Suffrage in Britain 1867-1928" (London: The Historical Association, 1980); Marian Ramelson, *The Petticoat Rebellion* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1967); Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women!* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974); Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain 1866-1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967); and Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> For criticism of Pankhurst's wartime role, see Garner (1984), pp. 55-61; Holton (1986), p. 132; Ramelson, p. 30; Rosen, pp. 242-244; and Tickner, pp. 229-237.

martial stand simply reinforced the patriarchal status quo and checked a feminist critique of war.<sup>5</sup> A closer look at the modification of political strategy Pankhurst implemented at this time, however, may provide an alternative interpretation of both Pankhurst's wartime role and her subsequent contribution to British women's partial enfranchisement in 1918. Disputing the assumption that Pankhurst abandoned the suffrage cause, this thesis will review Pankhurst's wartime activities for evidence of a continuation in her concern for women's issues—including parliamentary enfranchisement—and will suggest that Pankhurst may have been more politically astute than previously acknowledged.

While the declaration of war immediately altered the political climate in England and brought a halt to the momentum of pre-war militancy carefully orchestrated by Pankhurst and the members of her Women's Social and Political Union, evidence suggests that Pankhurst continued to organize WSPU members toward the goal of suffrage during the war.<sup>6</sup> Although the war jeopardized the WSPU's decade-long policy of creating an awareness of women's political servitude and "leaving the government no

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<sup>5</sup> Breakaway members from the WSPU were particularly critical of Pankhurst's position during the war. See Charlotte Despard in Andro Linklater's *An Unhusbanded Life, Charlotte Despard: Suffragette, Socialist and Sinn Feiner* (London: Hutchinson of London, 1980), p. 177; Teresa Billington-Greig, *The Non-Violent Militant*, eds. Carol McPhee and Ann FitzGerald (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987); Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement* (1931, reprint London: Virago, 1977), pp. 591-595; and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World* (London: Gollancz, 1938), pp. 306-323.

<sup>6</sup> Though the focus of this thesis is Emmeline Pankhurst and the role she played during the Great War, the research is in no way intended to dismiss the contributions of other suffragists to the passing of women's suffrage amendments in Britain in 1918 and 1928. Public awareness of the issue of women's suffrage can be attributed to the work of all suffrage societies. For the purposes of this thesis, however, research will be restricted to the momentum created through Suffragette militancy. For a look at how central the work of "constitutional" suffragists' was to the eventual extension of the parliamentary vote to women, see Leslie Hume's thorough study *The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies 1897-1914*.

peace from it,”<sup>7</sup> Pankhurst would adapt WSPU strategy during the war to suit a political climate that was even less conducive to discussion of women’s demand for the vote. Recognizing that continued acts of civil disobedience during the war would only result in widespread public condemnation, and that even the most vigorous militancy would be rendered less effective while the public’s attention was turned to battle, Pankhurst shrewdly suspended the type of militant activities for which the WSPU had become known.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Pankhurst turned to attacking the beliefs which provided the basis for much of the anti-suffrage argument, and used the wartime opportunities made available to women to justify the women’s claims. Although Pankhurst would join other suffrage societies in recognizing the immediacy of England’s national emergency, the question of her motivation for renewed political activity during the war—whether driven by concerns for nation or gender—remains open to debate.

Although the war would provide numerous examples of the ability of patriotism to transcend political, class and gender distinctions, in the case of Emmeline Pankhurst, what has conventionally been described as her “[furious] prosecution of war”<sup>9</sup> may be more than just an illustration of patriotism overcoming her commitment to women’s issues. Rather, Pankhurst’s activities reveal a pragmatic approach to a situation that was

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<sup>7</sup> S. Pankhurst (1931), p. 223.

<sup>8</sup> Within two days of England’s declaration of war, the largest suffrage society, Millicent Garrett Fawcett’s NUWSS suspended all political activity. With some Suffragettes still in prison, however, Pankhurst waited until all WSPU members were released unconditionally before declaring a temporary truce from militancy on 13 August 1914. For an example of the ambiguous tone of Emmeline Pankhurst’s decision to suspend suffrage activity at the outbreak of war, see the circular letter issued 13 August 1914 as cited in Midge Mackenzie’s *Shoulder to Shoulder* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), p. 282.

<sup>9</sup> S. Pankhurst as cited in Garner, p. 55.

looking increasingly unpromising for the realization of women's suffrage. Leaving the government as little peace from women's demands to be included in the war effort as she had from women's demands for the vote, Pankhurst consistently argued for the recognition of women's rights through the very rhetoric critics have called her wartime jingoism.<sup>10</sup> Within Pankhurst's so-called patriotic calls for military conscription, increased munitions production, care for illegitimate war babies, and the removal of the franchise from holders of dual citizenship, one can likewise tease out a program deliberately fashioned to realize a host of pre-war suffrage demands. While conscription and increased munitions production provided the unforeseen opportunity of employment in areas traditionally closed to women, Pankhurst's insistence on women's equal role in the defense of the state also cut to the heart of the anti-suffragist argument that women should not vote because they could not bear arms. Similarly, Pankhurst's insistence on equal pay for equal work, social benefits for children, unwed mothers and single women and the vote for all British citizens kept alive many of the issues at the centre of her earlier suffrage platform.

The opportunities made available to women during the war could not have been lost on Pankhurst, especially considering the highly charged political environment in which she had been working.<sup>11</sup> Previously

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to the works listed in n. 3 above, see also Ellen DuBois "Woman Suffrage Around the World: Three Phases of Suffragist Internationalism" in *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, eds. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p. 270; Sheila Jeffries, *The Spinster and Her Enemies* (London: Pandora Press, 1985), p. 147; Liddington & Norris, pp. 252-253; and Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 2nd. ed. (London: Macmillan Press, 1991), p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> Pankhurst was imprisoned for suffrage militancy four times over the years 1908-1914. The first imprisonment was for the Caxton Hall deputation of 11 Feb. 1908 (six weeks); the second for charges of inciting the public to "rush" the House of Commons on 13 Oct. 1908

imprisoned for making demands on the state to recognize women's claim to equal citizenship, Pankhurst found herself during the war in the enviable position of being requested to demonstrate that claim.<sup>12</sup> With new-found encouragement (including financial support) from the government, Pankhurst set about to present women's readiness to be included in national affairs. As the leading article in the newly reissued wartime *Suffragette* would clearly state, Pankhurst's aim was not only "to be loyal to the . . . [liberty] of small nations," but "to make men and women equal in national defense."<sup>13</sup> It has been noted that Pankhurst "succeeded in making women's contribution to the war effort so significant, and so visible, that the possibility of using the old arguments . . . in any future franchise reform was effectively blocked."<sup>14</sup> The suggestion that the gains won by women in 1918 were merely the incidental result of Pankhurst's patriotic activity, however, does little justice to the possibility that Pankhurst was acting with keen political insight. It is the intention of this thesis to review Pankhurst's controversial wartime role and to provide an

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(three months); the third for conspiracy in the window-smashing campaign, 15 May 1912 (nine months); and the fourth imprisonment and second trial for conspiracy over the bombing of Lloyd George's summer pavilion, 23 Feb. 1914 (three years penal servitude). Turning to the strategy of hunger-striking after her second imprisonment, Pankhurst served only a portion of her last two sentences. S. Pankhurst (1931), pp. 277-278, 288-291, 373-388, 455-457.

<sup>12</sup> Even George V recognized the potential for harnessing Pankhurst's organizational abilities. Writing to then Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George, the king wondered "whether it would be possible or advisable for you to make use of Mrs. Pankhurst." Lloyd George papers D/17/5/2, as cited in Tickner, p. 231. Ironically, the request came little more than a year after Pankhurst was charged for conspiracy in the bombing of Lloyd George's summer home.

<sup>13</sup> *The Suffragette*, April 16, 1915, pp. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Tickner, p. 230.

interpretation which may support the supposition that Pankhurst was in fact acting throughout to further her original goal of women's suffrage.

Questioning why the government of the day felt inclined to honour with a statue Emmeline Pankhurst and not Millicent Fawcett, Vera Brittain concluded in 1930 that society rewards those who offer it a touch of drama.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Brian Harrison has suggested that Pankhurst's reputation benefited from "the shorthand whereby we relieve ourselves . . . of the need to grapple firmly with the complexities of the past."<sup>16</sup> Both Brittain's and Harrison's comments are indicative of the type of academic response the question of Pankhurst's contribution to the women's suffrage campaign has drawn. Publicly the name Pankhurst became synonymous with the demand for votes for women, and "Suffragette" the misused term to describe women activists of all descriptions in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> On an academic level, however, Pankhurst's involvement in the women's suffrage campaign has received much closer scrutiny. Some criticisms of Pankhurst center on an elitist preference for concerns of middle-class women over those of the working class, a tendency

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<sup>15</sup> Vera Brittain as cited in Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> Harrison (1987), p. 42.

<sup>17</sup> In her examination of the relationship between the introduction of suffrage militancy in 1905 and increased media attention to the suffrage movement, Dorothy Newns notes that editorials intended to discuss the issue of women's suffrage were an almost exclusive discussion of WSPU activities. Dorothy Newns, "From 'Angel in the House' to 'Shrieking Sister': an Exploration of the Relationship Between the Press and the Militant Suffragette Movement," unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, 1993. Lisa Tickner's *Spectacle of Women* also includes numerous examples of the popular misuse of "Suffragette" to categorize all women involved in suffrage activities. See especially illustrations no. 68 and 112 ("Mummy's a Suffragette" and "Now Aint that a Shame, I Bet It's Them Suffragettes") and plate xv ("A Suffragette's Home").

toward undemocratic policies and autocratic leadership, and a limited conception of women's role in society. In addition, charges of political and ideological inconsistency involve political radicalism, a reactionary view of female sexuality, and a growing conservatism demonstrated by a chauvinistic support for the Great War.

It must be said that a quick survey of Pankhurst's career would provide ample evidence to support the charges of ideological inconsistency and political fickleness. At various points in her career, Pankhurst not only would switch party-political allegiances, but would defend widely different positions on such controversial topics as sexual license, the prosecution of war and the definition of minority rights. Although a proud heir to the radical Liberal tradition (routinely reminding audiences that her grandfather had survived the demand for parliamentary reform at the massacre of Peterloo), Pankhurst would ultimately abandon the Liberals for various other groups and parties across the political spectrum. The Fabian Society, the Independent Labour Party, the newly formed Labour Representation Committee (later the Labour Party), the wartime Liberal government under Lloyd George, the Conservatives and her own Women's Party were favoured at different stages of her political career. Similarly, as a young woman Emmeline would switch from the unconventional position that her and her fiancé Richard Pankhurst could dispense with the legal formalities of marriage,<sup>18</sup> to a later position that would defend the call for women to remain single and for men to remain chaste. In terms of support for war, Pankhurst would also swing from an uncompromising stand against England's involvement in the Boer War to an equally

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<sup>18</sup> S. Pankhurst, (1931), p. 56.

uncompromising stand in support of England's participation in war in 1914.<sup>19</sup> One final example of Pankhurst's shifting political views, and perhaps that which drew the greatest condemnation from other suffragists, can be found in her treatment of other minority groups during the war. For although Pankhurst would incite thousands of women in dozens of countries to civil disobedience in the name of liberty and equality, she opted in 1915 to acquiesce in her daughter's call for the illiberal treatment of German nationals, British citizens of German descent and conscientious objectors.<sup>20</sup>

Yet the seemingly illogical swings in Pankhurst's personal opinions, when viewed beside her commitment to women's political liberation, become more intelligible. Taking the positions she believed would best promote the political emancipation of women, Pankhurst adopted arguments regardless of their popular currency. While her opinions on radical politics, sexuality, the Boer War and women's suffrage remained highly unpopular, Pankhurst would find the situation reversed for the first time after her public declaration in support of the Great War. Rather than indicating a growing conservatism, however, Pankhurst's new support for war is consistent with her earlier adaptations in ideology.

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<sup>19</sup> Unlike Millicent Garrett Fawcett who supported the Boer War, Pankhurst, along with sixteen others, resigned from the Fabian Society in 1900 on account of its refusal to oppose the War. Sylvia Pankhurst (1931), p. 155. For a further survey of Fawcett's career, see Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 196-238.

<sup>20</sup> After a seven-month suspension of publication at the outbreak of war, the WSPU's weekly newspaper *The Suffragette* returned as a self-proclaimed war paper in April 1915. See following issues for routine anti-German rhetoric, and in particular: vol. 4, no. 10, p. 214 (July 16, 1915) for debate over citizenship for British nationals of German descent; vol. 5, no. 7, p. 79 (Nov. 26, 1915) for debate concerning the resignation of government ministers of German descent.

To a great extent Pankhurst's political swings correspond with advances made by the different parties toward adopting programs more disposed to women's suffrage; swings which show connections between Pankhurst's steadfast commitment to women's issues and the parties that were most willing to embrace those concerns. For Pankhurst, the criterion for her political support was solely a party's position regarding women's enfranchisement—an issue which she felt superseded all other feminist concerns. At the first sign of a dilatory approach to women's suffrage, Pankhurst would end her political support; for her, equal rights of women allowed no room for compromise over the question of women's political citizenship. Pankhurst followed John Stuart Mill's belief that the vote was the necessary first step in women's emancipation (and that all other disabilities would be removed in its wake), and set her sights on attaining that goal.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Pankhurst's position on sex reflected her growing awareness of the perceived sexual determinism that provided the base of the anti-suffragist argument. Since separate sphere ideology justified the sexual classification and therefore the political subordination of women, Pankhurst followed her daughter's reasoning that single women defied such classification and undermined the concept of separate spheres.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> J.S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), in *Essays on Sex Equality*, ed. Alice Rossi (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970), *passim.*, and esp. pp. 225-230. With little awareness of the inherent contradictions of equal rights feminism, Pankhurst readily defended Mill's belief in equal rights. See E. Pankhurst "What Women Demand" in *Suffrage and the Pankhursts*, ed. Jane Marcus (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 171. For discussion of limitations and contradictions of equal rights feminism see Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (New York: Longman, 1981), pp. 113-144; Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 26-27, 129-131; Caine (1992), pp. 35-39 and Crane Brinton, *English Political Thought in the Nineteenth-Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 98-99.

<sup>22</sup> Pankhurst's daughter Christabel is generally credited with introducing the issue of "votes for women, chastity for men" into the suffrage debate. See C. Pankhurst, *The Great*

Pankhurst's move from advocating free sexual unions to calling for singlehood and chastity corresponded with her belief that British "marriage and divorce laws [were] a disgrace to civilization."<sup>23</sup> "I wonder that a woman will face the ordeal of childbirth," wrote Pankhurst in 1913, "with the knowledge that after she has risked her life to bring a child into the world she has absolutely no parental rights over the future of that child."<sup>24</sup> In light of her commitment to women's full emancipation, Pankhurst's advocacy of sexual restraint for women becomes less contradictory.

Keeping in mind her indomitable pursuit of women's rights, similarly, Pankhurst's wartime role becomes clearer. Fearing an erosion of political gains achieved by women in pre-war England, Emmeline Pankhurst was forced to make tactical changes in the pursuit of women's suffrage. If Pankhurst is viewed as seizing the opportunities provided to women by the war and allying herself to political parties and policies she deemed most advantageous to her cause, her apparently erratic political behaviour can be reinterpreted. This thesis will argue that Pankhurst demonstrated a degree of foresight and political opportunism which has been overlooked by contemporary suffragists and historians alike.

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*Scourge and How to End It* (London: E. Pankhurst, 1913). Although Christabel was more critical of male sexual license, Emmeline Pankhurst incorporated Christabel's arguments into her own speeches. See in particular Emmeline Pankhurst's recollections as a Poor Law Guardian and as Registrar of Births and Deaths in "Defense" and "Why We Are Militant" in Marcus (1988), pp. 136-140, 157-159. For a detailed look at the link between sexual purity movements and women's suffrage, see Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), esp. pp. 5-7, 203-205.

<sup>23</sup> E. Pankhurst, "Why We Are Militant" in Marcus (1988), p. 157.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 2

### INCONSTANCY AND MILITANT STRATEGY: PANKHURST'S PRE-WAR SUFFRAGE CAREER

*Whereas Fawcett was more revolutionary than she appeared, the reverse applies to Pankhurst, whose interest in clothes, zest for window-shopping, and love of Paris bring her much closer to the Edwardian female stereotype.... [This] impecunious provincial middle-class wife of a failed radical candidate could mount London's suffragist stage only through adopting unorthodox tactics.*

Brian Harrison, Prudent Revolutionaries

*Mrs. Pankhurst was the last popular leader to act on inspiration derived from the principles of the French Revolution; she put her body and soul at the service of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and earned a triumph for them.*

Rebecca West, The Post Victorians

For a political movement that was so enduring and varied, women's suffrage has had an unusually checkered career at the hands of historians.<sup>1</sup> Although successfully promoting the social equity of over half the population, stretching (and continuing to stretch) beyond individual nations, and involving such dramatic elements as arson, suicide, imprisonment and torture, women's suffrage has generated only modest historical interest. Perhaps because women did not vote as a bloc, enter national legislatures or make true their oft-quoted claims for the moral reform of society, historians have viewed the movement as curious but relatively insignificant.<sup>2</sup> As part of a broad pattern among historians, except for Pankhurst's Suffragettes (whose militancy rather than cause has generated interest), the women's suffrage movement has remained largely outside mainstream historical narratives.<sup>3</sup>

Joan Scott attributes much of this problem to the fact that "the abstract rights-bearing individual who came into being as the focus of liberal political debate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries somehow became embodied in male form and it is his-story that historians have largely told."<sup>4</sup> In addition, Scott adds that research into the history of women (political or otherwise) offers not only the opportunity to revise

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Grimshaw, "Women's Suffrage in New Zealand Revisited: Writing From the Margins," in *Suffrage and Beyond*, eds. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Rendall argues that the possession of the vote merely qualified women to enter into the masculine and public world of national politics. *Equal or Different* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.1. See also works cited in notes 14-16 below.

<sup>3</sup> For discussion of the lack of women's suffrage in mainstream historical accounts, see Grimshaw, pp. 25-41.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 25.

historical conclusions that have traditionally excluded women but also to reveal the political nature of works written from that perspective:

[T]o ignore politics in the recovery of the female subject is to accept the reality of public/private distinctions and the separate or distinctive qualities of women's character and experience. It misses the chance not only to challenge the accuracy of binary distinctions between men and women in the past and present, but to expose the very political nature of a history written in those terms.<sup>5</sup>

In order both to correct inaccuracies and to challenge accepted interpretations, Scott argues for a revision of women's political history.

In a similar manner, Holton suggests that historians' incomplete coverage of women's political history may render their accounts inadequate.<sup>6</sup> Referring in particular to Ross McKibbin's *The Evolution of the Labour Party*,<sup>7</sup> Holton points to the discrepancy between the discussions of women's suffrage issues at early Labour Party conferences and the absence of women suffragists in McKibbin's study. According to Holton, McKibbin's oversight not only does a disservice to women as historical subjects but skews the historical understanding of events of the period.<sup>8</sup> Paul Adelman's *Victorian Radicalism* can be seen as another such example, for by not including women's suffrage in his list of radical political movements of the nineteenth-century, he inadvertently defines

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<sup>5</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, "Survey Articles. Women in History II. The Modern Period," *Past and Present*, no. 101 (1983), pp. 141-157, as cited in Holton (1986), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Holton (1986), pp. 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> Holton (1986), pp. 3-4.

radical politics of the time as exclusively male.<sup>9</sup> It appears that historians have ignored women's campaign for the vote in much the same manner that nineteenth-century parliamentarians did. As sex was left the principal ground for disqualifying women from the vote, so too does it seem to have been left as the principal reason for overlooking the history of women's political reform.

The history of women's suffrage, however, has also been ignored by feminist historians for ideological reasons. The early, largely hagiographic portrayal of suffragists—and in particular Emmeline Pankhurst—can be held responsible for much of the academic disfavour. The custom of focusing almost exclusively on the leading characters of the suffrage movement has invited much criticism. Since individual suffragists have been singled out as exceptional women (with numerous memoirs, biographies and a television documentary attesting to their prominence as legendary celebrities<sup>10</sup>), it has been rightly argued that these women have received a disproportionate share of historical attention.<sup>11</sup> Borrowing from the written chronicles of several suffrage participants, early historical accounts tended toward “narratives which lauded the march towards

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Adelman, *Victorian Radicalism* (London: Longman, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> For contemporary accounts of the suffrage movement, see Annie Kenney, *Memories of a Militant* (London: Edward Arnold, 1924); Lady Constance Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners* (1914, reprint Wakefield: E.P. Publishing, 1976); Hannah Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up* (London: Faber & Faber, 1924); Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled* (London: Hutchinson, 1959); Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1914); S. Pankhurst (1931); E. Pethick-Lawrence (1938). For biographical accounts of Emmeline Pankhurst, see Fulford; David Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967) and *Women on the Warpath* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1966); Antonia Raeburn, *Militant Suffragettes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1973) and Rosen. The television series: *Shoulder to Shoulder*, writ. Alan Plater et al, prod. Midge Mackenzie et al for BBC and Warner Brothers, 1975, though intended as a survey of the British women's suffrage movement, is an almost exclusive rendition of Pankhurst's activities.

<sup>11</sup> Holton (1986), p. 1.

enfranchisement in a celebratory fashion"<sup>12</sup> and only added to the one-sided portrayals of suffrage individuals. Similarly, suffrage history has been criticized for concentrating on the experiences of privileged women over those who led "ordinary, everyday lives,"<sup>13</sup> for neglecting other more pressing concerns of women's history<sup>14</sup> and for reinforcing the patriarchal status quo by focusing on the preeminence of male political institutions.<sup>15</sup>

Since the mid 1980s, however, feminist historians have been returning to the study of women's suffrage.<sup>16</sup> As Melanie Nolan and Caroline Daley pointed out at a conference on women's suffrage held in New Zealand in 1993:

It may be that our renewed interest in and sympathy for 'first wave' feminists and feminism is linked to a rise in interest in the *fin de siècle* . . . . Or it may be that our disappointment with 'second wave' feminism has made us more sympathetic to

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<sup>12</sup> See for example, Carol Bacchi, "'First Wave' Feminism in Canada: The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 5/6, 1982, pp. 575-583, as cited by Grimshaw in Daley (1993), p. 25, n. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Richard J. Evans, "The History of European Women: A Critical Survey of Recent Research," *Journal of Modern History*, 52 (December 1980), p. 671. See also Marion Ramelson, p. 80; Liddington and Norris, intro. and *passim*.; and Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History* (London: Pluto Press, 1973), pp. 79-89.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Brian Harrison, *Prudent Revolutionaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 91; Phillipa Levine, *Victorian Feminism* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 59; Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "The New Woman and the New History," *Feminist Studies*, 3 (1975), pp. 185-198; Sheila Jeffries (1985), intro.; Jill Roe, "Modernization and Sexism: Recent Writings on Victorian Women," *Victorian Studies*, 20 (1977), pp. 179-192; and Patricia Hollis, "Working Women," *History*, 62 (1977), pp. 439-445.

<sup>15</sup> Ursula Vogel, "Rationalism and Romanticism: Two Strategies for Women's Liberation," in *Feminism and Political Theory*, eds. J. Evans et al., (London: Sage Publications, 1986), p. 32, argues for the recognition of the patriarchal make-up of equal rights and shows that by demanding to be included in the "Rights of Man," suffragists demanded what were, by origin and substance, the rights of men.

<sup>16</sup> For current work reassessing the contribution of first-wave feminism, see especially DuBois (pp. 254-255), Grimshaw (pp. 30-33) and Carole Pateman, "Three Questions About Womanhood Suffrage" (pp. 332-333) in Daley (1993); as well as Holton (1986), pp. 1-8.

the 'first wave'. . . . Perhaps the constant threat of backlash and the rise of the new right has led historians to be more tolerant of the suffragists. For whatever reasons, feminist historians have returned to the study of women's suffrage.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, recent suffrage histories have looked (almost exclusively) to both the non-militant and the working-class suffragist for new, largely untapped areas of suffrage history.<sup>18</sup> Interest in Emmeline Pankhurst, however, has yet to be rekindled. Indifference to Pankhurst may be accounted for by the fact that she is largely misunderstood.

Pankhurst's career has been misinterpreted in two main areas: first, for its apparent inconsistency, and second, for its uncritical employment of militant tactics. The inconsistency in Pankhurst's career stems largely from the inherent tension that arises between contradictory humanist and essentialist approaches to women's rights. When looking at Pankhurst's political career, a clear line can be drawn between her belief in equal rights for women and the influence of Enlightenment thinking on the formation of nineteenth-century feminist thought.<sup>19</sup> Though four intellectual traditions can be traced within nineteenth-century feminism, Pankhurst's opinions fall most consistently within the scope of humanist,

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<sup>17</sup> Melanie Nolan and Caroline Daley, "International Feminist Perspectives on Suffrage: An Introduction" in Daley (1993), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> See for example, McPhee and FitzGerald; June Hannam, *Isabella Ford: A Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Rebel: Selina Cooper 1864-1946* (London: Virago, 1984); and Ada Nield Chew, *The Life and Writings of a Working Woman* (London: Virago, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Both Karen Offen ("Defining Feminism," *Signs*, 1988, 14 {1}, pp. 119-157) and Nancy F. Cott (1987) have argued that the terms "feminist" and "feminism" did not come into general use until the early years of the twentieth century. For the sake of this paper, however, these terms will be used to describe the women and ideology of those active in the nineteenth-century women's movement. See also Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women* (London: Polity Press, 1989), p. 15, n. 1 for her argument concerning the need to recognize and name feminist arguments regardless of historical period.

or equal rights, feminism.<sup>20</sup> Descending directly from eighteenth-century political philosophy and nineteenth-century liberal theory, humanist-feminism disputed the existence of innate sexual characteristics specific to women and men. As one of the earliest proponents of humanist-feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft, would declare: "I here throw down my gauntlet, and deny the existence of sexual virtues, not excepting modesty. For man and woman, truth, if I understand the meaning of the word, must be the same."<sup>21</sup> Similarly, John Stuart Mill argued that the subjection of women was more the result of social rather than sexual influences and that women's emancipation could be secured by social engineering.<sup>22</sup> Echoing the humanist sentiments of Wollstonecraft and Mill, Pankhurst would define feminists to an audience in New York as women that are "neither superhuman nor . . . subhuman [but] just human beings like yourselves."<sup>23</sup>

According to Pankhurst, the disqualification of women by virtue of their sex was the most immediate political obstacle to overcome. The demand for the parliamentary vote on "the same terms as it is or may be granted to men," thus became the foundation for her campaign for

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<sup>20</sup> For an account of the different strands of nineteenth-century feminism, see Olive Banks, *Faces of Feminism* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1981), pp. 13-59. For a brief summary of the arguments used by British feminists, see also Martha Vicinus, "Male Space and Women's Bodies: The Suffragette Movement," *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985), pp. 247-280.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1795; reprint, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 139.

<sup>22</sup> John Stuart Mill (1869), pp. 125-241, as cited in Holton (1986), p. 10. For contradictions in Mill's feminist theory, see also Barbara Caine, "John Stuart Mill and the English Women's Movement," *Historical Studies*, 18, 70 (April 1978), pp. 52-67; Eisenstein, pp. 113-144; Pateman, pp. 26-27, 129-131; Brinton, pp. 98-99.

<sup>23</sup> E. Pankhurst, "Why We Are Militant" (speech delivered in New York, October 21, 1913) in Marcus (1988), p. 160.

women's political enfranchisement. In Pankhurst's opinion, "such a law would mean that the principle of sex equality would be established for ever."<sup>24</sup> Pankhurst's battle was not with the structure of British democracy nor was it a critique of class in Edwardian England, but rather with the belief that "men considered themselves superior to women, and that women apparently acquiesced in that belief."<sup>25</sup> Insistent that the abstract rights-bearing individual of Enlightenment thinking was not specific to the male sex, Pankhurst was determined to remove the artificial restrictions placed on women.

Concerned as she was with pursuing equality for women, however, Pankhurst was not immune to employing the arguments of what critics have called essentialist-feminism to promote her case.<sup>26</sup> Constructed on the assumption of sexual difference, essentialist-feminism was built on the understanding that there were innate sexual differences between men and women and that these differences confirmed the ideology of separate spheres. Women were deemed to possess a unique moral mission and it was precisely on account of this mission that essentialist-feminists felt women should be included in the decisions-making processes of the state. In her study of nineteenth-century women Owenites, Barbara Taylor describes the essentialist case as an "unresolved tension between the desire to minimize sexual difference and the need to re-assert it in women's

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<sup>24</sup> E. Pankhurst, "Our Demand: What it is and What it is not" (WSPU leaflet, c. 1908) in Marcus (1988), p. 166.

<sup>25</sup> E. Pankhurst (1914), p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> For a concise outline of the essentialist case in nineteenth-century feminism, see Holton (1986), pp. 9-28.

favour.”<sup>27</sup> Because the essentialist position was widely held in the latter half of the nineteenth century, one can detect its presence throughout the majority of feminist writing, where the existence of this tension remains a fundamental contradiction in much feminist thought. As Barbara Caine notes, while many persons within the women’s movement criticized the very notion of women having a separate sphere, at the same time they retained a sense of the innateness of womanly qualities. Although demanding freedom from the existing restrictions imposed on women, the essentialist argument held that since womanly qualities were important within the home, they would likewise be beneficial to the state. Parliamentary enfranchisement would therefore allow these interests to be developed and put to wider use.

As with Taylor’s women Owenites, Pankhurst indiscriminately employed essentialist arguments in the process of justifying women’s claim to the vote. As the following passage reveals, Pankhurst struggled with demanding votes for women on the basis of equality as well as on the basis of women’s recognized contribution to society as mothers. Written before the passing of The Representation of the People Act in 1918, the following passage looks forward to the yet unaccomplished goal of enfranchisement for women:

The future lies far ahead, but let this preface and this volume close with the assurance that the struggle for the full enfranchisement of women has not been abandoned. . . . There can be no real peace in the world until woman, the mother half of the human family, is given liberty in the councils of the world.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (London: Virago, 1983), as quoted in Holton (1986), p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> E. Pankhurst (1914) foreword.

As if uncomfortable with simply demanding equal rights, Pankhurst relies on a reference to motherhood to help bolster her case for women's enfranchisement. By asserting women's proven abilities, however, Pankhurst unwittingly undermines the strength of her humanist argument. Women, not mothers, constituted the parameters of Pankhurst's demand for the vote "on the same terms as it may be granted to men."

A further example of Pankhurst's "unresolved tension" can be seen in her speech of March 24, 1908. As if recognizing for herself the paradox in her argument, Pankhurst inflates the essentialist concern for the private sphere to a position rivaling that of the public sphere:

I assure that no woman who enters this agitation need feel that she has got to give up a single one of women's duties in the home. She learns to feel that she is attaching a larger meaning to those duties which have been women's duties since the race began, and will be till the race has ceased to be. After all, home is a very, very big thing indeed . . . . The home is the home of everybody in the nation.<sup>29</sup>

While asserting women's right to vote, Pankhurst also demands that the roles traditionally occupied by women be elevated to acknowledge their full contribution to society. Embracing sexual difference in order to justify political equality, Pankhurst demonstrates what Joan Scott has characterized as suffragists' "unstable speaking positions."<sup>30</sup> Suffragists,

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<sup>29</sup> E. Pankhurst, "The Importance of the Vote" (1908) in *An Historical Anthology of Select British Speeches*, Donald C. Bryant et al., eds. (New York: Ronald Press, 1967), pp. 454-455.

<sup>30</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, Paper presented to the Ninth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, 11-13 June 1993, as cited by Grimshaw in Daley (1993), p. 26.

Scott suggests, not only faced the paradox of arguing for political equality at the same time as stressing womanly values, but *lived* it, day by day, year by year.<sup>31</sup> Though often viewed as an example of the contradictions in Pankhurst's political ideology, the humanist versus essentialist distinction oversimplifies the positions held by most nineteenth-century feminists. In actuality, suffragists revealed little awareness of the philosophical contradictions evident in their beliefs, rhetoric and actions.

On the political front, Pankhurst's activities have been represented as fickle and inconsistent. Her association with (and later disassociation from) the three major political parties has been interpreted as contradictory and short-sighted. Yet for a number of reasons, neither Labour, the Liberals nor the Conservatives would readily embrace women's suffrage. Instead, each of the three parties shunned women's suffrage for fear that the enfranchisement of women would benefit the electoral chances of the others. No one, it seemed, could agree on how the women's vote would alter the electorate.<sup>32</sup> The issue of plural voting (half a million men had two or more votes) and constituency boundaries were the more pressing concerns of Liberal and Labour reformers of the period, and the question of

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> While the most common charge was that women would vote in a Conservative bloc, this contention seems to have been considered unreliable seeing that the Conservatives did not adopt women's suffrage, even after losing the landslide election of 1906. Considering the make-up of the NUWSS executive committee in 1907 (ten members were connected with the Liberal Party, two with Labour and only one with the Conservatives) it seems unlikely that a majority of upper- and middle-class women would vote Conservative.

One could argue, in fact, that for all the talk of women voting Conservative, the Liberals were not as much concerned about women voting Tory as they were about women voting Labour. Leslie Hume has shown that according to surveys made in 1904 and 1907, up to 82.4 percent of working-class women who belonged on the municipal register would be qualified to vote if the disqualification by sex were removed. Hume, pp. 35-37.

parliamentary enfranchisement no longer the touchstone reform issue (except to women) that it had been earlier that century.<sup>33</sup>

Although Gladstone would confidently declare in 1884 that in enfranchising agricultural labourers he was “not concerned whether they wanted it or not; the State wants it for them,”<sup>34</sup> the Liberal government of 1884 as in 1906 was not willing to offer the same degree of gratuitous citizenship to women. As one editor of *The Times* saw it, “sex was a difference which no legislation could erase,”<sup>35</sup> and to an unparalleled degree, gender had become the element of franchise reform that was most difficult to overcome. Indeed, not until the immediacy of militant action brought on by Pankhurst’s WSPU would franchise reform be reasserted at the forefront of political consciousness. Pankhurst’s shift from peaceful political allegiances and party affiliations to a more militant stand intent on gaining votes for women was born out of frustration over the evident lack of progress toward women’s political enfranchisement. Rather than evidence of inconsistencies, Pankhurst’s political shifts reflect a constant commitment to her original goal of women’s enfranchisement. Borrowing from Lloyd George’s advice to Welsh miners, Pankhurst agreed that “there comes a time in the life of a people suffering from an intolerable injustice when the only way to maintain one’s self-respect is to revolt against that

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<sup>33</sup> For a review of franchise reform in Britain, see H.C.G. Matthew, R.I. McKibbin and J.A. Kay, “The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. XCI, No. 361, October 1976, pp. 723-752; Neal Blewitt, “The Franchise in the U.K., 1885-1918,” *Past and Present*, no. 32 (1965), pp. 27-56. For an in-depth look at government reforms overshadowing women’s suffrage, see Morgan, pp. 23-39.

<sup>34</sup> Harrison (1978), p. 160.

<sup>35</sup> *The Times*, 11 June 1884, as cited in News, p. 70.

injustice.”<sup>36</sup> Militancy, in Pankhurst’s mind, was the next logical step for affecting political change.

The imprisonment of Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenny in October 1905 has traditionally been regarded as the event which marked the beginning of militancy within the women’s suffrage campaign.<sup>37</sup> Though founded in 1903, the WSPU did not distinguish itself from other suffrage societies until the projected victory of the Liberals in the upcoming election of 1906 provided the catalyst for increased suffrage activity. According to the Pankhursts, the Liberal leaders were to be challenged on the fundamental principle of Liberalism: government of the people for the people.<sup>38</sup> As Christabel Pankhurst<sup>39</sup> noted, “the life of the Conservative

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<sup>36</sup> David Lloyd George as cited by Emmeline Pankhurst in “Defense,” 21 May 1912. Marcus (1988), p. 137.

<sup>37</sup> Christabel Pankhurst (1959), p. 48; Sylvia Pankhurst (1931), p. 189. Ray Strachey, *The Cause* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1928), p. 291 and Fulford (pp. 121-124) both place the introduction of militancy with the formation of the WSPU in October 1903, but since the political strategy of the WSPU between 1903-1905 did not differ from other suffrage groups, the later date is more appropriate.

<sup>38</sup> C. Pankhurst (1959), p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> The eldest daughter of Emmeline and Richard Pankhurst, Christabel helped to found the WSPU and worked alongside her mother in suffrage campaigns in the north of England. She was to match her mother as a charismatic speaker, and a driving force behind the adoption of militant strategies. For contemporary accounts of Christabel Pankhurst, see Annie Kenney (1924); S. Pankhurst (1931), pp. 98-115; and E. Pethick-Lawrence (1938), pp. 150-151. For secondary accounts, see Fulford (1957), pp. 114-124; Holton, p. 34; Marcus (1988), pp. 1-17; and Elizabeth Sarah, “Christabel Pankhurst: Reclaiming Her Power,” in *Feminist Theorists*, ed. Dale Spender (London: The Women’s Press, 1983), pp. 256-284. The research of David Mitchell, *Queen Christabel* (London: MacDonald & Janes, 1977) and George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1935) provides wholly unsubstantiated caricatures of Christabel which could effectively be summed up in their descriptions of her associations with “pre-war lesbianism” (Dangerfield, p. 149) and “Bitch Power” (Mitchell, p. 314).

The close relationship between Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst throughout the history of the WSPU makes it often difficult to distinguish which figure played a larger part in determining the direction of the Union. As later editor of *The Suffragette* and *Britannia*, Christabel’s name would follow the publication of numerous articles which outlined WSPU policy but which were undoubtedly the work of both women. Similarly,

Government was ebbing fast, so we wasted no powder and shot upon them.”<sup>40</sup> Campaigning on the platform of reform, Liberal Party candidates were challenged by women of the WSPU to declare their intention to include women’s franchise within their list of reforms. The election campaign provided an ideal opportunity for suffragists to point out the inconsistencies between the basic tenets of Liberal philosophy and the Party’s stand on women’s suffrage. Moreover, with the heightened awareness of the need to hold onto election votes, suffragists hoped to show the Liberal Party that the women’s movement, regardless of its lack of official political status, could influence the electorate and therefore determine the outcome of a general election.

Setting out with the intention to “sleep in prison tonight,”<sup>41</sup> Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney succeeded in their plan of interrupting the political meeting at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, and ended up with a summons to court for spitting on a policeman.<sup>42</sup> Almost overnight, the press became interested in women’s suffrage and coined the term “suffragette” to distinguish the new militants.<sup>43</sup> Embraced by the

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Emmeline Pankhurst would provide an example of the reverse, where WSPU policy would be introduced by Emmeline but which were based on decisions made by the WSPU executive.

<sup>40</sup> C. Pankhurst (1959), p. 49. See also E. Pankhurst, “Why We Oppose the Liberal Government,” WSPU leaflet, 1908-9.

<sup>41</sup> S. Pankhurst (1931), p. 189.

<sup>42</sup> According to Christabel, spitting was her only recourse since she was forcefully restrained and carried from the Hall. Christabel’s contention that the spit was nothing more than a “pout, a perfectly dry purse of the mouth,” however, seems somewhat suspect. C. Pankhurst, 1959, p. 52.

<sup>43</sup> The *Daily Mail* first coined the term on 10 January 1906, and it gained general currency in the weeks following its appearance (Holton, p. 8). For a look at media and the Suffragette movement, and in particular the lack of press coverage before the introduction of militancy, see Newns (1993), chapters 4 & 5.

WSPU, the term would serve as a rallying cry for militant activity.

According to Christabel:

Suffragists, we had called ourselves till then, but that name lacked the positive note implied by "Suffragette." Just "want the vote" was the notion conveyed by the older appellation and, as a famous anecdote had it, "the Suffragettes (hardening the 'g') they mean to get it."<sup>44</sup>

The new direction of suffrage campaigning did not go unnoticed. As Martin Pugh argues, not until the adoption of militant tactics was the suffrage movement accepted as a legitimate political movement.<sup>45</sup>

Although the arrests of Pankhurst and Kenny introduced a new phenomenon into the campaign for women's enfranchisement, the splitting of suffragists into opposing camps of militants and non-militant constitutionalists was a distinction made more often by commentators than by the suffragists involved. In fact, for several years following the introduction of militant activity, the similarities between the two wings of the suffrage movement were greater than their differences. The symbiotic relationship between constitutional and militant suffrage societies, however, has received little historical consideration: a split between militants and non-militants has remained a convenient distinction for later historians.<sup>46</sup> The evidence, however, suggests that suffrage sympathies

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<sup>44</sup> C. Pankhurst (1959), p. 63.

<sup>45</sup> Pugh (1974) as quoted in Rosamund Billington, "Ideology and Feminism: Why the Suffragettes were 'Wild Women,'" *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 5, no. 6, (1982), p. 669.

<sup>46</sup> Much of this chapter has benefited from the research of Sandra Holton (1986) and her questioning of the traditional dichotomization of the suffrage movement. Her analysis of militancy and the cross-currents evident within the suffrage movement contests the oversimplification of women's suffrage into two opposing camps. See also Tickner (1988), p. 8 and Hume (1982), p. 53 for further examples of the similarities between militants and constitutionalists.

stretched across such a division.<sup>47</sup> In the early years of the twentieth century, the militant and constitutional wings of the suffrage movement worked closely together, strengthening and consolidating the progress of the other.<sup>48</sup>

Sandra Holton suggests that the lack of understanding of the similarities between constitutional and militant suffragists, is due to an imprecise use of the term "militant." According to Holton, "if 'militancy' involved simply a preparedness to resort to extreme forms of violence, few 'militants' were 'militant' and then only from 1912 onwards."<sup>49</sup> In her review of feminism and democracy in Edwardian England, Holton notes that the activities of suffragists, regardless of their affiliations with particular societies, were in fact, the same: participation in massive public marches, collecting of signatures at polling booths, street chalking, the holding of impromptu corner meetings, street paper selling, sandwich-board advertising and house-to-house canvassing were tactics used by militants and non-militants alike. Moreover, the three elements which

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<sup>47</sup> Millicent Fawcett noted that with the imprisonment of WSPU members in 1906, the policy of militant activity had "touched the imagination of the country," and letters of indignation and support flowed into suffrage offices. Hume, p. 31; Pethick-Lawrence, p. 171. Similarly, the obituary of Miss Florence Canning appearing in *The Suffragette*, 16 April 1915, p. 14, suggests that membership in several suffrage societies was not uncommon. As one leading militant pointed out, "whether we are so-called suffragists or so-called suffragettes, what does it matter? Hundreds of us are both." Beatrice Harraden as cited in Holton (1986), p. 39.

<sup>48</sup> In Scotland, the Edinburgh branch of the WSPU reported the annual meetings of the Edinburgh branch of the NUWSS since, they argued, "as most of our members still belong to the National, we thought it best to help them in their meetings in every way we could." Holton (1986), p. 37. Similarly, in a report written by Isabella Ford for the NUWSS, although Ford "longed to," but "stopped short of 'go[ing] for' the Liberal" as Mrs. Pankhurst had done, she reports that the WSPU procession "was fine and we cheered and waved as they passed our rooms—and they did too." Holton (1986), pp. 38-39.

<sup>49</sup> Holton (1986), p. 4.

were routinely used to define militants (affiliations with labour or socialist groups, membership in a militant society or a willingness to take the suffrage debate out onto the streets) could be used to describe individuals who worked within either wing of the suffrage movement. Considering the criticism invoked by the use of militancy that so often featured in accounts of Pankhurst and the WSPU, a review of the similarities between militant and non-militant suffrage societies may offer an opportunity to re-evaluate Pankhurst's suffrage role.

One of the earliest misinterpretations of suffrage militancy was that it was a novel strategy for enacting social change. Resorting to militancy, however, was by no means a new approach for those outside the political spectrum. As Emmeline Pankhurst maintained, radical change for women had to be wrested from those in power on the model of civil insurgence as had accompanied the Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867.<sup>50</sup> Continually citing examples of militancy exercised in the name of reform by men (and in particular the most recent demands of the Irish Home Rulers), Pankhurst aligned herself with the long history of nineteenth-century radical politics:

In 1885 . . . Dr. Pankhurst stood as a Liberal candidate for Parliament in Rotherline . . . . Parnell was in command, and his settled policy was opposition to all Government candidates. So, in spite of the fact that Dr. Pankhurst was a staunch upholder of home rule, the Parnell forces were solidly opposed to him, and he was defeated . . . . My husband pointed out to me that Parnell's policy was absolutely right. With his small party he could never hope to win home rule from a hostile majority, but by constant obstruction he could in time wear out the

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<sup>50</sup> E. Pankhurst (1914), p. 58.

Government, and force it to surrender. That was a valuable political lesson, one that years later I was destined to put into practice.<sup>51</sup>

As Holton contends, it is possible to recognize the roots of militancy reaching as far back as the abolition movement, the Anti-Corn Law League and the non-conformist opposition to the established church.<sup>52</sup> Civil disobedience, passive resistance, moral suasion and the Quaker use of tactics such as tax resistance all played a part in the configuration of suffrage militancy, and yet to date have received only minor recognition with regard to their influence.<sup>53</sup>

In this light, Pankhurst's movement toward a more militant approach in the fight for votes for women presents less of an aberration in the course of women's enfranchisement than the path taken by non-militant suffrage societies. Indeed, even within the women's movement, two late nineteenth-century campaigns provide further examples of the model of militant political activism from which Pankhurst drew inspiration. Josephine Butler's campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and Sophia Jex-Blake's campaign for the opening of medical classes to women, offer evidence both of militancy and feminist political leadership, as well as strategies for by-election militancy, extra-parliamentary activities and the need for feminists to operate outside official political parties.<sup>54</sup> According to Judith Walkowitz, "the intense

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<sup>51</sup> E. Pankhurst (1914), p. 18.

<sup>52</sup> Sandra Stanley Holton, "From Anti-Slavery to Suffrage Militancy," in Daley (1993), p. 229.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 255-256.

anger [invoked by the CD Acts repeal campaign] at male sexual license undoubtedly contributed to the militancy of the Edwardian suffragists."<sup>55</sup> Both examples show not only the existence of militant political activity prior to that practiced by Pankhurst and the WSPU, but also concrete evidence of its ability to affect, or at least draw attention to, unjust public policy.

The more violent activities which are traditionally associated with the Suffragette movement, such as bombing, arson, stone-throwing and vandalism, became regular features of the militant campaign from 1912 onwards. A survey of WSPU campaign strategies reveals, however, that the adoption of new and more militant tactics followed each failure of the government to pursue a measure that would lead to votes for women. Throughout the history of the WSPU, a direct correlation can be made between increased militant activity and subsequent truces from militancy, and the government's on-again, off-again approach to hearing the militants' claims.

Willing to support any party ready to adopt the cause of women's suffrage, Pankhurst began dissociating the WSPU from its base in Labour politics as early as 1906. The WSPU had initially been formed in response to the lack of consideration the Independent Labour Party gave to women's issues, but was considered a ginger group within the socialist and labour movements.<sup>56</sup> Working closely with Lancashire women textile workers,

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<sup>55</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 255.

<sup>56</sup> Already a member of the North of England Society (affiliated with the NUWSS), Pankhurst decided to form her own party in 1903 after the ILP refused to support the call for the enfranchisement of women. According to ILP executive Bruce Glasier, the ILP reasoned that it was not essential that the whole people should be enfranchised, but rather that so long as the division was not upon class lines, those outside the suffrage would be

Pankhurst harnessed women's suffrage to the cause of independent labour representation.<sup>57</sup> Contrary to the opinion that Pankhurst "expressed no interest in working-class women's issues,"<sup>58</sup> Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence noted that it was "their socialistic fervour and . . . their concern for the welfare of the working woman in the North" that prompted the "latent feeling blazed up in the stormy scene of the Free Trade Hall."<sup>59</sup>

After the disappointing showing of the Labour Party in the 1906 election, however, and with Labour's failure to make women's suffrage part of its political platform, the WSPU changed the direction of its militant policy to a political independence which became permanent. As Christabel Pankhurst argued:

[M]any Labour men were distinctly displeased that a women's union should, at the by-elections, oppose Liberal candidates without supporting Labour. Yet we were simply pursuing that course of political independence which they thought best for themselves. It is evident that had we supported either the Labour or Conservative candidates we should have been reckoned simply as appendages of the Conservative or the Labour Party and the "votes for women" issue would have been dangerously obscured. Also, we should, by working for any one party, have alienated women whose preference was for one or other of the remaining parties. As it was, we could rally

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represented by those within for their interests would be the same. S. Pankhurst (1931), p. 167.

<sup>57</sup> Holton (1986), p. 33. For further description of the early ties between the WSPU and Labour, see DuBois (1993), pp. 266-267; Harrison (1987), p. 33; C. Pankhurst (1959), pp. 31-33, 40-47; and Pethick-Lawrence, p. 146.

<sup>58</sup> Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 165. In a similar vein and also in contrast to the findings of Holton, DuBois and Harrison, see Rowbotham (1973) pp. 79-86, and Liddington and Norris, pp. 167-192 for discussion of the WSPU's dissociation from the early Labour movement.

<sup>59</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, p. 146.

women of all three parties and women of no party,  
and unite them as one independent force.<sup>60</sup>

Although critics have accounted for the WSPU's move away from Labour as a result of its new ties with the London social elite, the charge that the WSPU abandoned the working-class in favour of upper-class suffragists belittles the degree to which WSPU policy was based on political strategy and reasoned argument. As socialist suffragette Hannah Mitchell would later recount, "when we began to approach Labour candidates for support we were often snubbed."<sup>61</sup> It was "about this time I realized," wrote Mitchell, "that if women did not bestir themselves the Socialists would be quite content to accept Manhood Suffrage in spite of all their talk about equality."<sup>62</sup>

According to the WSPU, the plea for the displacement of women's suffrage in favour of a bill for universal suffrage (defended in terms of its greater democratic scope) was nothing more than a Liberal version of the socialist insistence on the necessity of a revolution first—a delaying tactic rather than an honest claim for complete democracy:

Let [franchise reform] be as democratic as you like and the more votes the better, says the WSPU to Mr. Asquith, PROVIDED you are not putting forward this suggestion for wrecking purposes—providing . . . in other words that you are not expecting us to assent to enfranchisement of women being postponed until, and being made conditional upon the enfranchisement of all men.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> C. Pankhurst (1959), p. 69.

<sup>61</sup> H. Mitchell, p. 126.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *The Suffragette*, June 26, 1914, p. 180. See Sarah (1983) for an in-depth look at the debate over suffrage militancy and its ties with early socialism.

As Hannah Mitchell experienced first hand in her meetings with various political candidates, the candidates, frustrated with constant pressure from suffragists, would “listen with ill concealed impatience” and then “grandly reply” that they were for adult suffrage only. As Mitchell described it, “we heard a lot about adult suffrage at this time from men who never seemed to have thought about it before.”<sup>64</sup> George Bernard Shaw incisively summed up the issue in the following terms:

If a man owes you a sovereign, and being able to pay you fifteen shillings, refuses to do so, depend upon it, ladies, he never intends to pay the lot.<sup>65</sup>

Recognizing that both Labour and the Liberals were more interested in issues of class than women’s suffrage, the WSPU chose to focus upon establishing political independence and the pursuit of a non-party campaign. As Elizabeth Sarah has noted, the WSPU’s position was defined not by class but by gender, and the WSPU’s insistence on the removal of the discrimination of sex from the vote demanded nothing more than the recognition of women’s fundamental equality as women, whether working or middle-class.<sup>66</sup>

The landslide Liberal victory of 1906 saw the greatest electoral triumph in the Party’s history and provided the moral encouragement needed by the suffrage movement to pursue its goal. The number of

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> George Bernard Shaw as quoted in H. Mitchell, p. 126.

<sup>66</sup> Sarah (1983), pp. 268-275.

Liberals in parliament had almost doubled and a majority of members from all political parties had pledged support for some form of women's enfranchisement.<sup>67</sup> The Liberal Party had traditionally been the party associated with franchise reform, and women's suffrage societies were optimistic, believing that the government, having been out of office for ten years would be preoccupied with issues of reform. In addition, in the House of Commons there emerged an independent Labour Party, which was generally expected to support the Liberal government, and could therefore also be brought into an active role in furthering the cause of votes for women.<sup>68</sup>

After the election, WSPU militancy continued in the form of public challenges to politicians, attempts to enter the House of Commons and the organizing of large public demonstrations. However, as Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence later recalled, without sensational tactics like those exercised at the Free Trade Hall, interest in the issue quickly faded:

During [the] winter campaign three thousand public meetings were held; eighty thousand publications were sold, and eight vigorous by-election campaigns were waged, yet, in the absence of any militant activity, the newspapers began to speak of the movement as "dead". It was not aggressive enough to command their attention and respect.<sup>69</sup>

The Government's reform measures did not place a high priority on women's suffrage and in response to perceived Liberal indifference, the WSPU stepped up militant activity. The reassembling of Parliament on

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<sup>67</sup> Tickner, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> Holton (1986), p. 35.

<sup>69</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, p. 180.

October 23, 1906 provided the ideal opportunity: while trying to hold a suffrage meeting in the Lobby of the House, ten members of the WSPU were forcibly removed and arrested.<sup>70</sup>

Early WSPU militancy focused on the organization of large demonstrations intended to illustrate the popular support behind the demand for women's suffrage. Taking its cue from statements made in parliament concerning the need for women to show proof that the vote was seriously desired,<sup>71</sup> the WSPU laid out a campaign strategy which would culminate in a mass meeting in Hyde Park on June 21, 1908. Described as the largest women's suffrage campaign ever seen (some estimates put the crowd at half a million persons), seven separate processions led thousands of suffragists and onlookers to Hyde Park. Women from across the country had been recruited to show their support and yet the Liberal government

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<sup>70</sup> S. Pankhurst (1931), pp. 228-230. Although most accounts of the event cite the number of women arrested as eleven, Sylvia Pankhurst notes that only ten were arrested from the Lobby of the House, the eleventh, herself, arrested at the courthouse for abusive language. According to the police witness, the language which incurred her arrest was nothing other than "votes for women," and unlike those also arrested, resulted in Sylvia serving three weeks in detention in the Third Division. The original protesters received the option of being bound over to be of good behaviour for six months, or six weeks' imprisonment in the Second Division. The importance attached to the distinction between prison divisions can be found throughout suffrage literature, where the court's refusal to grant women activists political prisoner status (and hence imprisonment in the First Division) is seen as another example of the women's movement not viewed as a legitimate political issue. See Emmeline Pankhurst, "Suffragist Prisoners are Political Offenders. Therefore They should be treated as First-class Misdemeanants," WSPU leaflet, c. 1911-12.

<sup>71</sup> Conservative leader Arthur Balfour wrote to Christabel Pankhurst in 1907 that he was prepared to accept women's suffrage "if it can be shown either that women as a class seriously desire the franchise, or that serious legislative injustices are being done them . . ." Similarly, Asquith, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, stated in December of that year, that "I am prepared to withdraw my opposition, which is a very unimportant factor in the case . . . the moment I am satisfied of two things, but not before, namely, first that the majority of women desire to have a parliamentary vote, and next, that the conferring of a vote upon them would be advantageous to their sex and the community at large." Balfour papers, 23 and 28 October 1907; Asquith as quoted in *Votes for Women*, January 1908; both cited in Rosen, pp. 95-96, 98.

remained unimpressed by this massive but peaceable demonstration.<sup>72</sup> The newspapers of the day gave it extensive coverage but did not pick up on the symbolic relationship of the processions with earlier reform movements.<sup>73</sup> True to the resolution they dispatched to Asquith on the day of the demonstration, the WSPU, in light of the government's refusal to act "were obliged to rely more than ever on militant methods."<sup>74</sup>

From 1908 onwards, therefore, WSPU tactics were increasingly organized in terms of threats to public order rather than demonstrations of broad popular support. Since the latter had proved ineffective as a form of extra-parliamentary pressure, precisely calculated and limited threats to public order were seen as the answer. Linking suffrage protests with that of the unemployed, the WSPU's "rushing" of the House of Commons later that year would find their leaders once again on trial, only this time facing the more serious charge of inciting the public to riot. The recruitment of the unemployed had had the intended effect—to suggest the possibility of a suffragist threat to public order—but it was not until 1909, and the government's refusal to grant suffrage prisoners political status, that violent attacks on public and private property were introduced. Initiated at first by rank and file members, the window-smashing campaign soon became an official WSPU tactic since it provided both an effective demonstration and the means for a quick arrest and safe escape from the crowds that gathered.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> For an excellent description of the spectacle of the Hyde Park procession, see Tickner, pp. 91-98.

<sup>73</sup> News, p. 101.

<sup>74</sup> *Votes for Women* June 4, 1908 as cited in Rosen, p. 105.

<sup>75</sup> See S. Pankhurst (1931), p. 309; C. Pankhurst (1959), p. 131.

In both 1910 and 1911, the WSPU called successive truces to militant activity with the intention of allowing the government time to enact a measure of women's suffrage. The first truce lasted ten months and its failure came with the torpedoing of the Conciliation Bill (drawn up by members of all political parties and one which would secure the franchise for about one million women householders) which prompted the worst conflict to date between the police and the militants. For five hours on Friday November 18, 1910, hundreds of women attempted to reach the House of Commons but were charged by police and the public alike. One hundred and nineteen women were arrested and when their complaints of brutality were ignored, the day became known simply as "Black Friday."<sup>76</sup> Following another ten months of suspended militancy in 1911, the second failed truce resulted in a similar increase in suffrage militancy. The truce had been announced to give a second Conciliation Bill time to pass, but the failure of the Bill caught even the most cynical suffragists by surprise. During the months of debate even the Liberal press the *Nation* had become convinced of the government's intention to enfranchise women. According to the editorial of June 24th, "women [had] become, in all but legal formality, voters and citizens."<sup>77</sup> As with the earlier failed truce, over two hundred arrests were made as women tried to enter the Houses of Parliament and a window smashing spree followed in Whitehall and Parliament Square. The "argument of the stone"<sup>78</sup> became the preferred

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<sup>76</sup> For an extended account of "Black Friday" see Caroline Morrell, *Black Friday and Violence Against Women in the Suffragette Movement* (London: Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications, 1981).

<sup>77</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, pp. 252-253.

<sup>78</sup> Reworking advice given by Lloyd George to discontented Welsh miners, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst both incorporated Lloyd George's argument into their own

militant strategy for, as the repeated public mauulings served to confirm, the women clearly could not compete physically with men. Martha Vicinus points out that breaking windows served the dual purpose of both a speedy and a very public arrest:

In all cases windows broke quite easily and with a satisfying noise, reminding one and all of the fragility of male institutions. Moreover, the barrier between the inside (the government offices) and the outside (the women refused entry) was metaphorically destroyed, leaving a gaping hole (or boarded window) to remind others of women's position.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, the ruling by the Speaker that the Electoral Reform Bill of 1913 would be dropped, provoked yet another round of increased militancy. Setting out his opposition to women's suffrage in a letter to a friend, Asquith wrote that evening that "the Speaker's coup d'état has bowled over the Women for this session—a great relief."<sup>80</sup> In response to Parliament's intransigence, members of the WSPU spontaneously escalated militant attacks, including vandalizing golf greens (by writing "Votes for Women" in acid on the tees, where, Suffragettes argued, they had a greater likelihood of meeting with politicians), cutting communication cables, and fire-bombing various unoccupied kiosks and buildings. The most famous

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defenses of the WSPU window-smashing campaign. According to Lloyd George: "democracy has never been a menace to property. I will tell you what has been a menace to property. When power was withheld from the democracy, when they had no voice in the Government, when they were oppressed, and when they had no means of securing redress except by violence - then property has many times been swept away." Lloyd George at Bath, Nov. 24, 1911, as cited by C. Pankhurst in "Broken Windows". See E. Pankhurst, "Window Breaking: To One Who Has Suffered" (WSPU leaflet, c. 1912-1913) and C. Pankhurst, "Broken Windows" (1912) as collected in Marcus (1987), pp. 183-184, 123-124.

<sup>79</sup> Martha Vicinus, p. 266.

<sup>80</sup> Cited in Newns, pp. 125-126.

assault was the bombing of Lloyd George's summer home (then under construction) which brought Emmeline Pankhurst once more to trial for conspiracy; this time she was convicted and sentenced to three years penal servitude.<sup>81</sup> For Emmeline Pankhurst the charges could not be firm enough. She had often exclaimed that "she wanted to be tried for sedition"<sup>82</sup> for the innocuous crime of demanding equal rights for women.

Pankhurst's pre-war activities were misunderstood for the same reason as her wartime ones: her willingness to adopt any tactic she considered promising led her into activities that people have condemned for a variety of reasons. When viewed from the perspective of a single-minded pursuit of women's suffrage, however, Pankhurst's ideological inconsistencies and shifting political allegiances become more comprehensible.

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<sup>81</sup> The bombing was in fact carried out by Emily Wilding Davidson (who would later die under the hooves of the King's horse at Derby). According to Sylvia Pankhurst, Davidson "had got away clear, leaving Suffragette literature," but Mrs. Pankhurst was tried for conspiracy when she announced at a public meeting in Cardiff that "we have blown up the Chancellor's house!". S. Pankhurst (1935), p. 125.

<sup>82</sup> Pethick-Lawrence, p. 278.

## CHAPTER 3

### SUFFRAGE MILITANCY AND THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

*For the present at least our arms are grounded . . . . The struggle for the full enfranchisement of women has not been abandoned; it has simply, for the moment, been placed in abeyance. When the clash of arms ceases, when normal peaceful, rational society resumes its functions, the demand will again be made. If it is not quickly granted, then once more the women will take up the arms they today generously lay down. There can be no real peace in the world until woman, the mother half of the human family, is given liberty in the councils of the world.*

Emmeline Pankhurst, My Own Story

With the declaration of war on August 4, 1914, the momentum gained through years of campaigning for women's enfranchisement was abruptly checked. Having demanded political representation on the grounds of women's equal claim to citizenship, suffragists were faced with the dilemma of having to define that claim: of participating in a war they had no political power to influence and working with a government they had recently (and often violently) petitioned. Although the appropriate response to war would become a divisive issue among suffragists, all recognized that suffrage campaigning would be overshadowed by the country's national emergency. Within two days of the announcement of war, the executive committee of the large NUWSS suspended all political activity, and by August 13, once it had secured the unconditional release of its members from prison,<sup>1</sup> the WSPU did the same. Historians have traditionally concluded that in 1914, "votes for women" was dead,<sup>2</sup> that the suffrage campaign came abruptly to an end,<sup>3</sup> and that even for the most militant suffragist, women's enfranchisement had become a side-issue.<sup>4</sup> In particular, the Pankhursts were seen to "turn conservative" during the war and were condemned for their uncritical acceptance of militarism,

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<sup>1</sup> Although the WSPU stated their willingness to declare a truce from militancy, they rescinded their offer when the Government announced it would release only those suffrage prisoners who would give an undertaking "not to commit further crimes or outrages." The initial refusal to lay aside their argument for the sake of the war may be seen as the first in a series of deliberate moves intended to maintain the gains made by suffragists during the war.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Kent, p. 220.

<sup>3</sup> Tickner, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup> Harrison (1987), p. 27.

patriotic chauvinism and what was viewed as a complete disregard for the earlier concerns of the women's movement.<sup>5</sup>

A review of the wartime activities of the Pankhursts and the WSPU, however, contradicts the belief that suffragists were resigned to merely showing themselves as "worthy of citizenship whether [their] claim to it be recognized or not."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, changes in WSPU activities during the war can be seen as a continuation of the adaptation of militant strategy that was evident in pre-war Suffragette campaigns. The calling of a third truce from militancy at the outbreak of war follows the same pattern as those Pankhurst called in 1910 and 1911. "It is obvious," Pankhurst argued, "that even the most vigorous militancy of the WSPU is for the time being rendered less effective by contrast with the infinitely greater violence done in the present war."<sup>7</sup> In keeping with Christabel's earlier conclusion that with militancy "much depended . . . upon timing and placing, upon the dramatic arrangement and sequence of acts and events,"<sup>8</sup> a pause from militancy was adopted as a temporary strategy. Though a break from the strain of repeated prison stays and hunger strikes<sup>9</sup> may have encouraged

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Kent, Tickner and Harrison above, as well as Garner (1984), pp. 55-61; Jeffries (1985), p. 147; DuBois (1993), p. 270; Marwick (1991), p. 127; Ramelson, p. 30; and Rosen (1974), pp. 242-244.

<sup>6</sup> Circular letter from the NUWSS Executive, August 6, 1914, as cited in Tickner, p. 229.

<sup>7</sup> E. Pankhurst, circular issued August 13, 1914, in Mackenzie (1975), p. 282.

<sup>8</sup> C. Pankhurst (1959), p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> In July 1914, Emmeline Pankhurst was released from prison on account of the effects of her twelfth hunger, thirst and sleep strike in less than a year (Mitchell, 1966, p. 45). Due to the government's introduction of The Prisoners' Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health Act (soon to be known as the Cat and Mouse Act), hunger-striking imprisoned suffragists could be released before their strike would take their life, then re-incarcerated as soon as their health returned, without any suspension of the sentence for the days they were recuperating and out of prison.

her decision, Pankhurst nevertheless warned that “the WSPU will at the first possible moment step forward into the political arena in order to compel the enactment of a measure giving votes to women on the same terms as men.”<sup>10</sup> As far as the leadership of the WSPU was concerned, the war was the “tragic result of the unnatural system of government by men only,”<sup>11</sup> and that under the joint rule of enfranchised women and men, “the nations of the world [would], owing to women’s influence and authority, find a way of reconciling the claims of peace and honour and of regulating international relations without bloodshed.”<sup>12</sup>

Although the events of the twentieth century would fall sadly short of Pankhurst’s prophetic vision, with regard to the charge that she leapt into the war with “patriotic fervour and stirring appeals for national unity and endeavour,”<sup>13</sup> the evidence would seem to suggest otherwise. Pankhurst’s immediate position with regard to the nation’s call to arms was to denounce war as another example of the defectiveness of a system of government that did not contain women, and the announcement of the WSPU’s truce from militancy was only grudgingly offered. It was not until several months had passed (with the war still not concluded) before Pankhurst would join the “pro-war” forces, and as this thesis will argue, pragmatically (if not subversively) pursued a course that would see to the eventual enfranchisement of women.

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<sup>10</sup> E. Pankhurst, circular issued August 13, 1914, in Mackenzie (1975), p. 282.

<sup>11</sup> C. Pankhurst, “How Men Fight,” *The Suffragette*, June 19, 1914, p. 163.

<sup>12</sup> E. Pankhurst, circular issued August 13, 1914, in Mackenzie (1975), p. 282.

<sup>13</sup> Marwick (1991), p. 127.

In her study of women munitions workers during the First World War, Angela Woollacott notes that historians have often privileged accounts of pacifist organizations, favouring instead an idealized version of women, and viewing an objection to the war and a negation of hope for civilization as representative attitudes of the majority of political women activists.<sup>14</sup> The Pankhursts are usually cited as the exception which proves the rule. Over-emphasizing a more acceptable face of women's political activity, historians have often turned to evidence of the organized women's groups which were intent on providing a new, non-violent approach to international disputes in order to illustrate the radical possibilities of first-wave feminism.<sup>15</sup> However, unenlightened as it may seem to later observers, those who opposed the war in 1914 were a vilified minority in every class.<sup>16</sup> Although suffragists demanding political equality were fighting one type of social prejudice, the mass of women involved in such organizations never claimed to be pacifists (although some may have used a pacifist/feminist slant to help justify women's participation in politics). As Millicent Fawcett categorically defined it, the position held by most women was that "until German troops were out of France and Belgium, it was

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<sup>14</sup> Woollacott, p. 211.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Jane Marcus, "The Asylums of Antaeus; Women, War and Madness: Is There a Feminist Fetishism?" in *The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory*, ed. Elizabeth Meese and Alice Parker (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 1988); Claire Tylee, "Maleness Run Riot?—The Great War and Women's Resistance to Militarism," *Women's Studies International Forum* 11, no. 3 (1988); Jill Liddington, *The Road to Greenham Common: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991); Ian Bullock, ed., *Sylvia Pankhurst: From Artist to Anti-Fascist* (London: Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd., 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Woollacott, p. 7.

treason to speak of peace.”<sup>17</sup> Although Fawcett’s declaration did not satisfy all within the NUWSS (and in fact resulted in the resignation of some of her executive), it can certainly be seen as representative of the majority of women who retained their membership and worked with the NUWSS in their contribution to the war effort. Even though there remained a feeling throughout the suffrage movement that war was a male invention, that the present war was a result of the blundering of (male) politicians and that women need not be pacifists if men stopped declaring war,<sup>18</sup> the majority of the women in Britain in 1914—both in and outside organized political groups—fell behind their country once war had been declared.

Although Emmeline Pankhurst did not welcome the outbreak of war in 1914, according to historian Joan Byles, Pankhurst was of the opinion that to stand for peace was the way to be abused and ostracized, and to take that route would rouse still fiercer opposition to the suffrage cause.<sup>19</sup> Considering the criticism that an unpatriotic stand against the war could draw, Pankhurst’s fears were well founded. As Fawcett would experience first hand, hesitation over support for the war would receive immediate condemnation. For example, on hearing of the suffrage meeting held the evening Britain declared war, and which had angrily condemned the war and opposed British intervention, Lord Robert Cecil (a leading Conservative suffragist) wrote to Fawcett the following morning:

Action of that kind will undoubtedly make it very difficult for the friends of Women’s Suffrage . . . . Even to me the action seems so unreasonable under the circumstances as to shake my belief in

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<sup>17</sup> Millicent Fawcett, as paraphrased in Byles, p. 475.

<sup>18</sup> Byles, pp. 475-477.

<sup>19</sup> Byles, p. 475.

the fitness of women to deal with great Imperial questions.<sup>20</sup>

Although Fawcett agreed with Cecil's opinion and noted her displeasure with the tone that the meeting had adopted,<sup>21</sup> Cecil's patronizing response only illustrates how immediate was the demand for women's acquiescence in the war. Considering that the violent potential militant suffragists had shown was within women's ability, a war on two fronts, so to speak, was perceived as an intolerable threat.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, when the Representation of the People Act eventually passed into law in 1918 and saw for the first time the partial enfranchisement of women in Britain, evidence of the distrust that non-compliance with the war could provoke can be seen in the inclusion of a clause which disenfranchised conscientious objectors for a period of five years.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps recognizing the national mood against women's involvement with peace at this time, Pankhurst joined other prominent suffragists in the effort to bring a quick end to the war. It appears that Pankhurst was very clear as to the pragmatic nature of her contribution to the war effort: women's efforts would be employed to help bring the war to an end and in the process to once again demonstrate women's legitimate claims to political enfranchisement.

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<sup>20</sup> Lord Robert Cecil to Millicent Fawcett, Fawcett Collection, London, as cited in Vellacott (1987), p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> Vellacott (1987), p. 39, n. 9.

<sup>22</sup> In fact, the government may have been faced with a war on four fronts if Irish and Syndicalist opposition was also counted.

<sup>23</sup> Vellacott-Newberry (1977), pp. 424-425.

An interesting example of how difficult the assumption of an anti-war, pro-peace stance was can be found with the Women's International Congress held at The Hague April 28 to May 1, 1915. Undoubtedly the most hopeful development of the early years of the war, the Congress saw the gathering of women from across Europe and North America to meet and take responsibility for peace, including representatives from each of the belligerent countries.<sup>24</sup> According to a report on the Congress, "hundreds of women in Great Britain were convinced that their work lay not only in the relief of physical distress and suffering, but that upon them, as women and non-combatants, fell especially the duty of preparing the way for a better understanding and lasting peace between nations."<sup>25</sup> The conference was of historical importance for it was the first time women had met publicly to protest against war. Yet the steps the British government took to block the participation of British feminists also shows the extent to which the government wished to prevent a challenge to official policy at a time of war. Though 180 women were prepared to attend the conference, the government required a dossier on each one and reduced those able to go to their own selection of twenty-five. At the last minute, however, the North Sea was declared closed to shipping, and although the women waited on the docks and negotiated for a reprieve, none was able to leave. Only three British delegates who were already outside of the country attended the

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<sup>24</sup> Whether women from France attended the conference is a matter of debate. Byles notes that French women were included, whereas Vellacott-Newberry (1977) states that they refused to attend.

<sup>25</sup> Helena Swanwick, "The Kingsway Hall Meeting of May 13th 1915 during which women were given a Report of The Women's International Peace Congress at The Hague, April 28th to May 1st 1915," as cited in Byles, p. 477.

conference.<sup>26</sup> For the government, diplomacy was still the preferred international policy, and as will be discussed, Emmeline Pankhurst capitalized on the government's fear of a negotiated peace engineered by women.

There is little to separate the position held by the WSPU during the War from that held by other suffrage societies. Although Pankhurst and the Suffragettes were most often singled out for their wartime activities, these activities remained remarkably similar to those undertaken by members in other organizations. The war years became a time to regroup, pool resources and to maintain an educational campaign which argued the necessity of women's enfranchisement while at the same time offering limited support to the country by organizing war work for women. Though Emmeline Pankhurst is often cited for her imperious refusal to offer support to the fledgling women's peace movement that met in The Hague, Millicent Fawcett also torpedoed links with the Women's Congress in 1915, claiming that only liberty and democracy would prevail over Prussianism and that "suffragists must not be seduced into taking up tangential causes."<sup>27</sup> For Fawcett, the decision to deny support to the pacifists at The Hague was final and became official NUWSS policy during the war. Fawcett's position with regard to the Women's Peace Congress aroused strong feelings, which were carried beyond the years of the war. Those who had criticized her wartime position and later tried to make amends, encountered a still unforgiving and unyielding Fawcett.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For a description of the Conference (and the later foundation of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom), see Vellacott-Newberry (1977), pp. 419-420; Woollacott, pp. 164-165; and Byles, pp. 477-478.

<sup>27</sup> As cited in Harrison (1987), p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> Harrison (1987), p. 27.

Similarly, charges of inciting German hatred have been unfairly centered on Pankhurst and the WSPU. Although the pages of the weekly *Suffragette* and the later *Britannia*<sup>29</sup> would provide shameless accounts of the “evils of Prussianism,” it should be noted that this was not at all out of keeping with public opinion or with other publications of the day. Indeed, racial intolerance was promoted in the daily press as the following message (prominently boxed and heavily leaded) from the *Daily Mail* reveals:

REFUSE TO BE SERVED BY AN AUSTRIAN  
OR GERMAN WAITER.  
IF YOUR WAITER SAYS HE IS SWISS  
ASK TO SEE HIS PASSPORT.<sup>30</sup>

The press became a regular tool for strengthening civilian morale and it was during the First World War that “propaganda” received its pejorative meaning.<sup>31</sup>

While Pankhurst played her part in promoting German hatred, as the one-act play “The Munitions Worker” published in the March 1917 edition of *The Englishwoman* reveals, wartime propaganda and the incitement of German hatred was not the sole reserve of the WSPU. “The Munitions Worker” centers on the skilled shell-worker Tina, whose consumptive complaint requires immediate medical attention. Tina,

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<sup>29</sup> The official paper of the WSPU changed three times during the course of its publication. Originally titled *Votes for Women* and jointly edited by the Pethick-Lawrences, the paper changed to *The Suffragette* after the leadership split with the Lawrences in October, 1912. October, 1915 saw the first publication of the newly titled *Britannia*.

<sup>30</sup> As cited in Marwick (1991), p. 90.

<sup>31</sup> Felix Gilbert with David Large, *The End of the European Era, 1890 to the Present*, 4th edn. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), p. 126.

however, refuses (at the expense of her life) to be removed to a rest home, explaining that when she started working at the munitions factory that

God was talkin' to me, and He'd never done that before, 'cos of course I'm too poor for the likes of Him, and He said, "Tina, you must go along and make shells for your country, and never think you won't have the strength," He says, "I'll give you the strength," and to this day He's given it to me, Matron, and there's nothing you can say to me—nothing—for my country wants me!<sup>32</sup>

Stating there is nothing in the world she would rather do than to continue turning out shells to help the men at the front kill Germans, the factory matron and doctor console themselves with the thought that though she “will die as surely on the battlefield as any of our heroes,” her “spirit is the spirit of a whole nation soaring towards Heaven.”<sup>33</sup> As the publication of the play reveals, denunciation of the “Hun”<sup>34</sup> was a phenomenon that was not exclusive to Pankhurst and the activities of the WSPU. Indeed, whipped-up public hatred for Germany and widespread fear of German influence within government saw the First Sea Lord, Prince Louis of Battenberg (the king's cousin) forced out of office because of his German origins,<sup>35</sup> and quickly the royal family found it expedient to dissociate itself from its German heritage. To the surprise of purists and extreme royalists, in 1917 George V changed the royal family name from the house

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<sup>32</sup> Alec Holmes, “The Munitions Worker: A Play in One Scene,” *The Englishwoman* 33 (March 1917), p. 264, as quoted in Woollacott, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> In the last week of August, 1914, the *London Times* is reported to have first called the Germans “Huns,” in reference to events in Louvain, where, it was believed, the Germans had shot a large number of civilians and set the town on fire. F. Gilbert, p. 126.

<sup>35</sup> Marwick (1991), p. 91.

of Saxe-Coburg to the house of Windsor and notified the Council that in future, members of the royal family would be permitted to marry into British families.<sup>36</sup>

The wartime title change of the WSPU's weekly publication has also come under fire. The switch from *The Suffragette* to *Britannia* has been viewed as concrete evidence of the WSPU's swing away from women's concerns and "into fervid nationalism."<sup>37</sup> With "ferocious zeal for relentless prosecution of the War," *Britannia* was seen to represent "a tragic betrayal of the great movement to bring the mother-half of the race into the councils of the nations."<sup>38</sup> Pankhurst's greatest critic was her own daughter Sylvia, who saw the wartime changes at the WSPU as "utterly sad."<sup>39</sup> Yet as with her dealings with the Women's Peace Congress, Pankhurst was not alone in her adoption of a more "patriotic" tone for her society's publication during the war. The *Common Cause*, the journal of the NUWSS reported "little to nothing now about the Suffrage issue,"<sup>40</sup> and turned its columns over, instead, to accounts of war relief work being

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<sup>36</sup> John Cannon and Ralph Griffiths, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Monarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 591-592.

<sup>37</sup> Marwick (1991), p. 128.

<sup>38</sup> S. Pankhurst (1931), p. 595.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* Though Jane Marcus has hit upon the discrepancies evident in Sylvia's "historical" account of the Suffragette movement, a comprehensive study of what Marcus terms Sylvia's "family romance" (which has become the stubbornly unchallenged reading of suffrage events), has yet to be completed. Indeed, considering the availability of three separate Pankhurst versions of the Suffragette movement—and the extent to which they are used as primary sources—an examination of the relationship that existed between Emmeline, Christabel and Sylvia may offer a new avenue for suffrage research. See Marcus (1987), pp. 5-6.

<sup>40</sup> Marwick (1977), p. 45.

undertaken by its members.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the journal of the United Suffragists was re-titled and changed from *Votes for Women* to the patriotic *Votes for Women: The War Paper for Women*.<sup>42</sup>

A closer look at the *Suffragette's* title change to *Britannia*, however, may offer an interesting rebuttal to the charge that the name change was nothing more than “a tragic betrayal” of the WSPU’s earlier concerns. The choice of the name was quite deliberate for not only did it suggest a certain degree of national pride, but it symbolized that pride in the personification of woman. As a glance to the backside of any coin would confirm, the female Britannia with her trident, helmet and shield was a ready symbol for female heroism and women’s historic vigilance, protection and contribution to her country. The Latin name for Britain traditionally reserved for poetry was in keeping with Christabel Pankhurst’s claim (on being questioned in America as to how Suffragettes could cooperate with a government who had treated them so cruelly) that the WSPU “was not fighting for the Government, [but] supporting the country.”<sup>43</sup> The choice of “Britannia” over, say “Patriotism,” “The Munitionette” or “Women at War” is a telling choice for it combined heroism, allegory and myth in the representation of the militant Suffragette. Suffragettes, it suggested, had not only courageously taken up arms in the defense of women’s liberty, but were now willing to provide that same guidance and support to help the men:

We hardly realized, when we began to work for the political liberty of our countrywomen, that one day

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<sup>41</sup> Holton (1986), pp. 127-128.

<sup>42</sup> Marwick (1977), p. 152.

<sup>43</sup> Mitchell (1966), p. 53.

we should have to share in the task of protecting from destruction, the liberty also of men—that is to say, of the whole people of this country.<sup>44</sup>

Rather than merely supporting the men, however, Christabel Pankhurst clearly states that the name change was deliberate and intended to demand recognition of women's equal contribution to the war: "This paper shall deserve a place among the upholders of Britain's right and duty in the national sense . . . the political right and duty of her sons and daughters."<sup>45</sup> Stepping beyond the realm of national politics, the Pankhursts defended their participation in the war effort as neither war-mongering nor an indiscriminate offer of support for the government, but rather as allowing women to assume their rightful place in the administration of the state. It was hardly a coincidence, therefore, that the first edition of *Britannia* featured on its front cover a full picture of the female Britannia followed by the unequivocal quotation:

Thee haughty tyrants ne'er shall tame;  
All their attempts to haul thee down  
Will but arouse thy generous flame,  
And work their woe, but thy renown.<sup>46</sup>

When viewed with the "Right to Serve" march organized by the WSPU earlier that year, the change in title to *Britannia* suggests that the Pankhursts were not only very aware of the existing barriers that disallowed women's full participation in national affairs, but that they may have been using the backdoor of patriotism as a means of overcoming these

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<sup>44</sup> C. Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, October 1, 1915, p. 350.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> From "Rule Britannia," by James Thomson as cited in *Britannia*, October 15, 1915, p. 1.

barriers. Although it has been noted that the Pankhursts altered the title of their march from “Right to Work” to “Right to Serve”(and that the change is thus representative of their dissociation with women’s issues),<sup>47</sup> it can also be argued that this change reinforced women’s claims to social and political equality. No longer demanding the mere opening of industry to women, the name change subtly insisted that women could “defend” as well as they could “contribute.” Rather than providing only physical labour, Pankhurst’s “serving” women were demonstrating an equal partnership in the maintenance of the state. In light of the anti-suffragist argument concerning women’s inability to defend the state, the Pankhursts’ reworking of the Right to Serve march reveals a familiar theme. That the march took on the unmistakable trappings of earlier suffrage demonstrations (including the use of “retired” suffrage banners, organized women’s bands and the symbolic costumes once used to denote militant suffragists who had been detained in prison), suggests a conscious attempt to defend and reaffirm suffragist claims.

Another curious charge which has often been leveled against Pankhurst was her participation in the “White Feather” campaign. A campaign intended to shame unenlisted men by tagging them with a white feather denoting cowardice, historians have written that the WSPU “was the first to hand out white feathers,”<sup>48</sup> that they handed out feathers “to every young man they encountered wearing civilian dress,”<sup>49</sup> and that they

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<sup>47</sup> See for example, Deborah Thom, “Tommy’s Sister: Women at Woolwich in World War I” in R. Samuel (ed.) *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of the British National Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 146.

<sup>48</sup> Garner (1984), p. 55.

<sup>49</sup> S. Pankhurst (1931), p. 594.

turned up at Hyde Park meetings with placards intended to put fear into the hearts of “shirkers” with the slogan “Intern Them All.”<sup>50</sup> Yet the campaign was in fact the creation of the peppery Admiral Penrose Fitzgerald of Folkestone who assembled his own squad of young women to patrol the homefront with their pockets full of feathers.<sup>51</sup> “Militancy” on behalf of the state, it appears, was deemed an acceptable occupation for the young women.

Baroness Orczy followed with the founding of the Women of England’s Active Service League, whose sole object was to influence men—through women’s cajoling—to enlist at once to the nearest recruiting officer. Members of the League had to sign a pledge, the tone of which reveals that a pro-war attitude was by no means restricted to the militant suffragists. With an unnerving call to nationalism, the form read:

At this hour of England’s peril, I do hereby pledge myself most solemnly in the name of my King and Country to persuade every man I know to offer his service to his country. I also pledge myself never to be seen in public with any man who, being in every way fit and free for service, has refused to respond to his country’s call.<sup>52</sup>

Mitchell notes, that although the Baroness was overly optimistic in her call for one hundred thousand volunteers, she did get twenty thousand, whose names and addresses were inscribed on an honour roll which was later

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> For a description of the “White Feather” campaign, see Mitchell (1966), p. 39; Marwick (1991), p. 90; Anne Summers, “Edwardian Militarism” in R. Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism*, p. 248.

<sup>52</sup> Mitchell (1966), p. 40.

presented to the King.<sup>53</sup> Considering the self-congratulatory tone of much of the WSPU's editorials, one would assume that had the WSPU been involved in the White Feather campaign, it would have trumpeted its participation among its lengthy descriptions of war work being undertaken by militants. Yet the pages of both *The Suffragette* and the later *Britannia* provide no such evidence of the WSPU's involvement. Similarly, neither Emmeline nor Christabel's autobiography make reference to the campaign.

One is left with the conclusion, then, that the "militant" activities of an organized league of women have become unwittingly associated with those of the self-proclaimed suffrage militants, the Suffragettes. Possibly, in the minds of contemporaries and later historians alike, evidence of militant behaviour (even if quite divorced from the suffrage campaign) would attribute the White Feather crusade to those most likely to espouse its methods, Pankhurst's militant WSPU. Since the Suffragettes were routinely held accountable for all feminist challenges to the status quo, attributing the White Feather campaign to the WSPU would seem a logical conclusion.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps, however, the reason may point to the more common fallacy, that militant women suffragists were man-hating harridans who were pleased to humiliate men publicly. Regularly misrepresented, resented and publicly ridiculed, militant suffragists consistently garnered

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* Summers, however, has made an interesting argument in defense of the League's chauvinistic position. For Summers, the "White Feather" movement was completely in keeping with the League's thirteen-year campaign that had called not for the introduction of conscription, but for the League's Protestant-based belief in voluntarist practice. See Summers, p. 248.

<sup>54</sup> See for example Tickner, pp. 205-213.

unfavourable portrayals in the press.<sup>55</sup> The prevalence of such portrayals had an effect on early historical interpretations of women suffragists and of militants in particular.<sup>56</sup> Writes one such convinced historian of the suffrage movement, “the homosexual movement first manifested itself, in 1912, among the suffragettes” who remained “odious to men, whom they regarded . . . as coarse and inferior creatures.”<sup>57</sup> Based largely on opinions about women held by authorities and the public at the turn of this century, such accounts continued to promote the completely unfounded belief that there was a link between women’s political activism, lesbianism and evidence of a “generally diseased mind.” As laid out by the medical doctor Sir Almroth Wright in his letter to *The Times* of March 28, 1912, there is the “tendency of woman to morally warp when nervously ill,” a situation which he attributed to the “serious and long-continued mental disorders” developing in connection with the approach of menopause.<sup>58</sup>

Wright’s severest censure, however, was reserved for women of the suffrage movement “who have all their life-long been strangers to joy, . . . [and have] turned into gall and bitterness and hatred of men.”<sup>59</sup>

[T]hese upsettings of [a woman’s] mental equilibrium are the things that a woman has most cause to fear; and no doctor can ever lose sight of the fact that the mind of woman is always

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 151-226. Also see Newns, appendices 5-17.

<sup>56</sup> See in particular Dangerfield, pp. 139-213; Mitchell (1967), *passim.*; and Rosen, pp. 209-213.

<sup>57</sup> Dangerfield, pp. 148-149.

<sup>58</sup> Sir Almroth Wright, “Suffrage Fallacies: Sir Almroth Wright on Militant Hysteria,” letter to the Editor, *The Times*, March 28, 1912.” Pamphlet reprinted London: John Parkinson Bland, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

threatened with danger from the reverberations of her physiological emergencies. It is with such thoughts that the doctor lets his eyes rest upon the militant suffragist. He cannot shut them to the fact that there is mixed up with the woman's movement much mental disorder . . . .<sup>60</sup>

Overlooking the legitimacy of the suffragists demand for equal rights, such interpretations reveal not only a narrow view of the history of the campaign for women's enfranchisement, but provide the reader with examples of the hostility suffragists met with through the course of their sixty-year agitation. Although Wright's comments can be viewed as an extreme example of the unfair characterization of suffragists, there remained an impression that militant suffragists were somehow noticeably unusual. As the comment made by one munitions worker during her wartime employment at the Woolwich arsenal reveals, the living Suffragette was considerably different from the one of fiction. "You'd never have known it," Mrs. Hansen later recalled, "they were so nice, such ladies."<sup>61</sup> Though the munitions worker's comment reveals an uncomfortable linking of class and gender to describe what would be a more acceptable example of a political woman, the comment also reveals what a Suffragette was expected to be. Suffragettes, according to the worker, were thought to be not "nice," not "ladies."

The pre-war misinterpretation of suffragists continued into the war years. In particular, militant suffragists were conceived as wholeheartedly throwing themselves into the promotion of war—a position which has traditionally gained for them the negative charges of political vacillation and of abandoning feminist concerns. It can be argued, however, that the

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Mrs. Hansen, 1977, as interviewed and cited by Thom (1989), p. 149.

militants were neither enthusiastic about the outbreak of war nor alone in their work to help bring it to a hasty conclusion. Indeed, once the initial disappointment of having to delay the question of votes for women was passed, Pankhurst and the WSPU worked unstintingly to maintain the ground already gained through years of suffrage activism. As the following chapter will argue, the ground for further suffrage gains was suddenly made unexpectedly fertile by the emergency of war and the call for women's immediate help that war entailed. This opportunity was not lost on the suffragists.

## CHAPTER 4

### BEYOND PATRIOTISM: THE W.S.P.U. AND THE OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED BY WAR

#### *FIRST WOMAN MOTOR VAN DRIVER*

*The first woman professional motor van driver has made her appearance in Leeds. It will interest our readers to know that she is a member of the WSPU.*

*She takes the place of a man who has joined the army. . . . She presented herself as a candidate pleading that she was anxious to liberate a man for the war.*

*The firm is delighted with the success of their experiment. The manager states that there is far less time wasted on errands.*

The Suffragette, April 16, 1915

According to Bonnie Smith, women who worked for the war effort eclipsed suffragists as the most visible public image of womanhood.<sup>1</sup> It is the intention of this thesis to argue that suffragists were well aware, and in part the engineers of, this shift in public attention. As the opening quotation observes, war work for suffragists, patriotic duty and the continuing debate over women's "fitness" for public life, became conveniently blended with claims that women were "anxious to liberate men for the war."<sup>2</sup> After years of unsuccessful militant campaigning for enfranchisement, Pankhurst and members of the Women's Social and Political Union could not have overlooked the political opportunities which the war had suddenly provided for them. Petitioned by the government for advice and assistance, admitted into professions previously barred to women and given the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the state, suffragists were in a position to assert their claims in a more favourable political climate. Indeed, the potential political inroads were not lost on the WSPU's critics. As The National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage would complain, women's involvement in the war effort was not simply the unconscious participation of female patriots. "They sew and knit comforts for the soldiers," wrote the *Anti-Suffragist Review*, "but with such a perpetual running accompaniment of suffragist self-laudation that they might as well embroider the sacred name of Mrs. Pankhurst or Mrs. Fawcett on every sock and every muffler."<sup>3</sup> It will be argued that Pankhurst was not simply a malleable character acted upon by calls to

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<sup>1</sup> Bonnie Smith, *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath & Co., 1989), p. 372.

<sup>2</sup> *The Suffragette*, April 16, 1915, p. 13

<sup>3</sup> *The Anti-Suffrage Review*, as cited in Pugh (1978), p. 139.

nationalism, but one who knowingly pursued a course that was in keeping with her concerns for women's issues—a course that would eventually culminate in her original goal of the political enfranchisement of women.

The Women's Social and Political Union suspended the publication of its paper *The Suffragette* on August 13, 1914 in order, it claimed, "to give the Union as a whole . . . [an opportunity] to recuperate after the tremendous strain and suffering of the past two years."<sup>4</sup> *The Suffragette* would remain suspended for another eight months, until April 16 of the following year. A review of the first wartime issue of *The Suffragette* provides an interesting look at the militant position held at this time. The sixteen-page issue features on its cover an illustration of Joan of Arc rising mystically from the recently bombed cathedral in Rheims, France. The choice of the cover illustration is telling for the character of Joan of Arc had previously been used to symbolize the WSPU's own "holy crusade." At pre-war suffrage demonstrations, a woman dressed in armour as Joan of Arc and riding astride a white horse would lead WSPU processions. As Lisa Tickner notes, Joan of Arc was the "central emblem of feminist rebellion against the state . . . ; she was the paradigm both for female militancy and for its persecution."<sup>5</sup> According to Christabel Pankhurst, the suffragist's association with Joan of Arc was one which showed the English government as "500 years behind the times." "Their predecessors burned

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<sup>4</sup> E. Pankhurst, circular issued August 13, 1914, as cited in Mackenzie (1975), p. 282.

<sup>5</sup> Tickner, pp. 209-210. For an excellent analysis of Joan of Arc in suffrage presentation, see Tickner pp. 209-213. See also Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: the Image of Female Heroism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981); and Eric Hobsbawm, "Man and Woman in Socialist Iconography," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 6 (Autumn 1978), esp. p.135 n. 249.

Joan of Arc,” wrote Christabel Pankhurst, “and they themselves are now persecuting her spiritual descendants.”<sup>6</sup>

As far as placing Joan of Arc (rising from the destruction wrought by the present war) on the cover of the recently re-issued *Suffragette*, the choice could have been anything but unintentional. As both the symbolic emblem of women’s fight for political enfranchisement and the figure of women’s historic heroism and sacrifice, the choice of Joan of Arc coming to the rescue, as it were, with the Pankhurst’s official re-entry into public life, is in keeping with the Pankhurst’s conviction that the inclusion of women into the affairs of the state would “correct” the present imbalance and was therefore necessary in the maintenance of the state. In fact, Joan of Arc would grace the front covers of an additional six issues over the next three years, while the majority of other issues would feature front-page illustrations of Queen Boudica, Elizabeth I, the Virgin Mary, St. Genvieve, Liberty, Britannia, the Queen of Rumania, female Serbian resistance fighters, Russian women soldiers and various other illustrations of prominent and historic women.

The contents of the 16 April 1915 edition lay out the WSPU’s position on a number of issues, but most important for this study, the edition defended the WSPU’s work toward a just and timely end to the war. In essence, the WSPU defined its official “promotion” of the war as twofold: first, to re-establish the “liberty and the rights of small nations,” and secondly to protect British democracy from the “impossible constitutional affairs” of Germany. In Christabel’s editorial “We will not be Prussianised,” as well as various shorter articles throughout this paper

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<sup>6</sup> C. Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, May 9, 1913, as cited in Tickner, p. 210.

and in subsequent issues, the WSPU's position toward the war is elaborated on and the above two points discussed.

Interestingly, the two concerns which garner much of the attention are those which can to some extent be described as "women's" or "suffrage" issues, or in other words, issues which show a striking similarity to earlier arguments regarding women's enfranchisement and the position of women within society. In a more than metaphorical sense, the WSPU equated the situation in Serbia, Belgium and France with its own struggle for women's political enfranchisement. "This war and the women's fight for the vote," one article reads, "are part of the old old [sic] conflict between freedom and tyranny. The very same hopes, the same aspirations that inspire British women to fight for political liberty are inspiring the peoples of Europe to fight for national liberty."<sup>7</sup>

Although conveniently silent regarding the history of British imperial tyranny, *The Suffragette* makes a convincing argument for the protection of smaller, defenseless states from the expansionist plans of a greater Germany. According to the WSPU, "the German Emperor . . . [has stated] in unmistakable terms that the strong must rule the weak, the strong must exterminate the weak, and that Might is Right."<sup>8</sup>

Undoubtedly, such comments instilled fear in women whose hold on power was tenuous at best. In response, the language the WSPU used to describe the situation adopted the sex-specific terms of the earlier suffrage struggle. Germany was defined in conceived masculine terms: as aggressive, powerful and virile, while Serbia, Belgium and France were characterized

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<sup>7</sup> *The Suffragette*, April 23, 1915, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> *The Suffragette*, April 16, 1915, p. 12.

in similarly conceived feminine terms: invaded, violated and helpless. Support for France is qualified as to “prevent her from being crushed by the over-sexed, that is to say over-masculine, country of Germany.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, an illustration of “Unconquerable Belgium” depicts a woman in tattered clothing standing over the burning countryside while German armies are described as “extorting, pillaging, re-pillaging and ravishing” and “trampling over [her] prone body.”<sup>10</sup> Serbia, too, would be described as a country struggling with wartime loss and rife with an epidemic that is “plunging [it] in tears, and covering her with grief.”<sup>11</sup>

Though depictions of women and children as the predominant civilian casualties of war would later be used as wartime propaganda in the Second World War, the WSPU’s use of such imagery may suggest a motivation very different from that used to encourage women to enter factories or to buy war bonds.<sup>12</sup> On one level, Pankhurst may have deliberately tried to unveil the reality of war for women: that war often entailed their systematic displacement, torture and rape. On another level, however, Pankhurst’s gendered depiction of the belligerent countries reflects her very real concern that “rights” must not be compromised by force. Calling on the help of previous members, the newly re-published *Suffragette* declared that the women of the WSPU

had a duty not only to our Allies, but to the neutral nations, who are counting upon us to guarantee

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<sup>9</sup> *The Suffragette*, April 23, 1915, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> *The Suffragette*, May 21, 1915, p. 81; April 16, 1915, p. 8; April 23, 1915, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> *The Suffragette*, April 23, 1915, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> For a critique of wartime propaganda during the Second World War, see Susan Gubar, “This Is My Rifle, This Is My Gun” in Higonet et al., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 227-259.

them against the fate that has befallen Belgium and Serbia [sic]. They trust us no less than do our Allies, to be loyal at the very end to the cause of small nations, and to the cause of liberty.<sup>13</sup>

Calls to aid in the liberation of Czechs, Slovaks and Rumanians<sup>14</sup> would be added to the list of countries in need of Allied support as Christabel Pankhurst travelled to Paris to meet with the exiled Czech patriots Tomas Masaryk (later founding-President of Czechoslovakia) and Eduard Benes (Foreign Minister and second President of Czechoslovakia).<sup>15</sup> The plight of invaded countries remained the focus of WSPU attention and their rhetoric employed the same language of liberty over tyranny that had been used in earlier suffrage literature. To a certain extent the WSPU argued for the defenseless underdog—a position not unlike the one it faced at home. When confronted by former suffragist-sympathizer Bertrand Russell's accusation that Serbia was barbarous and therefore not in a position to request foreign aid, Emmeline Pankhurst was quick to point out the arrogance of Russell's comment. As Pankhurst saw it, for Russell to accuse Serbia of being barbarous was "a criminal piece of audacity on the part of a man who belongs to a country which took off the head of Charles Ist."<sup>16</sup> War and violence, Pankhurst argued, was the work of men, not the reserve of barbarous countries.

To a large extent, the "liberty" Pankhurst was so concerned about had much to do with the second focus of WSPU attention: Germany's system of

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<sup>13</sup> *The Suffragette*, April 16, 1915, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> See for example *The Suffragette* from June 22, 1917 to October 12, 1917.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell (1966), p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

government and the fear that the women of Europe, and England in particular, might become subject to such a political system. The German Empire, as put together by Otto von Bismarck in 1871, was a federation of twenty-five monarchical states which unified under the predominant weight of the Kingdom of Prussia, the Prussian army and the Prussian landed aristocracy. Germany developed neither the constitutionalism of England nor the democratic republicanism of France, and although members of the lower chamber of government, the Reichstag, were elected by universal manhood suffrage, the legislative powers of the lower house were severely restricted and the upper chamber, representing the princes and not the people, effectively ruled the state.<sup>17</sup> Although Germany's claim to universal manhood suffrage was one that England could not boast of, the Pankhursts were well aware of the relative ineffectiveness that a vote in the Reichstag represented, and they made clear their determination to avoid such a system for England.

In Germany, most suffragists worked within women's auxiliaries to the Social Democratic Party (SPD).<sup>18</sup> A legislated ban on the formation of separate women's groups in Germany meant a bitter ideological division grew along political lines, namely, between those who were convinced of the benefits of feminism and those who distrusted it as bourgeois and argued that socialism would sooner emancipate women. The dispute effectively

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<sup>17</sup> For a description of the creation of the German Empire, see R.R. Palmer and Joel Colton, eds, *A History of the Modern World*, 6th edn (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), pp. 580-583.

<sup>18</sup> Since the mid-nineteenth century, absolute bans were placed on German women's membership in political parties or attendance at public political meetings. Nancy F. Cott, "Early-Twentieth-Century Feminism in Political Context: A Comparative Look at Germany and the United States," in Daley (1993), pp. 234-251, p. 236. For a further look at women's suffrage in Germany, see Evans (1977), pp. 192-194, 199-203.

disrupted the development of organizations specific to the promotion of women's suffrage and prevented women's groups on the whole from acting as a unified front.<sup>19</sup> The ban placed on women's political activity in Germany was not lifted until 1908, but even after its lifting, women were still underrepresented at the top levels of the party. Shunted into social welfare work rather than policy-decision making, the pursuit for women's enfranchisement fell behind.<sup>20</sup>

In response to a recent "German Meeting for Woman Suffrage" made in New York earlier that month, *The Suffragette* of 23 April 1915 warned readers not to be fooled by the pronouncement that women would be given the vote in Germany after the war. According to *The Suffragette*:

Even if it does, [women's suffrage] will be useless unless the Hohenzollern rule, with its control over ministers to the exclusion of control by the people's representatives is ended once and for all. The vote of German men is a sham and a fraud; so it would profit women little if they had it.<sup>21</sup>

In keeping with the militant's conviction that life in England would be transformed with the extension of the parliamentary vote to women, the WSPU's fears of the imposition of a German parliamentary system, were logical. "Do you realize what it would mean if it were possible for the Germans to win?" announced Suffragette Flora Drummond in May, 1915, "it would mean that the voice of the people would be *nil*."<sup>22</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>19</sup> Jean H. Quataert, *Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885-1917* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), as cited in Evans (1980), p. 660.

<sup>20</sup> Cott (1993), p. 236.

<sup>21</sup> *The Suffragette*, April 23, 1915, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> *The Suffragette*, May 21, 1915, p. 85.

considering that the British suffragists thought their battle for equal political representation was nearly at an end (especially in light of their recent victories in gaining popular support and government recognition for their contributions to the war effort), the suffragists felt they had much to lose with a possible Allied loss in the war. Aware that legislation had recently been brought in which strictly limited the employment of women in Germany,<sup>23</sup> and considering the fact that political organization by women was still deemed illegal in Germany as late as 1908, the WSPU was understandably wary of the possibility of such a situation developing in England.

In "Weekly War Service Meetings" which were organized to encourage men to enlist, Pankhurst made very clear her reason for helping the government with the war:

I am going to be perfectly frank with you, . . . if not a single man told me he was influenced, we women who have led this Union would fight against the Germans to the end.

Because Prussianism is masculinity carried to a point of enormity and obscenity even, that is what we women are fighting against in every land and in every race, we are fighting against that over sexuality that we women have always been trying to break down; for women to be recognized as half of humanity. It is the same splendid fight that we have always fought that we are fighting now.<sup>24</sup>

Through the rather jarring argument of the above quote, Pankhurst reveals the extent to which she combined the issue of women's rights with the fear of losing the war. Already frustrated by the fact that British citizenship

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<sup>23</sup> Gilbert, p. 83.

<sup>24</sup> *The Suffragette*, June 25, 1915, p. 165.

could be obtained by men of alien origin “at the price of complying with certain regulations and paying a five pound note, while they, as British women, were permanently and unconditionally denied these rights and privileges,”<sup>25</sup> Pankhurst would not let rest the inequality of British women’s political position. Since the meetings were intended to encourage men to enlist, Pankhurst’s argument seems oddly out of place. The conventional call to male chivalry would have been more in keeping with the event (and Pankhurst certainly had evidence of German atrocities purported to have been committed on women and children in Belgium to call upon<sup>26</sup>), but her address clearly was not such a call. Pankhurst’s tone was not pleading, but rather demanding—demanding that British women’s claim to the right of equal citizenship be recognized, and that British men step forward and protect that right since women were not allowed to do so. Though one can fault Pankhurst for the chauvinistic quality of her patriotism (the British concentration camps of the Boer War were hardly shining examples of British benevolence) or the possible short-sightedness of her vision (was the threat to British women’s expected citizenship great enough to warrant the loss of lives that a lengthened war would entail?), one must, however, acknowledge her continued commitment to the earlier concerns of the women’s movement, for Pankhurst’s wartime activism was undeniably linked with her demand for political enfranchisement.

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<sup>25</sup> *The Suffragette*, May 28, 1915.

<sup>26</sup> The May 21, 1915 issue of *The Suffragette*, featured the article “The Germans in England: What an Invasion would Mean,” which listed German atrocities in Belgium as compiled in a report prepared by the government appointed Committee of Enquiry into German Atrocities (*The Suffragette*, May 21, 1915, p. 92). Mitchell (1966) also writes that Pankhurst was one of the select few who were granted admittance to an atrocity exhibition where, among other horrors, carefully preserved mutilated Belgian babies were on view (Mitchell, 1966, p. 55).

It has been discussed elsewhere that suffragists recognized the war as an opportunity for obtaining the vote for women.<sup>27</sup> Through their war work suffragists were able to keep the issue of women's contribution to the state at the forefront and were in a position to offer women's services before the government even thought to ask for them.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, suffrage groups were well situated to offer help at the outbreak of war for their groups could provide the services of women with organizational skills, ready-staffed offices and wide contacts.<sup>29</sup> Para-military women's groups, whether suffragist or not, challenged the concept of war as a masculine exercise, and like the WSPU member who was "anxious to liberate a man for the war," entire squadrons of women volunteered their services to the country.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, considering the anti-suffrage opposition to women's involvement in national issues, suffragists' participation in the war effort provided active proof of women's fitness for public affairs and therefore legitimated their claims for parliamentary enfranchisement.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to sensing the political ramifications that an Allied defeat might mean for women, the WSPU also continued to challenge the government over the issues of women's access to employment, wage parity, the lack of recognition and remuneration for women's work in the home, and the issue of funding for single mothers and unemployed women.

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<sup>27</sup> See for example, Byles, p. 477.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 478.

<sup>29</sup> Vellacott-Newberry, p. 416.

<sup>30</sup> For discussion on the new "army of women," see Woollacott, pp. 17-37, 188-216; Marwick (1977), *passim*, but esp. pp. 83-114; Thom, pp. 144-157; and Braybon, pp. 44-59.

<sup>31</sup> Vellacott (1987), p. 37.

Evidence of their insistence on maintaining these issues during the war is also laid out in the first wartime edition of *The Suffragette*, and continues unabated throughout the following three years of the paper's publication. In fact, once the Representation of the People Act was passed in February 1918 (partially realizing Pankhurst's dream of the enfranchisement of women) *The Suffragette* would swing noticeably away from an enthusiastic support for the war and begin to campaign for its own Women's Party through which it intended to field a number of candidates in the upcoming election.

The War offered the WSPU a platform from which it could express what it saw as either the government's or society's problems while remaining under the sanction of government for providing valuable work to the nation. It was a novel position and the WSPU took immediate advantage of it. From the start of its re-publication, *The Suffragette* outlined the terms upon which women should be included within war work. As *The Suffragette* claimed, "men and women [are] equal in national defense,"<sup>32</sup> and that

the war, and the consequent recruiting of women's labour, should teach the public and the politicians what they have not all of them [sic] learnt in time of peace, that women as wealth producers, enrich and do not impoverish their country. We are told that after the war there will be a great need of building up the wealth that has been destroyed and wasted in the course of it. Women's labour should therefore be needed after the war, as well as during the war on a larger scale than in the past. . . . The problem is, of course, largely one of wages—Equal pay for equal work is good for men as well as for women.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *The Suffragette*, April 16, 1915, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Continuing in this vein, numerous articles are included which describe the type of war work being undertaken by women beyond that of munitions manufacturing. Descriptions of women working as teachers, doctors, nurses and police are given, as well as those working as railway porters, tram conductors, ticket collectors, van drivers, lift attendants, postal messengers, bank clerks, club waiters and so on. Each article concludes with the repetitive refrain that the women are either “engaged on the same basis as men,” that “their hours and pay are the same as those of the male employees,” or that they “will have the same regulations and the same pay.”<sup>34</sup>

Interestingly, the briefest of these descriptions is given to munitions work. Concluding a short paragraph titled “Varied Work by Women,” and following a list of other positions that have been made available to women throughout the country, the sentence “women are also now employed extensively in armament and munitions factories”<sup>35</sup> is the paper’s only reference to munitions work. This may be explained in part by the fact that industrialists and trade unions were still resisting the full placement of women in munitions factories,<sup>36</sup> but considering the very temporary nature of wartime munitions work, one may conclude that the WSPU deliberately chose to highlight other professions which would have a potentially greater and lasting effect on women’s position within society. Employment which

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> The WSPU’s “Right to Serve” march of July 17, 1915 was subsidized with a government grant of £2000 and encouraged by Lloyd George to “create an atmosphere” in which the climate of public opinion and the opposition of industrialists and trade unions would be forced to melt away. C. Pankhurst (1959), pp. 289-291, as cited in Tickner, p. 231.

entailed a high degree of public visibility was given preference in *The Suffragette*, regardless of the class of woman employed at it. Women dockers, railway porters and “newsgirls,” therefore were given as much coverage as uniformed women employed in the more respectable jobs of policing, conducting trams or providing medical help. Women replacing men as club servants warranted special attention and received its own article in the paper. Considering the history of clubs as a bastion of male privilege, the political consequences of such positions becoming available to women could not have been overlooked by the militant members of the WSPU. In keeping with Pankhurst’s pre-war insistence on the importance of the WSPU being in control of its own image, Pankhurst’s wartime activities can be viewed as consistent with her earlier concerns.

In addition to providing new, very public, roles for women, the war allowed the WSPU an opportunity to promote its vision of a society reordered to benefit women and men more equitably. A full year into the war, when fresh approaches to Britain’s wartime problems were needed, the WSPU answered the call with a series of suggestions obsequiously argued to help strengthen the country. Answering the call that economy in public and private expenditure was needed in order to enable Britain to bear the cost of the war, *The Suffragette* outlined the WSPU’s policies for reduced government expenditures. Adamant that the education of the rising generation be spared from any cuts, the article begins with a non-gender-specific discussion but quickly reveals the WSPU’s true concern, the cutting back of education for girls:

To take the girls especially away from school has in the past been regarded as a permissible means of saving money. Nothing could in fact be more

wasteful . . . . The individual, being deprived of the full measure of education, will probably find himself—or more frequently herself—sooner or later stranded because of her inability to maintain herself.<sup>37</sup>

Instead, the WSPU recommends the rationing of supplies and the taxing of luxuries as the first step toward maintaining the government's expenditure: "except among the very poor, a certain economy in the matter of foodstuffs is no doubt possible," and therefore rationing and the "taxation of luxuries is the best means of procuring wise as distinct from unwise economy."<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, sensing the government toying with the idea of reducing allowances paid to the wives of British soldiers, *The Suffragette* was quick to defend the women's incomes. In response to the suggestion in the House of Commons that the British allowances were considerably larger than those paid to women in Germany, *The Suffragette* replied that

[It] is part of the price we are having to pay for remaining a free nation and after all the money spent on maintaining families and rearing up new workers and citizens is productively spent . . . . Every healthy citizen who reaches womanhood and manhood is apart from all else a financial asset to the nation.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, the article follows with a defense of the economic independence of married women, which in turn calls for the remuneration of domestic work and the reorganization of domestic industry so as to provide co-

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<sup>37</sup> *The Suffragette*, July 30, 1915, p. 247.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> In response to the comment made by the Financial Secretary to the War Office. *The Suffragette*, July 30, 1915, p. 247.

operative housekeeping and more reasonable food and living accommodation. Women's economic independence, remuneration of domestic work and the introduction of co-operative housekeeping is cast in the humble terms of saving the government money by removing the maintenance of dependent women from the expenses of the state. Unmarried women, the article argues, should be given equal entry into the professions so that they, "as the men of the country, may not only maintain themselves but help to keep the national coffers full."<sup>40</sup> However, considering that the article concludes with a reprinted piece from a pre-war issue of *The Suffragette* (which also highlights the claims to the desperate need for the economic independence of women and the need to reorganize domestic industry), the WSPU's "answers" for the wartime dilemma of the government would appear to be more than patriotically driven.

Indeed, calls to reform marriage and illegitimacy laws,<sup>41</sup> to help alleviate poverty among women and children,<sup>42</sup> and to enfranchise "the mother half of the human family"<sup>43</sup> would complement articles on maintaining the education of girls and encouraging the economic independence of women. Once the inclusion of women in the upcoming franchise reform bill was essentially guaranteed in the fall of 1917, Pankhurst softened her wartime campaigning and replaced it with the enthusiastic announcement of her new Women's Party. No longer known

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *The Suffragette*, June 11, 1915, p. 138; Nov. 16, 1917, p. 186.

<sup>42</sup> *The Suffragette*, Feb. 8, 1918, pp. 261 and 295.

<sup>43</sup> E. Pankhurst (1914), p. 12. See also *The Suffragette*, esp. April 9, 1917, p. 355-356; and April 23, 1917, p. 363.

as the Women's Social and Political Union, the Women's Party would field women candidates in the up-coming election on a platform of various feminist, socialist and national issues. Although the WSPU continued to support calls for an allied victory once women gained the vote, there was a noticeable absence of the pro-war stance evident in its earlier wartime activities. By the end of the war, Pankhurst's attention would be completely re-focused and directed toward the new goal of establishing a political party geared specifically to the concerns of women.

## EPILOGUE

*It will be fifty years on the seventeenth of May since John Stuart Mill introduced the first women's suffrage bill into the House of Commons. Fifty years is a long time and it seems to me that fifty years of agitation that has seen men and women going from the cradle to the grave, hoping and longing to see this thing pass, is altogether too long a time even in a conservative country like England.*

*Men have said kind and gracious things about the part women have played in this war. But women think of what we have done as simply doing our duty, and our regret is that it has taken so long for opportunities to be given to us.*

Emmeline Pankhurst

*Speech Delivered at the Queen's Hall*

*April 23, 1917*

It has been noted that one of the lesser ironies of the First World War was the coming together of the erstwhile enemies, David Lloyd George and Emmeline Pankhurst.<sup>1</sup> United under the common banner of war, these two seasoned politicians found a convenient use for each other at the same moment. Although Lloyd George had experienced his own share of suffrage militancy, the organizational skills of Pankhurst and her claim to speak for women offered Lloyd George a political opportunity during the war that outweighed the bitter personal recollection of by-election opposition, subpoenaed court appearances and arson attacks. For Pankhurst, the chance to knock off the final and most intransigent anti-suffragist argument—that women could not exercise the parliamentary vote because they were unable to defend that vote in the event of war—was both unexpected and timely. The sudden currying of suffragist favour, both in terms of government recognition, financial sponsorship and public adulation could only have added to Pankhurst's enthusiasm at seeing the near realization of her goal of votes for women. For both Pankhurst and Lloyd George the war was a high watermark point in their careers, and the years following the war would never again see either personality in such a position of public acclaim.

The momentum of suffrage lobbying was not lost during the war, but rather was given the unforeseen opportunity to break the stalemate that had characterized the pre-war debate. The partial enfranchisement of women was secured nearly a year before the signing of the armistice that would end World War One, when the Representation of the Peoples Act passed into law on February 6 1918. Numerous reasons have been given for

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<sup>1</sup> Tickner, p. 231.

the eventual extension of the parliamentary vote to women. Importantly, a change in the perception of the vote from a threat to social and political order to an insurance against its collapse allowed room for the inclusion of women.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the formation of a wartime coalition government removed the formidable influence of those most virulently opposed.<sup>3</sup> Although Millicent Fawcett would later pessimistically write that enfranchisement of women in 1918 occurred for no other reason than that the government was in a bind over how to give the vote to the millions of men who had become disqualified during the war,<sup>4</sup> Fawcett's evaluation does not adequately explain the government's subsequent inclusion of women. Though undoubtedly in a quandary over how to re-qualify men serving abroad, the government faced bringing in franchise reform in a political climate that had categorically changed over the course of the war. It would have been unthinkable to bring in reform without including the women who had made possible the transition of British life from pre-war England to a country capable of pursuing total war.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Carole Pateman, "Three Questions about Womanhood Suffrage," in Daley (1993), pp. 331-348; p. 343.

<sup>3</sup> Marwick (1991), p. 139.

<sup>4</sup> Millicent Garrett Fawcett, "Progress of the Women's Movement in the United Kingdom" in Ida Husted Harper (ed.) *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. vi, pp. 725-51 as cited in Spender (1982), p. 491.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the concept of "total war," see Ian F. W. Beckett, "Total War," in Clive Emsley et al. (eds.), *War, Peace and Social Change in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London: Open University Press, 1989), pp. 26-44. Ironically, the women most responsible for manufacturing of war goods, the young and predominantly working-class "munitionettes," were excluded from voting in 1918 on account of the age qualification for women voters. Despite the rhetoric of women having "earned" the vote, through the inclusion of an age minimum for women, the government insured itself against a female majority at the polls.

Contemporaries were well aware of the social changes war had brought about, and readily agreed that women's war work had helped secure the vote for women in Britain.<sup>6</sup> As a cartoon in *The Tatler* would suggest, "The Key of the Situation," rested with a woman dressed in a munitions uniform unlocking a door to the Houses of Parliament labeled "The Vote." She had just laid down an axe marked "Militancy" and was now using a key marked "National Work." Meanwhile John Bull, inside the door, was greeting her with the following admonition: "It was no good axe-ing for it, but now you've worked for it and earned it, it's a different matter."<sup>7</sup> The last years of the war would see the opposition to women's suffrage "dwindle like mist before the sun"<sup>8</sup> as the press, politicians and the public alike acknowledged women's service to the state.<sup>9</sup> However controversial Pankhurst's wartime activities, her contribution to the war effort meant a continuation of suffrage campaigning that eventually led to women's enfranchisement.

Few who had witnessed John Stuart Mill's original call for women's enfranchisement in 1867 were present to see the partial goal of votes for women realized in 1918, and if placed within the time frame of today, the

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<sup>6</sup> In the midst of war H.G. Wells echoed the general consensus when he wrote that "women have won the Vote. . . . [they] have killed forever the poor argument that women should not vote because they had no military value. Indeed, they have killed every argument against their subjection. H.G. Wells in *Ladies Home Journal*, June 1916, as cited in Woollacott, p. 188.

<sup>7</sup> "Pictorial Politics: The Key of the Situation," *The Tatler*, 11 April 1917, p. 40, as cited in Woollacott, p. 189.

<sup>8</sup> S. Pankhurst (1931), p. 601.

<sup>9</sup> Owned by the recently converted Lord Northcliff, *The Times*, the *Observer* and the *Daily Mail* all dropped their anti-suffrage stance by 1917, Marwick (1991), p. 139. For the public and political acknowledgment of women's war service, see also Holton (1986), pp. 130-131; Garner, pp. 94-103; Tickner, pp. 229-237; and Woollacott, pp. 188-192.

suffragists would have finally won the battle they had initiated in the early years of the Great Depression. The changes that occurred between the 1860s and the 1920s, not unlike the rate of change from the 1930s to the 1990s, were remarkable and only help to highlight the questions that have remained largely unasked through the course of suffrage history: why did it take so long for women to get the vote?, why was there such an organized opposition against it?, why was it not granted with the same speed or on the same terms as it was for men?

In part, this thesis has been an attempt to shift the focus from perceived shortcomings in the suffragists repeated attempts to gain the vote. In particular, Emmeline Pankhurst has borne a disproportionate share of the blame for the protracted course of the drive for enfranchisement. It is hoped that by presenting alternative interpretations of Pankhurst's wartime activities, future debate can be redirected so as to examine the sources of opposition to women's suffrage and to provide an opportunity for ongoing historical research. As Virginia Woolf would suggest in *Three Guineas*, the study of men's opposition to women might be an even more interesting study than that of the women's own struggle.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (1938) as cited in Marcus (1987), p. 12.

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