

The struggle for the emancipation of women

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



They eventually got the vote in 1918 after the war ended on November 11th at 11 am. In 1918 a new law was passed to re-organise the electoral register it was called the 'Representation of the peoples act'. Added onto that law was a clause saying that women over 30 could vote but there were conditions, they would have to have rented a house for 12 months or have owned a house. Finally in 1928 voting became completely equal. I agree that women's efforts in the war helped them gain the right to vote. One of the reasons was that they helped out by making munitions (shells).

They were made all over Britain in places such as Woolwich, Leeds and Birmingham. This was the first job women had during the war and the most important. Over 1 million women worked in munitions!! The reason they were allowed to start working in munitions factories was because the British army were severely low on shells after 1915. They were down to firing a few shells a day while we were bombarded with shells non-stop. The reason the shortage developed was because the government let too many of the munitions workers go and fight so there was a shortage of workers.

When the shortage occurred the women again started asking for their right to serve but it was denied again. So they made a very famous march to Whitehall where they demanded the right to serve their country. Adding to that Mrs Pankhurst asked for women's wage conditions to become fairer. The P. M. at the time David Lloyd George obliged and allowed them to start working and have equal wages. Women did not only make shells they did lots of other significant work to make up for all the men that left to fight. Although after a while some of them had to be brought back e. . the miners

were called back because they were very important to the country back in Britain.

Other jobs that women did included joining the Red Cross Society's 'Voluntary Aid Detachment'. They came to be later known as VAD's, an example of a famous VAD was Vera Brittain. The VAD's only had basic medical training so they could give soldiers basic medical treatment. Most families of the VAD's didn't mind them doing other jobs but they were strongly against them being VAD's. This was because they didn't want them to mix with lower classes - 'Tommies'.

The only forms of painkiller the VAD's had at their disposal were aspirin and morphine. Morphine came in tablet form and had to be mixed with water and then sucked into a needle then the nurse had to find a place near the wound to inject it. VAD's did not get paid as it was voluntary but the sisters and matrons that organised them did. Because of the non-payment most VAD's came from a social background where not being paid wasn't an issue. Also during the war the Women's Land Army was created. With so many men being away someone had to keep the farms going and that's what the women's land army was created for.

As the German U-Boats were sinking our merchant ships coming from America we had to feed ourselves. We had to become self-sufficient and that's where the land army came into its own. They were paid 18 shillings a week (near enough i?? 1 now) but 12 shillings went to board and food so they didn't make that much money. To save fuel for the war effort all corners were cut so anything that could be done by hand was, seeds were planted by

hand, harvesting was done by hand and horses were used for ploughing just like medieval times!!

There was such a need for more women to join the WLA (Women's Land Army) that recruiting officers didn't check them that thoroughly, one girl Patricia Vernon who was 14 told them she was 18 and was immediately accepted!! This to me shows two things, how desperate the country was for women to start working and also how much young women were eager to help the war effort. Also during the war lots of military jobs opened up for women, from 1917 women were allowed to join the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps the W. A. A. C. They tried to employ women as cooks, drivers etc so even more men could go off and fight.

The idea of this caught on and women were now being allowed into bigger military services. In 1918 women got their own royal navy (WRENS) and then a women's royal air force was created the W. R. A. F. (women's royal air force) But except from military services women still did other jobs like sewing, coal mining, factory work etc all the less glamorous jobs. Through the whole war I think women showed their patriotism and courage by making a lot of changes in their personal lives and the struggles they faced in their lives that they overcame.

For example here is one scenario that women would've faced working in munitions factories. By working with the chemicals in shells women could get cancer and die but they still worked on, because shells contained sulphur which there was no protection for. Women who worked with sulphur soon started to realise that the areas of their exposed skin started to turn the

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colour of sulphur - yellow. These women were nicknamed canaries but that wasn't any kind of insult it was more a term of endearment as people recognised the huge importance of their work.

They would also have 12-hour days and they would swap with other women every 12 hours. That meant there would be no time to clean where they slept, these places increasingly dirty and hence very unhygienic. While working making shells if one little mistake was made it could be very bad, there was one instance where a whole factory was burnt down in Silver Town 1917. Also women were still paid less and still faced sexism from the male employees that didn't go off to fight and sometimes these men would steal things from the women like their tools etc.

To me this shows again how much women really wanted to help out the war effort. If they were willing to go through all I have just described they must've have really wanted to play their parts. By doing this they showed how courageous they were in the country's time of need. Another thing that doesn't get mentioned sometimes is that the government didn't make women completely independent when working. They kept older male citizens that were too old to go and fight, well they kept them as kind of managers in the factories to watch over the women. These problems were only faced at work.

There were other problems that women overcame in their personal lives as well. Firstly to even work a lot of middle and upper class women were forced to run away from home because their dads/husbands wouldn't let them work. Then there were things like if their husband's had gone off to fight as

well as working long hours they would also have to take care of their homes. All the way through the war women fought these types of struggles and it didn't go unnoticed. By the end of the war in 1918 women became a lot more independent and earned the vote.

Therefore in 1918 women got the right to vote thanks to their efforts during World War 1. During the war they showed lots of courage, patriotism, responsibility and an overall willingness to help out their country in its time of need. Men realised that without women's efforts in the war Britain wouldn't have survived. In recognition of that realisation they granted women the vote. I disagree that women's efforts in the war earned them the right to vote because of what they did before the war e. g. protesting. One of the reasons they earned the vote was because of the pre-war suffragette campaigns such as Black Friday.

For a long time before war broke out the suffragettes had been pestering the government about giving women the right to vote. So you could say that it had been coming because there were signs that the government was crumbling under the constant and extreme pressure it was under. One of the most important things about the Suffragettes was that because of their approach it showed to society that women wanted the vote. Whereas peaceful protesting e. g. letter writing never got further than the MP's they sent them to. Emmeline Pankhurst formed them in 1903 and their protests got worse and more extreme as the years passed.

From starting off by letter writing then going through all extremes to end up doing stuff like damaging public property, hunger strikes and even jumping

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under horses at the derby in 1913. But just by reading those brief comments you can see how much they wanted the vote and how far they had to go to get it. Another big factor, which is often overlooked, is the part the N. U. W. S. S. played in getting women the vote. A lot of people even go as far as saying that the N. U. W. S. S. were more important and instrumental in getting the vote for women.

They were a lot bigger than the W. S. P. U. because they had members all over the country whereas the main percentages of the W. S. P. U. were from London. The N. U. W. S. S. were a lot different from the W. S. P. U. they believed in peaceful protesting unlike the suffragettes. They were nicknamed the Suffragists to go along with the suffragettes. There wasn't too much in common with these two different groups apart from the leader of the suffragettes used to be in the suffragists. They made a very big contribution, which a lot of people do not know.

The contribution I'm talking about is when the suffragettes went completely out of control the people that once supported women's franchise were turning against it. At one time in 1900 more than half of all MP's were for votes for women. Mrs Fawcett described the movement as 'glacier-like, slow but very powerful'. But after 1903 many people thought that the suffragettes had gone too far because of the extremes their campaigns had reached, people were tired about hearing what they had done next. But Millicent Fawcett and the suffragists worked tirelessly on what seemed to be a lost cause, gaining back the support of public.

They carried on doing the same things they had done all the years back but now it seemed that more people were taking notice. They held many meetings, gave out leaflets and collected petitions. They also did things like met with MP's to argue their case with MP's but did so in a dignified manner and when election times were near they would campaign for any candidate that believed women should get the vote. Mrs Fawcett wrote in 1911 that she wanted to show the whole world how to gain reforms without the need for any kind of violence a bit like the preaching's of Mahatma Gandhi & Martin Luther King Junior.

That means that maybe the W. S. P. U weren't so important and perhaps there should be a statue of Mrs Fawcett in front of parliament rather than Mrs Pankhurst. In the years between and after the war women were making progress in every field such as in jobs, educationally, legally and economically. They made plenty of educational progress and they even were allowed to vote to run for positions in school boards and as local councillors and such. So they probably would've got the vote anyway because they were progressing in all areas of their life. Their status was continually increasing so eventually it would've increased enough for them to get the vote.