

Suffragettes were members of women's organization movements in the late 19th and early 20th century, such as the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). The goal they wanted was for universal suffrage, women's right to vote in elections. The term "suffragette" is particularly associated with activists in the British WSPU, led by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst.

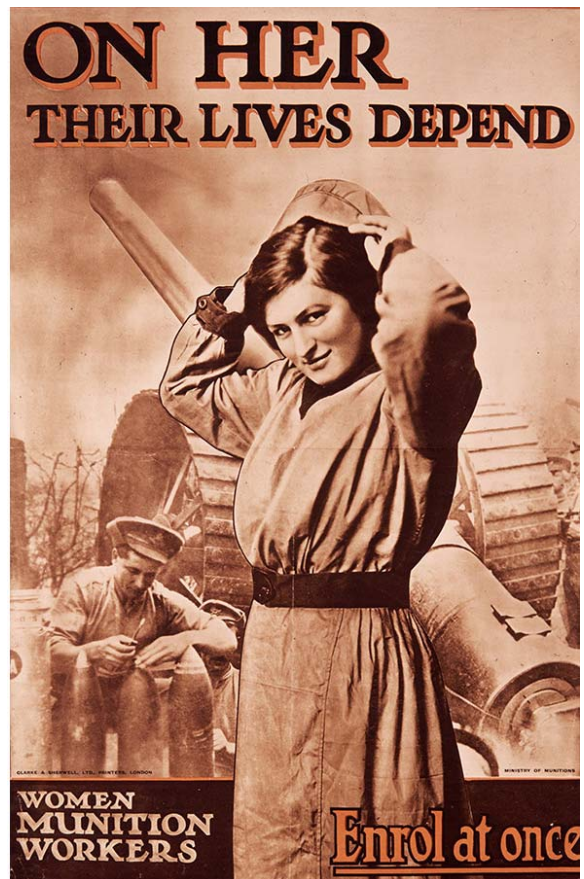
1912 was a turning point for the British suffragettes as they turned to more militant tactics such as chaining themselves to railings, setting fire to mailbox contents, arson, smashing windows and occasionally detonating bombs. This was because the Prime Minister at the time, Asquith, nearly signed a document giving women (over 30 and either married to a property-owner or owning a property themselves) the right to vote. But he pulled out as he thought the women may vote against him in the next General Election, stopping his party (Liberals) from getting into power.

One suffragette, Emily Davison, died under the King's horse, Anmer, at the Epsom Derby of June 4, 1913. It is debated whether she was trying to pin a "Votes for Women" banner on the King's horse or not. Many of her fellow suffragettes were imprisoned and went on to refuse food as a scare tactic against the government. Many suffragettes were imprisoned in Holloway Prison in London, and were force-fed after going on hunger strike.

With the commencement of the First World War, the suffragette movement in Britain moved away from suffrage activities and focused the efforts of their organizations on the war effort, and as a result, hunger strikes largely stopped. In August 1914, the British Government released all prisoners who had been incarcerated for suffrage activities on an amnesty, with Pankhurst ending all militant suffrage activities soon after. The suffragettes' focus on war work turned public opinion in favour of their eventual partial enfranchisement in 1918.

Women volunteered to take on many of the traditional male roles in factories, and especially making munitions. The war caused a split in the British suffragette movement, with the mainstream, represented by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst's WSPU calling a 'ceasefire' in their campaign for the duration of the war, while radical suffragettes, represented by Sylvia Pankhurst's Women's Suffrage Federation continued the struggle.

The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, which had always employed "constitutional" methods, continued to lobby during the war years. On 6 February, the Representation of the People Act 1918 was passed, enfranchising women over the age of 30 who met minimum property qualifications (as well as men over 21 – prior to this not all British men were enfranchised). In November 1918, the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 was passed, allowing women to be elected into Parliament



IMAGES:

A suffragette hands out flyers in London (top) while the government finds a need for women in the factories if not at the ballot box (below). Some have seen the mass introduction of women to the workplace as part of the emancipation process.