

Discuss the two approaches: suffragette and suffragists. which do you consider th...



Discuss the two approaches: Suffragette and Suffragists. Which do you consider the most effective? Women's suffrage in the United Kingdom was a national movement that began in 1872. Since the 1860s, women had been campaigning for the right to vote. Although women had made gains in areas such as education, real change could only come through by having a say in parliament. In the course of this movement, two parties were formed to fight for the rights of women: the Suffragettes and the Suffragists. Both parties were formed with the objective to campaign to let women have the right to vote, and the same political rights as men, however they had very different ways of approaching this cause. The Suffragists relied on non-violent direct action in their quest to vote, whereas the Suffragettes used direct and at times violent and militant action to aid their cause. This essay aims to compare the effectiveness of the approaches of both the parties, and in turn show which party's approach was the most effective. In 1897, the various suffragist societies united into one National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), the main Suffragist movement. It was set up under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett, and members of the NUWSS were known as the Suffragists. The NUWSS hoped to persuade politicians to give them the right to vote and undertook a peaceful and democratic campaign. They aimed to achieve women's suffrage through peaceful and legal means, in particular by introducing Parliamentary Bills, petitions, and publishing newspapers, distributing leaflets and free literature and holding organized meetings to explain and promote their aims. Nevertheless, the group continued to grow, and by 1914 there were in excess of 500 branches throughout the country, with over 100,000 members. Many, but by no means all, of the members were middle class. Moreover, unlike the WSPU, <https://assignbuster.com/discuss-the-two-approaches-suffragette-and-suffragists-which-do-you-consider-the-most-effective/>

their group also had some male members. Due to a lack of progress seen within the NUWSS's tactics and methods, there was a split within the party in 1903 and some members deviated and set up the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), or the Suffragettes, under the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst, and her daughter Christabel. They felt that the NUWSS restricted them to the constitutional methods being applied, and thought it was necessary to incorporate a more militant style course of action. The WSPU's motto was "deeds not words", and in comparison to the Suffragists, their tactics were definitely radical. Some of the strategies included public marches, window smashing, chaining to railings, hunger strikes, and arson attacks and interrupting political meetings. The NUWSS refused to criticise their former members however, as they admired their courage. They thought that violent action would alienate the other suffrage groups and not progress work towards the vote, as the government would not deal with them, or they would be seen to be giving in to violent action towards them, also encouraging other action groups to do the same. The suffragette's actions' were erratic, and although both party's were fighting towards the same cause; this non-peaceful approach adopted by the WSPU seemed to gain the attention of the masses. Many newspapers openly supported the Suffragette movement for example, on the 24th of October 1906 the Daily Mirror wrote that "By what means, but screaming, knocking, and rioting, did men themselves ever gain what they were pleased to call their rights?", and The Daily News wrote 'No class has ever got the vote except at the risk of something like revolution'. Moreover, Millicent Fawcett - one of the traditional, moderate 'suffragists' — was also supportive, despite being the leader of the NUWSS. She wrote in 1906, "I hope the more old-fashioned

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suffragists will stand by them. In my opinion, far from having injured the movement, [the Suffragettes] have done more during the last 12 months to bring it within the region of practical politics than we have been able to accomplish in the same number of years. " Lastly, the Suffragettes' radical actions proved a very salient fact; they were truly convinced that the violence helped the cause of women's suffrage. According to Emmeline Pankhurst, " The argument of the broken pane of glass is the most valuable argument in modern politics. " This public approval was further seen in the fact that many historians such as Edward Boyd, in ' The Suffragette Movement' in A Pageant of History (1958) as well as Constance Rover in Women's Suffrage and Party Politics (1967) described the WPSU campaign as successful, and presented the Suffragettes as heroes who won the vote for the woman. Therefore, this positive outlook by the public, as well as such strong forms of support, can be said to have labeled the Suffragette's approach as effective. Millicent Fawcett said in a speech in 1911 that the movement of the NUWSS was " like a glacier; slow moving but unstoppable". These words of hers implied a slow yet consistent progress of the NUWSS. This view was seen to be supported by the rise of membership numbers of the NUWSS. By 1913 the NUWSS had nearly 53, 000 members, showing they had a wide influence across Britain. Furthermore, the NUWSS's methods of peaceful protest were seen to gain respect by the public, and the government. Processions that were held to show parliament how many women wanted the vote were deemed successful, for example the ' Mud March' in February 1907, or the summer 1913 women's Pilgrimage, whereby members of the NUWSS set off in the middle of Jun, and during the next six weeks, held a series of meeting all over Britain. An estimated 50, 000 women

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attended Hyde Park in London on 26th July, showing the extent of the support of this cause. The NUWSS's close relationship with the government was characterized by its work with politicians. Up until 1910, Suffragists helped pro female suffrage liberal candidates with their campaigns, as well as support their own candidates against liberals. Therefore, it can be seen that the NUWSS was indeed effective in terms of giving the government a platform with which to actually collaborate with, rather than being in a constant battle with them like WSPU. Its close relationship with various politicians can be said to have been invaluable to the cause, as without them, no change would ever have been made. Thus, the Suffragist's approach was seen to have been effective. However, it must be noted that while some deemed the actions of the NUWSS as ineffective, the actions of the WPSU were argued to be destructive to the cause of women's rights. Many people were under the impression that the Suffragettes harmed the women's cause. For example, Lloyd George, in a letter to CP Scott, 29 November 1909, wrote, " The action of the Militants is ruinous. The feeling amongst sympathizers of the cause in the House [of Commons] is one of panic. I am frankly not very hopeful of success if these tactics are persisted in. " Furthermore, the actions of the Suffragettes were even said to set back women's rights and were represented with large negative press in newspapers such as the Manchester Guardian and the Morning Post, as well as cause some of their very own supporters to doubt the actions of the party. Therefore, the Suffragette's approach can be argued to have been detrimental to the cause of women's enfranchisement, and thus not as effective as the suffragists. In conclusion, the approaches of both parties held merit in terms of effectiveness. The Suffragists peaceful tactics were <https://assignbuster.com/discuss-the-two-approaches-suffragette-and-suffragists-which-do-you-consider-the-most-effective/>

indeed met with respect, and although they were said to be ineffective by some, in terms of pushing parliament to extend the vote to women, it was not said to be destructive in any way. The suffragette's movement however, was. This in turn caused many to view its violent methods with disdain, and this was further supported by the government's similar views too. They did not feel the use of violence was justified, nor useful. Lloyd George speaking in 1913 said, " Haven't the Suffragettes the sense to see that the very worst way of campaigning for the vote is to try and intimidate a man into giving them what he would gladly give otherwise? " Therefore, keeping in mind that without the Suffragists, there would be no link between the government and the unhappy women, the Suffragist approach can be said to have been more effective than the Suffragettes. (1389 words) -----

[1]. <http://www.thesuffragettes.org/map/london-boroughs/camden/national-union-womens-suffrage-societies/>

[2]. <http://www.ngfl-cymru.org.uk/vtc/20050422/History/Keystage4/protestan/votesforw/suffragis>

[3]. <http://www.markedbyteachers.com/gcse/politics/the-suffragettes-the-suffragists.html>

[4]. http://www.johndclare.net/Women2_DidSuffragettesHelp.htm

[5]. http://www.johndclare.net/Women2_DidSuffragettesHelp.htm