

Votes for women essay

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The Suffragettes were members of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a new women's suffrage organisation. Founded in Manchester in 1903 by the Pankhurst family, the approach was very much different from the moderate and law-abiding NUWSS - National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. The Suffragettes were a radical militant organisation who had no qualms about using weaponry or any kind of other forces, which could reverse a situation or influence a judgement. Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst was a prominent figure in the WSPU.

In her autobiography she outlines the plan of the Suffragettes, 'to secure for women the Parliamentary vote as it or may be granted to men'. Women fought for the vote as a means to an end. The vote had been a key factor in safeguarding the interests of men, and now women were demanding the same. Little progress could be made to improve women's working conditions, for example, until MP's were made accountable to female voters. They wanted the vote because all the important and lucrative positions are barred to them and opportunities of public service are denied.

Source A is a poster produced in 1912 by the Suffragette in order to publicise their highly debatable campaign about women having the prestigious right to vote. In those days, puritanical or male dominated society prevailed. This meant that men had all the power, in this case the vote. As they had the vote, they elected their leaders and they set the law. Due to this, not getting education and not receiving the privileges, the men, suppressed the women and made them raise their voice in heavy protest .

This implied that little was done to improve the women's lives. The top half of the poster shows that women can hold lucrative jobs if given a chance and yet do not have the vote. It shows women in very powerful positions such as a mayor, a nurse, a teacher etc. The bottom half of the poster portrays men in negative roles such as a drunkard, a lunatic, a convict and other such characters. Despite this, men will still regain the vote or will never lose it.

Women wanted the vote because wherever they have become voters; reform proceeded more rapidly than before. Through this poster women are trying to reiterate that if given a chance they can revolutionize the way of thinking. They are trying to show that even if men turn into drunkards, convicts, they can still have their social and economic grievances listened to, then why can't women? Politics and economics go hand in hand and as long as long as women has no political status, she will remain a second-class citizen.

Through this poster, the prominent message they are trying to bring out is that men and women must be given equal voting rights. If women get the vote, they can receive education and then hold important jobs in order to contribute to society. Some critics could argue that women could be in the same situation as the men have been shown in the poster and due to that they are not worthy of the vote. As the poster has been produced by a pro - woman organisation, there is a tendency of being biased towards women.

Source B is an extract from a book named 'Women or Suffragette' written by Marie Corelli in 1907. Marie firstly states that the whole fiasco about the vote for women is the 'shrill cry' of a number of frustrated ladies. By using the

words 'shrill cry', she straightaway sends out a negative implication to the reader. She follows that by reiterating her point and also states that women are destined to make voters rather than be voters themselves.

She then clarifies that men have done injustice to ladies, but she then contradicts that by saying that this injustice is a result due to the mothers who have raised their sons in this way and will continue to do so. Source C is a cartoon drawn by Bernard Partridge in 1906. It depicts two campaigners of female suffrage. However, one is the law abiding Suffragist and the other is the extremist Suffragette. The caption for the cartoon is, 'The Shrieking Sister', which indirectly refers to the Suffragette campaign.

The cartoon shows that the Suffragist is holding the Suffragettes clenched fist and is telling her, 'You help cause? Why, you're its worst enemy!' The Suffragists were trying to convince the Suffragette's that their campaign was futile as they resorted to violence and instead of helping the cause; they were providing the most damage to it. The Suffragists believed that this violence was the cause for the men not giving the vote to the women. The Suffragettes grew more violent as time progressed and were more daring and inventive in their protests.

They threw slates from roofs at Ministers, interrupted the King's royal coach to present a petition, and threw stones on 10 Downing Street. This violent and crude behaviour led to many of these women getting arrested. The action of the WSPU probably did more harm than good. Although they aroused public interest in the issue, they failed to win mass support and

made the government reluctant to give in. the government saw the suffragettes in a very negative light- little better than terrorists.

Although they promised no harm to life, their protests suggested otherwise. The damage to churches, property and art eventually turned many people against this worthy campaign. Both Sources B and C are similar as well as different in some or the other way. In Source B, Marie Corelli refers to 'the shrill cry of a number of discontented ladies'. This can be immediately linked up with source C whose caption is 'The Shrieking Sister'. They both refer to the Suffragettes who are making a big ruckus about the whole scenario and are actually ruining it for the women.

Also source C says that the Suffragist while holding the hand Suffragette's hand, is telling her ' YOU help our cause? Why you're its worst enemy! This is also indicated by the title of Marie Corelli's book, 'Women or Suffragette'. The title indicates that you either be a woman who is kind and gentle and support the cause or be the shrieking Suffragette who causes the most harm. The sources are also dissimilar in a few ways. Source B has a two-way argument about the women receiving the vote. Source C clearly is in support of it, but only supports the calm, easier going Suffragists.

The cartoon also shows that the Suffragists are the upper class women - who are stylish as well as polished. On the other hand it shows that the Suffragettes are the middle- lower class. This is clearly indicated by the difference in the clothes the two women are wearing. The Suffragette woman is wearing tattered clothes, while the Suffragist woman is wearing a fur, which clearly has an ostentatious as well as opulent look. Source C talks

about women as a whole and blames them for rearing their sons up in such a way that they commit injustice on women.

The Suffragettes were hardliners, who could go to any extent in order to gain the vote. Instead of this being an assertive statement, it in fact backfired on their campaign. The liberals had been elected in 1906 with a massive majority. The Liberals had begun a series of reforms such as poverty and ill health in Britain. By 1909 they were passing laws relating to health of children and age-old pensions. The Liberal Government were also involved in a series of clashes concerning rising taxes. From 1908 there were a series of strikes that kept the Liberal's busy. In Ireland there was unrest in Ulster and the creation of two armed forces.

Also the years before the war there were widespread demonstrations in Britain, some to do with trade union disputes and some by anarchists. This meant the government deploying troops on the streets. Finally, the political situation in Europe was becoming worse which finally led to the outbreak of the war. So, the Liberal's had a lot to think about, and the vote for women appeared a minor issue, therefore given no importance. Also the Liberal's were focusing on extending the vote to all men over the age of 21. The Liberals also thought that extending the vote to women meant more Conservative voters.

In addition to that there was no pressure from any outer force other than the WSPU to extend the vote to women. This made the Liberals believe that people in Britain didn't regard it as an important issue. In 1900, there was a general election in Britain. During that time the main issue was the Boer War

in South Africa, which had begun in 1899. During the election 7 million people were entitled to vote of a population of 42 million. There was no progress in votes for women during that year. The result of the votes worsened the situation as the Conservative Party which was completely against the votes, won by a huge majority.

The other parties weren't completely in favour of it either. Secondly, the Women's Suffrage Bill was rejected in the Parliament in 1900 which was a big blow to them. The House of Commons had voted about 50 times on the vote for women. However, MP's were too busy with the events in South Africa. The voting system in those days was biased towards men, but in particular to Middle class wealthy men. Most proposals for vote for women were based on the conditions that it should be on the same status of men. Many politicians believed that it was indeed right to give them the vote, but it meant making changes which would favour one party or another.

Giving the vote on the same terms as men meant partiality to the Conservative party. For this reason the Labour Party started to lose interest in this subject. While the campaigns for vote for women seemed to be making some progress, hopes of success received a serious blow. In March 1908, Herbert Asquith replaced Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Bannerman was in support of the votes, but Asquith wasn't. He was adamant on the fact that until a majority of Britain was in favour of it, no change was going to be brought about. The increased violence during 1912 had important results for the WSPU.

Emmeline and Fredrick Pethick Lawrence left the WSPU and began to work on their own for votes for women. The increased Suffragette violence also brought to an end any co- operation between the WSPU and NUWSS. This fizzed out the women's Suffrage activities as most of the prominent figures diverged in their different fields. A prominent reason for the women not receiving the vote was the actions taken by the suffragette campaign. Their violent campaigns convinced the government that they were little better than terrorists and handing them the vote would mean attracting a hundred more Wars and developing boisterous ministers.

Source D and Source E, both contradict each other. The leading member of the Suffragette's, Emmeline Pankhurst, has written source D and talks about the violent campaign of the Suffragette's and what good did it do to the vote. She is very clear in her argument and clearly states that the politicians were only ready to give the vote if two-thirds of the population were in favour of it. She goes on to say that in 1906, a large section of the population was in favour of the vote, however the government did nothing to award the vote. This is the primary reason why they started acting violent in order to assert themselves on the government.

Many people believed that all that violence caused by the suffragettes was causing harm to the campaign rather than helping it. On the other hand, Source E illustrates what many members of the parliament believed - giving the vote meant, putting the control of the country into feminine hands. This was another reason why the vote wasn't awarded. People were frightened about the implications of giving the vote to women. Men in powerful positions understood the potential of women, and felt that if women were in

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their positions, they would do a better job and this would mean the men population getting sidelined.

The Suffragettes had a base in Manchester and not one in London, which was the hub of the activity. This meant a lot of inconvenience, as the Suffragettes could not continuously keep an eye on the latest developments. During the time of the WSPU split, the Private Member's Bill promised by Asquith came before the House of Commons. It passed its first reading, but at its second reading, it suffered the same fate as all other such bills and was defeated by 47 votes in May 1913. This was a major drawback as these bills were very important to the fate of the suffrage.