

Why did a campaign for women's suffrage develop in 1870

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



One of the main factors that a campaign for women's suffrage developed in this time was the introduction of the Forster Act in 1870. This entitled both boys and - for the first time in England - girls, to a free education of primary level. In turn, women all across England became more educated, therefore could develop larger roles in society if they wished, for example become nurses, teachers and clerks. This education also made more women more aware of their unequal status in everyday life. It was perfectly normal as a woman to be thought of as her father's property until she got married, then her husband's property after this.

Only if a woman's husband died, with her becoming a widow would she gain a little respect and status. Being more educated, women, from mostly middle-class, wealthy backgrounds began to question why they were being treated so unfairly. By many women this was frowned upon, as many of them had almost been brainwashed into believing that " Women were and are destined to make voters rather than be voters themselves. " This was the view of London-born Marie Corelli, written in 1907, when the campaign for women's suffrage was at its climax.

Another important factor in the development of the campaign for women's suffrage was that many other changes in Britain happened at or around this time, which were mostly all positive for women. Local councils decided, in 1882, that women should be given the right to vote in the council elections. This was because it was becoming more and more obvious that female voters did not harm anyone or anything, including local democracy. These

feelings however did not have the strength to change the opinion of more or less every male mind in the United Kingdom.

Women were becoming more aware of women's suffrage internationally to add to these seemingly minor breakthroughs. The International Women's Suffrage Alliance brought together groups from around the world and gave a much more powerful feeling to them. Newspapers and magazines informed campaigners around the country about the progress of their supporters and suchlike, making the bonds ever more tight. In 1893, women in the UK learned that in New Zealand women's suffrage had been granted. Further developments in other countries were also taking place, giving hope and courage to the British campaigners.

In America, many well-off female landholders, including feminist leader Lucy Stone, took part in radical actions. Stone kept her birth name after marriage, something previously almost unheard of. Apart from support from rich women, many men also advocated the enfranchisement of women, and one of these happened to be the liberal writer Thomas Paine. Such support gave renewed life to campaigners, and was paralleled in the United Kingdom with the backing of women's suffrage from social reformists such as John S. Mill and Richard Cobden.

Mill's reformist views earned him little respect, and his founding of the first women's suffrage association in the UK did not help this, although just these people's presence in the campaign helped with morale during the development of it. Although all this backing was positive for the campaign,

many women devoted to the cause saw that it was getting nowhere. There were many strong-willed figures that opposed women's suffrage, including Queen Victoria. Leading MPs at the time also opposed it, for example William Gladstone, who was an anti-reformist Liberal Party leader.

His first ever speech in parliament condemned the abolition of slavery in the West Indies. He and many other politicians did not support votes for women partly because of the need they felt to back-up the Queen's opinion, but also because they believed that if they gave the vote to women, this would have a negative affect on their election results. In this period of the frustration of getting nowhere in their cause, the senior members of the Pankhurst family (being Richard and Emmeline Pankhurst, although their younger daughters were just as devoted to the cause as them) set up the Women's Social and Political Union.

This association was designed to speed things up in the campaign, at the same time attracting more attention from the press, for they, members of the WSPU believed that the methods of the NUWSS and the suffragists were far too tame and were not getting any solid results. Although the militant campaign of the Suffragettes was often frowned upon (they would often use violence and aggression publicly), it did not, as some anti-women's suffrage believers would have hoped, slow or hinder the campaign in an obvious or short-term way.

In many ways the WSPU succeeded in their aims, drawing close media attention to their cause and also actual political progress in their cause.

Millicent Fawcett, the leader of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, wrote to the newspaper *The Times* in 1906 that she was glad of the tactics of the Suffragettes, because she felt they had "done more to bring the movement within the region of practical politics in twelve months than I and my followers have been able to do in the same number of years".

This unity between the two campaigns was a strong one (although in some cases it was that the Suffragists saw their violent comrades as having more of a negative effect on the cause more than a positive one), and was another reason that the movement for the enfranchisement of women was becoming ever more rapid, and also often developing ever further.

Thus, by the year 1914, even though women still had not gained the right to vote, and in many ways were still seen as second-class citizens, the overall mood of public opinion had begun, slowly but surely, to recognise women and their roles and rights in British society as more of an equal one. This was prominently due to a virtuous combination of increased access to education for girls, general political changes taking place internationally - including the campaign for the enfranchisement of women - and the militant campaigning of women's suffrage groups, especially the WSPU and its Suffragette supporters.