

FEMINISM AND DEMOCRACY: THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT
IN BRITAIN, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE NATIONAL
UNION OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES 1897-1918

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C O N T E N T S

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i	
ABBREVIATIONS	iii - iv	
INTRODUCTION	v - xiii	
<u>PART ONE</u>	:	<u>SUFFRAGISM AND FEMINISM</u>
CHAPTER 1	:	THE DOMESTICATION OF FEMINISM 1 — 34
CHAPTER 2	:	'FEMINISATION OF DEMOCRACY' 35 — 76
<u>PART TWO</u>	:	<u>ASPECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT</u>
CHAPTER 3	:	THE ORGANISATION OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES 77 — 122
CHAPTER 4	:	WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE VERSUS ADULT SUFFRAGE: WORKING CLASS WOMEN AND THE VOTE 123 — 152
CHAPTER 5	:	SUFFRAGISTS AND SUFFRAGETTES: THE POLITICAL STRATEGIES OF THE NATIONAL UNION AND WSPU 153 — 182
<u>PART THREE</u>	:	<u>THE WINNING OF THE WOMEN'S VOTE IN BRITAIN</u>
CHAPTER 6	:	THE CONCILIATION BILLS 1910-1912 183 — 219
CHAPTER 7	:	THE FORMATION OF THE ELECTION FIGHTING FUND POLICY 220 — 248
CHAPTER 8	:	THE FRANCHISE AND REGISTRATION BILL OF 1912-1913 249 — 276
CHAPTER 9	:	THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ELECTION FIGHTING FUND POLICY 277 — 310
CHAPTER 10	:	SUFFRAGE POLITICS 1913-1914 311 — 350
CHAPTER 11	:	WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE AND THE WAR 1914-1918 351 — 385
CONCLUSION		386 — 395
BIBLIOGRAPHY		396 — 408

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXTSUFFRAGIST ORGANISATIONS:

NATIONAL UNION	:	NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES
WSPU	:	WOMEN'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNION
WLF	:	WOMEN'S FREEDOM LEAGUE
ELFS	:	EAST LONDON FEDERATION OF SUFFRAGETTES
LCTOWRC	:	LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE AND OTHER WORKERS REPRESENTATION COMMITTEE
CUWFA	:	CONSERVATIVE AND UNIONIST WOMEN'S FRANCHISE
[^] ASSOCIATION WILPF	:	[^] WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PEACE AND FREEDOM

OTHER WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS:

WCG	:	WOMEN'S COOPERATIVE GUILD
WLF	:	WOMEN'S LIBERAL FEDERATION
BWTA	:	BRITISH WOMEN'S TEMPERANCE ASSOCIATION
NUWW	:	NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN WORKERS

LABOUR AND SOCIALIST ORGANISATIONS:

WTUC	:	WOMEN'S TRADE UNION LEAGUE
ILP	:	INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY
WLL	:	WOMEN'S LABOR LEAGUE
LRC	:	LABOUR REPRESENTATION COMMITTEE

ABBREVIATIONS IN THE FOOTNOTES

BM	:	BRITISH MUSEUM
LPA	:	LABOUR PARTY ARCHIVES
MPLA	:	MANCHESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY ARCHIVES
MGFP	:	MILLICENT FAWCETT PAPERS
CMP	:	CATHERINE MARSHALL PAPERS
FAC	:	FAWCETT AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION
LGP	:	LLOYD GEORGE PAPERS
JRMP	:	JAMES RAMSAY MACDONALD PAPERS

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this study is to provide a re-assessment of the early twentieth century women's suffrage movement, thereby challenging much of the existing historiography of this subject.

The approach is based upon the premise that it is not possible to understand the nature and significance of the women's suffrage movement through accounts of the lives of a few of its charismatic leaders. A far broader analytical framework is necessary. This begins with the nature of the arguments about women and their place in society, which were utilised in support of votes for women. It then extends to an analysis of the success gained in conveying such ideas to a wide body of women, who in the case of Britain, if not elsewhere in Europe and North America, were drawn from all social classes. The final step is to assess the impact of the women's suffrage movement upon the broader political system in which it operated. For the eventual success of the movement in gaining votes for women cannot be explained solely in terms of its own internal dynamics. Rather it is necessary to examine the inter-action between the way the various suffrage organisations viewed and related to the current political environment, and the way political leaders and parties viewed and acted in response to suffrage activities.

This analytical framework unites two strands of historical research which at present seem to have developed in isolation from each other. That is, it combines the concern of the new feminist historiography with the evolution of modern sex-roles, with the more traditional political and constitutional historians' interest in women's suffrage as a problem for party politics and public order.

The British women's suffrage movement produced a number of organisations reflecting considerable differences over matters of political strategy. The oldest organisation, the National Union of Women's Suffrage

Societies (henceforth National Union or NUWSS) was formed in 1897, and represented what was termed the "constitutional" wing of the movement. Such constitutional suffragists, who supported law-abiding methods of protest found themselves unable to support many of the activities of the other major suffrage body, the Women's Social and Political Union (henceforth WSPU) formed in 1903. The "militancy" of the WSPU began with minor acts of civil disobedience, but was eventually extended to deliberate, large-scale violence, including arson and bombing.¹

This study will focus particular attention on the constitutional wing of the suffrage movement as represented by the National Union, and its contribution to the success of the demand for women's suffrage. As such it is intended to correct a significant imbalance in the existing historiography which has concentrated almost entirely on the WSPU. A few historians have made reference to the National Union, even suggesting its particular importance for the ultimate success of the demand,² yet none has as yet undertaken a detailed analysis of its work. In spite of the fact that the National Union numbered over 80,000 supporters by the outbreak of war,³ and had constructed a very effective parliamentary lobby, the existing historiography continues to focus on the WSPU, and more specifically on the WSPU as represented by the charismatic leadership of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. This has resulted either in a hagiographical approach,⁴ or attempts to undermine the credibility of such figures.⁵ Their beliefs attitudes and actions have been endlessly and repetitiously rehearsed. Worse, they have been generalised and taken

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1. See Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up Women*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul 1974 for an in-depth study of the WSPU
 2. e.g. Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women*, London, Faber 1957 Ch.34, and David Morgan, *Suffragists and Liberals*, Oxford: Blackwells 1975 p.161
 3. This figure includes those enrolled in the Friends of Women's Suffrage Scheme, for further discussion of National Union membership see Ch.3 pp.
 4. e.g. Midge MacKenzie, *Shoulder to Shoulder*, London: Allen and Unwin 1975
 5. e.g. David Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, London: Macdonald and Janes 1977

to be those of both the WSPU and the movement as a whole.

An underlying element in this preoccupation with the WSPU among recent writers is the powerful and influential analyses of some of the earliest historians of the period, George Dangerfield, Elie Halevy and R.C.K. Ensor.¹ All saw the suffrage demand as forming part of a trinity of revolt in Edwardian society, alongside the Ulster crisis, and the industrial unrest of the period. Consequently, they emphasized the activities of the militants at the expense of recognising the work of the constitutionalists. They also introduced a fundamentally false analysis of the WSPU, in suggesting its "revolutionary" nature.

In Dangerfield's view, for example, the exploits of the militants reflected the pathological state of Edwardian society: "was there not evident horrible but inevitable word, a neurosis?" His assessment of the movement as a whole ran thus:

It was achieved in disorder arrogance and outrage. It was melodramatic, it was hysterical, it was in a hurry ... there assembled, crowding up from the depths of the female soul, as uncouth a collection of neglected instincts, hopes, hatreds and desires, as thorough-going a psychological *jacquerie* as ever came together at any one time in human history.²

Dangerfield detected in the history of the WSPU,

Certain elements of brutal comedy (and declared) the ludicrous aspect of the whole thing is almost irresistible.³

Such writing has helped form an accepted characterisation of the suffrage movement as militant, violent, revolutionary and at the same time hysterical and irrational, springing from the deep unknown wells of the female psyche.

Approaches of this kind have been re-inforced by their selection of sources in newspaper reports and reminiscences which played up the more

1. George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, London: Paladin 1970 edition; E. Halevy, *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Vol.4: The Rule of Democracy 1906-14*, New York; Barnes and Noble 1961 ed; R.C.K. Ensor, *England 1876-1914*, Oxford: Clarendon 1936
 2. Dangerfield op cit p.152
 3. *ibid* p.141

sensational aspects of the suffrage campaigns. At the same time, internal material from the suffrage movement itself — the large body of periodical and pamphlet literature, and organisational records which remain extant, and which would have indicated aspects of the ideas and organisation of the movement in need of research — have been largely ignored.

An exploration of the National Union illustrates contrasting aspects of the history of the twentieth century women's suffrage movement which have so far remained obscure. To begin with constitutional suffragists believed above all in the educational power of rational thought and debate. Consequently, they produced a large body of propagandist literature through which it is possible to analyse the ideological assumptions of the feminists of this period, and how they related to the work of earlier feminists. Similarly the National Union's organisational development may be traced through its extensive records, and the discussions which surrounded policy-formation in its journal *The Common Cause*. In this way the analysis can be extended beyond the discussion of individual personalities and the issue of violence, to focus on the major themes of this thesis — the link twentieth century suffragists saw between their cause and that of social reform and progressive politics in general, and the implications of this for the transformation of nineteenth century feminism.

The National Union pursued radically different political policies to the WSPU. These involved the growth of a considerable lobbying machinery within parliament, and the building up of a mass movement behind votes for women. The significance for the democratisation of feminism, and the political effectiveness, of these policies have previously been obscured by the emphasis on the use of violence by militants. They involved the constitutionalists in the organisation of both middle

class and working class women, and an analysis of the activities of the National Union will show to what degree, and by what means, such women were able to come together in support of a single demand.

It was two founder members of the National Union who pioneered the organisation of working class suffragists in the mid 1890s, and pointed the way forward to the mobilisation of a mass movement. In the course of such work the National Union built up a close working relationship with both the Labour Party leadership, and with the rank-and-file of labour and socialist supporters. Hence an understanding of the activities of the constitutional suffragists is essential to any adequate account of relations between the women's suffrage movement and the labour and socialist movements of the same period.

The history of the National Union may also throw light on what was happening within Liberal politics at this time. Both P.F. Clarke and David Morgan have recently asserted the importance of the suffrage issue in the development of the Liberal Party,¹ though neither has shown adequately *how* the women's demand was significant for Liberal politics. From its beginning the National Union was a profoundly Liberal organisation — many of its leaders, local and national, were active in Liberal politics. How such an organisation came to strike up a strong alliance with the Labour Party will tell us much, not just about the internal tensions of the suffrage movement, but also about those processes which were to produce the eventual decline of the Liberal Party. The women's suffrage movement represented more than simply another example of contemporary resort to direct action, and the suffrage issue became more than a peripheral one. For the cause came to take on particular significance for many in the rank-and-file of the Labour and Liberal

1. P.F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 1971 p.339; Morgan *op cit* p.158

parties. National Union policies both reflected and promoted this advance, and this thesis will argue that they were critical for the eventual winning of the women's franchise.

Such developments in constitutional suffragists' activity were part of a fundamental shift in feminist strategy. In the nineteenth century this had concentrated on the "feminisation" of the public sphere of the middle class male, by seeking women's entry into hitherto male preserves like the professions and higher education, and in the recognition of women's separate legal rights to property ownership, and the possession of the vote on property qualifications. In the twentieth century, by contrast, suffragists demanded what was termed "the feminisation of democracy". By gaining the vote, it was argued that women's participation in political life would allow the reconstruction of society by infusing a more democratic state with uniquely female values and virtues.

In such ways feminists adapted to a new political framework and learnt how to build a mass movement. The link between progressive politics and feminism proved valuable not only in drawing a wider body of support towards the suffrage movement, but in bringing feminists to an awareness of the class dimensions of social reform. Such an awareness produced a political radicalisation of the suffrage movement in general. Hence the limited elitist nature of the original suffrage demand — namely for an equal franchise with men on the existing property qualifications — and the middle class domination of its organisations was increasingly democratised during the early years of this century, in order to attract working class support. By 1914 a major section of the suffrage movement, represented by the National Union, had aligned itself with those forces demanding a more full democratic society. Suffragists were now associating their demand with that for universal suffrage. By 1916 most progressive suffragists had abandoned the demand for votes for women, and had become openly committed to support for universal, adult

suffrage.

While this thesis argues that an understanding of the activities of the constitutional suffragists is essential to any useful analysis of the women's suffrage movement, discussion will not be limited to the National Union alone. The narrative and analysis in all three sections attempt to integrate an account of the work of the WSPU, alongside that of the National Union, for the way in which the two wings of the movement related and responded to each other represented an important determining factor in the development of the movement as a whole. Differences between the two wings involved more than discussion concerning the use of violence. The differing political bases of the two organisations, and the variations in political tactics they gave rise to were equally important, and will be more fully explored. Moreover constitutional and militant suffragists shared much in common, in particular the ideological legacy of nineteenth century feminism, as will be illustrated in the first part of the thesis, which explores the ideological perspectives of the women's suffrage movement in Britain.

Chapter One discusses developments in feminist ideas about women and their place in society, which took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century. These were to shape the justification for the women's suffrage demand in the early twentieth century. Chapter Two analyses in detail the propaganda material put out by the suffrage movement in the early years of this century. By and large, militant and constitutional suffragists relied on the same ideological heritage and shared similar ideas about women and society. The material discussed in this chapter is drawn from both the militant and constitutional wings of the movement. A new ideological departure was discernible by 1912 in the openly anti-male emphasis of Christabel Pankhurst's writings on social purity, and the significance of this will be discussed also.

Part Two of the thesis will examine aspects of the evolution of women's suffrage as a social movement, its basis of support and some of the controversies which split it. Chapter Three describes the development of the National Union as an organisation. Material will be presented on the growth of three of its more important branch societies, in London, Manchester and Glasgow, to place alongside that on the building up of a central organising body. Chapter Four analyses to what degree, and through which organisational channels, working class women joined the predominately middle class membership of the suffrage organisations to support votes for women. Any discussion of working class involvement with the women's suffrage movement will be unsatisfactory, which looks only at evidence from the suffrage organisation. Consequently this chapter will also draw on material from the labour and socialist movements, and will pay particular attention to the main organisation of working class women at this time, the Women's Cooperative Guild. Chapter Five discusses the policy issues which divided constitutional from militant suffragists and how these affected relations between the two wings of the movement. It also assesses the significance of the advent of the WSPU for the development of National Union policies.

The chapters in Part Three provide a narrative and analysis of the National Union's political activities in the years between 1910 and the final passage of the Representation of the People Bill in 1918. Through this it is hoped to show how the political strategy of constitutional suffragists, in particular their alliance with the Labour Party which effectively united women's suffrage with the adult suffrage demand, were ultimately of far greater significance than the WSPU's resort to extreme violence between 1912 and 1914. Events from early 1913 on, notably those associated with the WSPU, have led most commentators to assert a decline in the fortunes of the suffrage cause from this time,

yet National Union strength and vitality at the outbreak of war brings this notion of decline into question.

Chapter 11 also seeks to reverse the existing understanding of the impact of the first World War on the suffrage movement, again so far largely based on the history of the WSPU. Firstly, it is generally believed that the organised women's suffrage movement disintegrated at this point, and secondly that suffragists thereafter became, one and all the jingoistic distributors of the white feather.¹ While this chapter will offer evidence of the renewal of suffrage activity by the National Union from early 1916 it will also explore the development of important political divisions among suffragists which resulted in a major split within their ranks.

Though the main object of the women's suffrage movement was the winning of the franchise for women, it was also part of a wider concern for female emancipation. Therefore in concluding this study I have felt it important to look, very briefly, beyond the passage of the Representation of the People Bill, and make some observations on the longer-term significance of suffragists for the development of feminist theory and action. Consequently, the conclusion offers an interpretation of how the ideological and political divisions which had begun to appear in the year or so before war, as the struggle for the vote neared success, developed and affected the direction of later feminist activity.

1. Rosen op cit pp.265-6; Fulford op cit p.298

PART ONE: SUFFRAGISM AND FEMINISM

CHAPTER 1 ; THE DOMESTICATION OF FEMINISM

British suffragism has generally been seen as the culminating expression of classical nineteenth century liberal individualistic feminism,¹ which found its best known exposition in John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*.² This insisted on women's equality with men on the basis of their common humanity. Justice demanded that every woman be allowed equal opportunity with men to pursue her individual interests and develop her individual talents.³

This chapter will argue that by the late 1860s when the first permanent women's suffrage organisations were formed in Britain, feminist ideology was undergoing a significant development away from the premises of classical feminism, which was to have important implications for future feminist thought and action. A set of very different ideas from those of the early feminists, about women and their place in society, was beginning to be mobilised at this time, which emphasized women's specific talents and interests and stressed their *distinctiveness* from men. The *universalistic* arguments of classical liberal feminism were increasingly passed over for *particularistic* arguments built on the supposed differences between the sexes in their psychological and moral make-up.⁴ It was this development in feminist ideology which was to find its fullest expression in the women's suffrage movement, not the universalistic arguments of classical feminism.

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1. e.g. Richard Evans, *The Feminists*, London: Croom Helm 1978 pp.18-19; Jane Lewis, *Beyond Suffrage: English Feminism in the 1920s*, *The Maryland Historian* Vol.6 1975 pp.1-17
 2. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, reproduced in Alice Rossi, (ed) *Essays on Sex Equality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1970 pp.123-242
 3. For a discussion of this and three other forms of feminist ideology see Alison Jaggar, *Political Philosophies of Women's Liberation*, in Mary Wetterling, Frederick Elliston and Jane English (eds) *Feminism and Philosophy*, Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams and Co. 1977
 4. For further discussion of the emergence of feminist analysis under the impact of bourgeois universalism see Juliet Mitchell, *Women and Equality* in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds) *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, London: Penguin 1976 pp.379-399. I am also grateful to Anna Yeatman, Flinders University, for discussions on this issue

This analysis is offered as a modification to the model provided by Aileen Kraditor in her discussion of American suffragist ideology, in her *Ideas of the Women's Suffrage Movement 1890-1918*.¹ Aileen Kraditor notes that from about the turn of the twentieth century American suffragists moved away from the use of justice arguments, to what she terms the "arguments of expediency". These latter stressed the social, moral and political benefits which would accrue if women were enfranchised.² The discussion of British suffragist thought in the second half of the nineteenth century offered in this chapter seeks to locate the ideological assumptions about women and society which lay behind such a shift in feminist argument.

It will be suggested that in the ideology of late nineteenth century British suffragism we find the absorption by feminists of ideas associated with what has been termed "the cult of domesticity".³ This imbued women with innate, sex-linked characteristics such as purity, morality, piety, religiosity, spirituality, submissiveness, selflessness, consideration and caring for others, which it was claimed particularly suited them for domestic pursuits, notably the care and nurture of the family. It will

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1. Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Women's Suffrage Movement 1890-1918*, New York: Columbia University Press 1965
 2. *ibid* Ch.3
 3. Most of the existing research on the cult of domesticity concerns the American experience. See e.g. Barbara Welter, *The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-60*, *American Quarterly* Vol.18, 1966 pp.151-174; Nancy Cott, *The Roots of Bitterness*, New York: Dutton, 1972 pp.13-26 and *The Bonds of Womanhood*, Newhaven: Yale University Press 1977 pp.63-100; Aileen Kraditor, *Up from the Pedestal*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books 1968 pp.9-13; Mary Ryan, *American Society and the Cult of Domesticity*, PhD Thesis, University of California, 1971; Gail Parker (ed) *The Oven Birds: American Women on Womanhood 1820-1920*, New York: Anchor Books paper back ed. 1972 pp.14, 27; Mary Kelley, *The Sentimentalists: Promise and Betrayal in the Home*, *Signs*, Vol.4 1979 pp.434-446; Ruth Bloch, *Untangling the Roots of Modern Sex Roles: A survey of Four Centuries of Change*, *Signs* Vol.4 1978 pp.237-252 and *American Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother*, *Feminist Studies*, Vol.4 1978 pp.101-126; Anna Yeatman, *Gender Ascription and the Condition of its Breakdown: The Rationalisation of the 'Domestic Sphere' and the Nineteenth Century Cult of Domesticity*, unpublished paper 1978. For Britain see Catherine Hall, *The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology*, in Sandra Burman (ed), *Fit Work For Women*, London: Croom Helm 1979 pp.15-32

be argued that the effect of the domestic ideology on feminists in the second half of the nineteenth century was to lead them to concentrate their analysis of women's social position around the problematic of motherhood.

The course of this significant ideological development in feminism will be traced through the writings and speeches of feminists in the late nineteenth century, for it was to colour and shape the development of the new suffrage movement in the early years of this century, with which the main body of this thesis is concerned. The terms universalistic/particularistic are preferred to other prevailing conceptualisations of divergent emphases in feminism such as justice/expediency, social/hard-core, moderate/radical,¹ because they more accurately convey the alternative presuppositions within feminist ideology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their usage is not meant to imply the existence of two sharply divided stages in the development of the feminist movement — both types of argument were present in some measure at all periods. Nevertheless, there was evident a change in the predominant feminist emphasis from universalistic to particularistic arguments over time, which did represent a significant tendency in feminist thought.

This exploration of the change of emphasis from universalistic to particularistic arguments is not offered as a totally pessimistic account of nineteenth century feminism. For the cult of domesticity was associated with the notion of separate spheres — that is the belief that men and women are suited for quite different and distinct areas of activity, for

1. See the typologies of feminism offered by Kraditor, *The Ideas* p.44; William O'Neill, *Everyone was Brave*, Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969 p.x; Evans op cit p.33-7,39 respectively. It is not intended to query the usefulness of Kraditor's and O'Neill's distinctions between different aspects of nineteenth century feminism, but to suggest the theoretical assumptions which created these new developments in feminist thought and action. Evans' concepts of 'moderate' and 'radical' feminism are altogether less coherently thought out, as is indicated by his own difficulties in using them e.g. in his discussion of the American and British movements.

women the domestic sphere of home and family, for men the public sphere of work and politics. While suffragist ideology took up and used many of the ideas associated with the cult of domesticity it offered a direct challenge to the notion of separate spheres. It denied that the domestic and the public could be kept entirely distinct, and insisted that women had an equal, though often different, role to play in the public sphere.

It was this insistence which led to the great emphasis on the vote as "social housekeeping" in the later stages of the suffrage campaigns. This stressed women's particular interest and expertise on issues of social and moral reform, and the newer areas of government activity — hence the increasing use of "arguments of expediency" already noted by Aileen Kraditor. Thus, though feminists at this time did not undertake a challenge to the increasing association of women with strictly domestic roles, they did use this association, and in particular the role of mothers, to argue for women's entry to the public sphere.

The First Feminists and the First Suffrage Campaign

The first notable feminist tract was Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which appeared in 1792.¹ In large part, it was a response to the French Revolution, and its introduction was addressed to Tallyrand. Mary Wollstonecraft argued for women's right to independence from men. A large part of her *Vindication* is concerned with the kind of education women need to place them in a more equal relationship to men (she proposed state education for both sexes to the age of eight), particularly in terms of economic opportunity. Mary Wollstonecraft denied the existence of sex-specific virtues, one of the most common justifications for the exclusion of women from certain occupations and areas of education.

1. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* with an introduction by Elizabeth Robins Pennell, London: Walter Scott 1891.

She argued rather that independence and reason were the basis of every true virtue. Inasmuch as women were denied access to the education of their reasoning powers, and remained economically dependent on men, they could only hinder further social progress. Similarly, in her analysis, the inequality of the sexes was at the root of in chastity in both sexes — the virtues of the two sexes were interdependent. Mary Wollstonecraft also made a passing reference to the enfranchisement of women, but noting that the system of government in England at that time was "despotic" she declared that women could make no special complaint of their exclusion.¹

Whilst a large part of Mary Wollstonecraft's argument for the emancipation of women was universalistic, working from the shared common, human attributes of men and women, she also attempted to confront women's "peculiar designation" in their biological function as child-bearers. Though she accepted that there were different sexual duties for men and women, she insisted that they were still *human* duties. Further, women's proper role in the family could not be discovered by coercion, nor could they become satisfactory mothers until they were also "enlightened citizens". If they were educated to reason, this would lead them "back to nature, and their duty". Mary Wollstonecraft did not appear to feel that the sexual division of labour within the family could or should be challenged, as a pre-requisite to establishing women's independence. Thus while her arguments were placed in a universalistic framework, she tacitly accepted one major difference in the patterning of the lives of men and women, and presented child-rearing as women's particular function.²

During the 1850s and 60s organised feminism gradually emerged in Britain, concentrating principally on reform of the marriage laws, bettering

1. *ibid* p.207. See also Alice Rossi, *The Feminist Papers*, New York, Columbia UP, 1973 pp.124f for a discussion of this point and a comparison of Wollstonecraft with Harriet Martineau.

2. Wollstonecraft pp.237, 241

educational provision for women and securing their entry into formerly male professions, notably medicine. In 1869, John Stuart Mill published his classic feminist statement *The Subjection of Women*.¹ The ideas he explored here had been part of his writing over many decades, and the essay had been finished several years previously, though Mill had held back publication until he thought it would prove most useful to the cause of women's emancipation. Like Mary Wollstonecraft he argued that the subjection of one sex by the other was a hindrance to further social progress, representing the last vestiges of slavery. In particular he attacked the existing marriage laws in England. Again like Mary Wollstonecraft he argued for equal educational and work opportunities for women, and the importance of their independence from men to their future emancipation.

Mill believed that it was men's desire to keep women in domestic subordination which was at the root of women's exclusion from other fields of activity. Nonetheless Mill exhibited an interesting ambivalence in this area. To begin with he denied that it was possible to know the real nature of either sex while women were artificially restricted in so many ways. Nonetheless, when reviewing the existing marriage system he argued that there was a natural arrangement of the "division of powers" — that it was a "suitable" division of labour for men to earn and women to spend the family income.² Consequently, he argued that for married women access to economic independence was sufficient to ensure the reform of marriage. It was not necessary that they should *actualise* these possibilities, and

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1. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* in Alice Rossi (ed) *Essays on Sex Equality*, pp.123-242.
 2. *ibid* p.169,178-9. See also his essay on Marriage and Divorce, also in Rossi, *Essays*, pp.74-5, where he argues "It is not desirable to burthen the labour market with a double number of competitors ... there would be no need that the wife should take part in the mere providing of what is required to support life ... it will be for the happiness of both that her occupation should rather be to adorn and beautify".

they would surely choose to remain within the home and concentrate on a domestic role.

In his arguments in support of the enfranchisement of women, Mill also introduced the distinction between arguments of expediency and those based on notions of justice though this had a different content to Kradi-
tor's distinction. Mill pointed out that justice arguments were themselves a form of expediency argument. In his speech in support of a women's suffrage amendment to the Reform Bill of 1867 he made this explicit: "my whole argument is one of expediency. But all expediencies are not on exactly the same level. There is a kind of expediency which is called justice".¹ Hence Mill stressed the good which would accrue to society if women were emancipated: marriage would be reformed; the family would become a more apt centre for the moral training of the individual; the quantity of human faculties available to society would be doubled; but most significantly of all he introduced the argument that women possessed particular attributes which would be useful in the governing of society.

In discussing the grounds for women's enfranchisement Mill eventually went much further than Mary Wollstonecraft in accepting the existence of sex-specific aptitudes and qualities. It is a mark of the arguments of expediency in relation to women's emancipation that they frequently also signal a shift away from universalistic to particularistic lines of argument. In this regard both of the classic feminist tracts circulating in the nineteenth century held ambiguities and ambivalences in discussing the nature of the two sexes and pointed the way to the reliance on particularistic arguments among feminists by the end of the nineteenth century. Such ideas represented an assertion of the right to equality based on assumed

1. quoted in Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain 1866-1914*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1967 p.30. See also Mill, *Subjection* loc cit p.147

sexual differences rather than on the shared humanity of men and women. This aspect of Mill's argument has been largely ignored by commentators on *The Subjection of Women*.¹

At least one early feminist was aware of the dangers in such an approach. 1851 saw the publication of an article in *The Westminster Review* in support of the enfranchisement of women. It was by Harriet Taylor, who was shortly to marry John Stuart Mill, after a long friendship.² Harriet Taylor attacked the prescriptive use of the concept of "proper spheres" for women which restricted them to domestic duties: "there is no inherent reason or necessity that all women should voluntarily choose to devote their lives to one animal function and its consequences". The notion of a proper sphere for women was no more than another way of saying "that every other career should be forbidden them in order that maternity may be their only resource".³ She argued that women should have equal opportunities and equal pay, even if this suppressed wage levels (one of Mill's arguments against the employment of married women). For this reason Harriet Taylor attacked "the modern reformers of the education of women" who were aiming simply to make women more cultivated companions for their menfolk ("they do not say that men should be educated to be the companions of women"). What made intelligent beings was the power of thought, and this was discouraged in "those who are told from infancy that thought, and

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1. See Mill, *Subjection* loc cit pp.190-206, 226-7, 241 and compare the analyses of Rossi, *Essays*, pp.56-63; Kate Millett, *The Debate over Women: Ruskin versus Mill* in Martha Vicinus (ed) *Suffer and Be Still*, Bloomington Indiana UP, 1973, with that in Wendell Robert Carr's introduction to *Subjection of Women*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970 p.xxii. Carr points out that Mill affirmed "two apparently incompatible versions of women's relation to man. At times, he honoured woman as man's complement, at others, he insisted on the basic identity of masculine and feminine natures"
 2. *The Enfranchisement of Women*, *The Westminster Review*, July 1851 pp. 289-311, also reproduced in Rossi, *Essays*, pp.89-122. See Rossi pp.41-45 for the debate on the authorship of this article, and the conclusive evidence for Harriet Taylor's authorship.
 3. Rossi, *Essays*, p.104

all its greater applications, are other people's business".¹

Harriet Taylor concluded this article by warning against tendencies which she perceived in some of the speeches at a recent women's rights convention in America, where some of the arguments resembled,

those who would weakly attempt to combine nominal equality between men and women, with enforced distinctions in their privileges and functions. What is wanted for women is equal rights, equal admission to all social privileges; not a position apart, a sort of sentimental priesthood ... The strength of the cause lies in the support of those who are influenced by reason and principle; and to attempt to recommend it by sentimentalities, absurd in reason, and inconsistent with the principle on which the movement is founded, is to place a good cause on a level with a bad one.²

The first Ladies Petition for Women's suffrage, which Mill presented to the House of Commons in 1866, would have met with her full approval. British feminists would have found it difficult to deploy natural rights arguments in this context, for the British constitution still based the right to vote on the representation of interests, notably an interest in property. (Let alone the influence of Mill on these pioneer suffragists, and the antipathy of utilitarians to natural rights arguments³). Nonetheless, the Ladies Petition was framed on universalistic grounds. It argued that as British law enabled women to hold property in their own right, and as the right to vote was based on a provable interest in property, women's exclusion was therefore an anomaly. They were also able to point out that women were not excluded from the highest office in the land —

1. *ibid* pp.111-2

2. *ibid* p.120

3. In his autobiography Mill stressed that the Utilitarians did not base their argument for representative government on natural rights theory but as the most essential of "securities for good government". John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, New York: Columbia UP, 1924, p.75. This argument stressed the expediency of political justice. See also John Stuart Mill's *Essays on Liberty, Representative Government, and the Subjection of Women*, with an introduction by Millicent Garrett Fawcett Oxford: Oxford UP 1912 (1960 reprint) p.293 for the statement of this case in relation to women. For a rare example of the use of natural rights theory by a British feminist see Mrs Hugo Reid quoted in Patricia Hollis, *Women in Public: The Women's Movement 1850-1900*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1979, pp.293-4

the throne — and that they had in the past fulfilled many public functions, including voting.¹ Out of this campaign arose the first permanent suffrage societies in Britain.²

For the next two years suffragists concentrated much of their argument on women's traditional participation in affairs of state in Britain. The anomalies which had resulted as a result of the 1832 Reform Bill, which was the first to expressly exclude women from the franchise, were evidenced in the number of women who continually managed to find their way on to the voting register. One such instance resulted in a test case, *Chorlton v Lings* in 1868, when it was ruled that all women's names should be removed from the register, simply by virtue of their sex. From that time suffragists had to concentrate on a Parliamentary measure to overrule this court decision.³

There is now some controversy over the part played by John Stuart Mill and his step-daughter, Helen Taylor, in the conduct of these earliest societies. A.P.W. Robson has faulted them for failing to provide strong leadership, and constantly creating conflict within the societies in this formative period of the suffrage campaigns.⁴ Nevertheless, it would appear

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1. See the article in *Westminster Review*, vol.87 1867 pp.63-79. It is significant that while this article starts off by discussing the strictly universalistic arguments put forward by the petition, it ends by turning to a discussion of the expediency of enfranchising women. Compare the content of the petition with Mill's arguments for women's enfranchisement in *Representative Government* loc cit. For a further discussion of the petition see Lydia Becker's article in *The Contemporary Review*, vol.4, 1867, pp.307-16
 2. For more details of early suffrage societies, see Lydia Becker, *Women's Suffrage Journal*, vol.10, 1879, p.186
 3. *ibid* pp.186-9. For a fuller exposition of the case for the existence of traditional women's rights see Mrs Carmichael Stopes, *British Free-women*, London: Swann Sonnenstein 4th ed. 1909 (first published 1894)
 4. A.P.W. Robson, *The Founding of the National Society for Women's Suffrage 1866-1867*, *Canadian Journal of History*, vol.8, 1973, pp.1-22. One interesting question which the article does not clearly answer is why the organisers of the 1866 petition all withdrew from active participation in suffrage campaigns from this time. More information on the Langham Place circle of feminists concerned with these early campaigns may be found in Ray Strachey, *The Cause*, London: Virago reprint 1978, pp.89-104; Josephine Kamm, *Rapiers and Battleaxes*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1966, pp.89-105

that Helen Taylor and John Stuart Mill had good grounds for their uncertain attitudes to the new society in London. They held back their support until they were assured that it would have both a democratic constitution and that it would not exclude married women from its demand, as some of the organisers desired.

Barbara Caine has provided rather more substantial criticism of Mill's activity at this time.¹ She points to his lack of interest in broader feminist activities, notably those associated with the *Englishwoman's Journal*, and argues that the pre-eminence which he gave to the suffrage issue was misplaced and bad strategy for women's fuller emancipation. Moreover, Mill withdrew from active participation in the suffrage campaign on losing his seat in Parliament in 1868. He refused to cooperate with Jacob Bright who took over the suffragist leadership in the House of Commons, and kept aloof from the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage, and the Central Committee of the various societies, because of their association with the agitation surrounding the demand for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. (These acts applied to military and naval towns, and sought to control the spread of venereal disease among the armed forces through the compulsory medical inspection and treatment of all alleged prostitutes.)

Above all Barbara Caine faults Mill for his attitude to the women leaders of the suffrage societies then coming into being. She argues that in Mill's view "they were to provide decorative figureheads, to appear in public, particularly if they were pleasing to look at and likely to be persuasive, but they were to have little to do with real policy-making on crucial issues".² Similarly, while he supported the Contagious Diseases

1. Barbara Caine, John Stuart Mill and the English Women's Movement, *Historical Studies* (Melbourne) vol.18, 1978, pp.52-67

2. *ibid* p.57

Repeal agitation he opposed any association of the Suffrage organisation with it, because it appeared "indelicate and unfeminine", and would "make the suffrage vulgar and ridiculous";¹ he also stressed the need for men to initiate the campaigns, and for the secretaries of the various societies to be married women. Above all he wished to dissociate the London Society from "strong-minded" women like Lydia Becker of the Manchester Society, Caroline Ashurst Biggs and Millicent Fawcett, women who were to prove among the suffrage movement's most able leaders. Barbara Caine concludes that "in practical terms he could only accept Harriet and Helen Taylor as equals" while his view of women's emancipation was "at most a legalistic one, and not (to) be accompanied by any really fundamental change in attitudes towards the nature and the social role of women".²

The ambiguities in Mill's writing on women have already been explored and perhaps help to explain why his activity in relation to the early suffrage societies does not appear today fully consistent with his position as the figurehead of classical feminism. But it is clear from the writing of several women feminists at this time that his attitudes were shared by many in the developing women's movement, and reflected the growing predominance of the domestic ideology in discussions concerning the proper social role for women.

Nineteenth Century Feminism and the Cult of Domesticity

In the same year in which Mill's *Subjection of Women* appeared Josephine Butler edited a collection of essays entitled *Women's Work and Women's Culture*. These had all been completed before the publication of Mill's essay, and Josephine Butler hurried to deny any possible accusation of

1. Mill quoted by Caine *ibid* p.62

2. *ibid* p.64, 66, 67

plagiarism. They spanned a wide field, and provide fuller evidence of the shift away from a universalistic position which was already occurring within British feminist ideology.¹

Josephine Butler's introductory essay was a classic exposition of the cult of domesticity expressed in terms of "social housekeeping". It set the tone for the whole collection. She argued that "Women were not being simply self-seeking or self-asserting in raising the issue" of their own emancipation for "we are human first, women secondarily", and the matter concerned "humanity at large". Yet the essay is also one of the most fully elaborated examples of a feminist consciousness which accepted the dominance of the domestic role for women. Referring to her own experience in rescue work Josephine Butler argued for women's greater participation in public life, notably through their enfranchisement. Then the more fortunate women would

raise our voices to claim what we claim now - freedom and power to reach and deal with great social evils in their beginnings, and not only to a limited degree in their dire effects... It has been well said, that philanthropy and politics, now flowing apart will unite in one stream when philanthropists become conscious of power to reach the *source* of crimes and misery, and when statesmen understand that their functions are assigned to them for none but a philanthropic end... (Women) must have a hope of not merely palliating, but uprooting national evils.²

Josephine Butler insisted on the economic causes of prostitution and on women's need for greater economic opportunities through education and industrial training. Nonetheless, their prime duties would always centre on the home.

I believe that Home is the nursery of all virtues the fountain-head of all true affection, and the main source

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1. Josephine Butler (ed) *Women's Work and Women's Culture*, London, Macmillan, 1869. The very title of course implies the sex-specific nature of women's roles
 2. *ibid* p.xvii-xviii

of the strength of our nation ... I think I see that a great enlargement of hearts, and a free opening out and giving forth of the influences of homes, as reservoirs of blessing for the common good, would ultimately result in the restored security of all the best elements in our present ideal of Home ... I plead that to grant the present demands of women will tend to the restoration of the true home ideals, and that the denial of the demands will hasten the day of the dis-organisation and uprooting of sacred traditions.¹

Women's emancipation would both serve to strengthen the home and lead to the opening out and diffusion of the home influence and character among the masses by the relegation to women of some of the more important work of dealing with our vast populations.

Josephine Butler was effectively arguing for the opening up of the home into a large social welfare agency, while demanding women's access to the powers of the state for the furtherance of their particular duties and interests.²

In another essay in this collection, Frances Power Cobbe appeared to be attacking the domestication of women.³ She mocked the current need to make theories concerning women, and characterised one such as "the mould theory" in which "Men grow like trees, and the most we can do is to lop or clip them. But women run in moulds, like candles, and we can make them long-threes, or short-sixes, whichever we please".⁴ While she was prepared to allow some justification for environmental interpretations of human development, she warned "we must not fall into the absurdity of supposing that all women can be adapted to one single type, or that we can talk about Woman".⁵ Essentially, she was arguing that women should be viewed

1. *ibid* xxv, xxviii, xxiv, xxx

2. *ibid* xxi-xxxv. In recalling Josephine Butler's influence on the women's movement a leading suffragist Millicent Garrett Fawcett stressed her "infusion of the home spirit" into her public work. M.G. Fawcett and E.H. Turner, *Josephine Butler*, London: Assoc. for Moral & Social Hygiene 1927, p.28

3. Frances Power Cobbe, *The Final Cause of Women in Butler* (ed) pp.1-25

4. *ibid* p.2

5. *ibid* p.5

and treated as individuals. Nonetheless, she accepted that they were individuals with a social function specific to their sex. The tension between these two views runs through the whole essay.

She discussed two main lines of argument about women: on the one hand that the final cause of women was the service they could render man, and on the other that women were created to some end proper to themselves. She explored the "Domestic theory" of women as housewife, as an example of the first category and declared it:

Very beautiful and true, but also very ugly and dull.

While it was true

That Home is woman's proper kingdom; that all that pertains to its order, comfort and grace falls under her natural charge, and can by no means be transferred to men

that it should

form the be-all and end-all of woman, is assuredly, stupidly false.¹

She concluded

Domesticity then as a theory of woman's life fails in this: that by placing the secondary end of existence (namely, the making of those around us happy) before the first end (namely, the living to God, and goodness) even the object sought for is lost.²

But what Frances Power Cobbe offered women with one hand, she took away with the other. In describing her preferred goal for women, she stressed

The woman who lives to God in the first place can better than anyone else, serve man in the second; or rather, live to God in the service of his creatures. It is she who may best rejoice to be a wife and a mother, she who may best make her home a little heaven

1. *ibid* p.10
2. *ibid* p.14

of love and peace; she who may most nobly exert her social powers through philanthropy, politics, literature and art.¹

Women were to be allowed their full freedom only to pursue their true, and thoroughly domestic, role. Once again we see the ambivalence of nineteenth century feminism in the face of the cult of domesticity.

Julia Wedgwood provided the contribution on women's enfranchisement to *Women's Work and Women's Culture*, entitling it "Female Suffrage, considered chiefly with Respect to its Indirect Results".² She began by arguing that the possession of the vote was important "as the most obvious and complete symbol of that change which should make Woman, in the fullest sense of the word, a fellow-worker with Man...Once give a woman political status, and her admission to any career becomes an open question".³ When considering whether women needed a wider sphere of activity than they at present possessed she declared: "The dignified and peaceful associations (which) bind together the ideal of Woman and Domestic Life, seem to me in one sense equally true, and in another equally false", for while the marriage initiative remained with man not all women were in a position to fulfil this domestic ideal.⁴

Julia Wedgwood emphasised women's claim to the vote as "a measure of expediency" for at present women were "shut off from contributing that special knowledge" which sprang from their particular occupations.⁵ She then went on to discuss the faculties which she held to be particular to women — insight, sympathy, religiosity. From these supposed differences between the two sexes she concluded "an occupation for which the two have an equal facility does not, I am certain, exist... Her peculiarities of

1. *ibid* p.25

2. Julia Wedgwood, *Female Suffrage considered chiefly with respect to its Indirect Results*, in Butler (ed) pp.247-289

3. *ibid* p.248

4. *ibid* p.260

5. *ibid* pp.274-5, 287

capacity on the one hand, and her insurmountable incapacities on the other, mark out a distinct path, which no arrangements of ours seem to me required in order to narrow". Julia Wedgwood ended by stressing her belief that the admission of women to wider areas of activity would serve only to "make marriage nobler and more complete" and "enrich and strengthen the mother's influence", particularly in political life.¹

Lydia Becker, one of the founders of the Manchester Society for Women's Suffrage, appears to have been one of the few feminists at this time prepared to challenge women's overwhelming and particular identification with the domestic role. In an article on women's suffrage in 1867 she had rejected the argument that public work tended to withdraw women's minds from their domestic duties: "This seems to imply that women are the only persons who have peculiar duties" and was based on a "false estimate of the time and attention required for the discharge of the duties of an elector". While she appears to have accepted the basic sexual division of labour within the family, she nonetheless insisted that this did not relieve men of an equal degree of responsibility within that sphere: "in the division of family care, the share of men is at least as important and engrossing as that of the woman".²

At the Social Science Conference in 1877 she took an even stronger line, insisting that

the evil effects of the arbitrary division of the world's work into two distinct spheres for men and women are shown not only in the exclusion of women from all share of political duties, but in the withdrawal of men from their fair share of domestic duties.

She went on to discuss the economic value of women's work in the home, and outside it, and the double burden imposed on women who also worked outside

1. *ibid* pp.287-9

2. Lydia Becker, *Contemporary Review* vol.4, 1867, p.313. See also the report of her speech in 1878 when she declared "the duties of men and women in the State, in the family, in society, were equally important; it was also true they were in some respects diverse", *Women's Suffrage Journal* vol.9, 1878 p.75

the home. She continued,

Men and women do not exist in separate spheres, but have a common sphere — the world in which they live — and the cooperation of each in every department of human life is needed for the full development of human faculties in the perfection of the race.¹

Despite Lydia Becker's example, it is clear that in the decade or so following the initiation of the first women's suffrage societies the ideological stress of these feminists moved rapidly away from the universalistic basis of the 1866 Petition to an almost total reliance on particularistic arguments. Common themes in suffragist speeches became the association between the enfranchisement of women and the furtherance of social reform legislation,² and the promised introduction by women of a greater moral and spiritual force into politics.³ By the late 1870s even Helen Taylor, daughter of Harriet Taylor, could be found to make the following assertions from a suffrage platform:

It was just because there was so much difference between men and women that it was essential the feminine side of things should be allowed full and free expression. In these times when we had learnt that brute strength was not the source of righteous law, they would rejoice to take among law-givers that half of the human race which represented its most pitiful and sympathetic instincts.

In another such speech she declared:

...the main interest of the question to her was from the point of responsibility. The suffrage should be used by women not as a matter of right but as a duty... There were questions affecting a large class of women in the country which women could understand better than men, however noble they might be, and upon which they should be allowed to exercise their opinions. The interests of the nation would profit by the franchise being extended to women.⁴

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1. *Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science*, 1877 pp.701-704; on this issue see also Emily Davies in Hollis op cit p.6 & pp.17-18
 2. e.g. Miss Sturge at Bristol, *Women's Suffrage Journal*, vol.9, 1878 p.91; Lydia Becker in London, *ibid* p.89; Ann Todd in Belfast *ibid* p.59
 3. *ibid* p.27 and p.86 for speeches by Mrs Duncan McLaren and Millicent Garrett Fawcett
 4. *ibid* pp.44, 57

By this same period Millicent Fawcett, one of the first women public speakers, was advising suffragists to make clear their continuing adherence to domestic roles:

What she specially would wish to see was that all women who are really in earnest on this question should study to make their every day lives a sample of the good work that women can do in whatever department of life they find themselves called. Let them be good housekeepers, good needlewomen, good wives, good mothers. Let everyone feel that in moving for this privilege, they are not at all undervaluing the duties of their home life (Hear, Hear) ...She wished especially to remind young women that it was not by being bad needlewomen, and bad housekeepers, that they would show themselves worthy of the trust they claimed.¹

There was growing evidence that the increasing admission of women to public life did not cause deterioration in their household work and she pointed to the recent "great enthusiasm among ladies in regard to needlework and cookery. Art needlework was no longer the fashion of the hour, but the intelligent pursuit of a large number of ladies", while schools of cookery were flourishing. Millicent Fawcett denied the existence of separate spheres to limit women's opportunities, while accepting their specific duties in the domestic sphere. She urged that a woman "should seek to find the highest work that she was capable of doing, and do it with her whole soul and strength, at the same time not neglecting the humbler duties lying nearer to hand".²

This tendency to stress sex-specific needs, attributes and duties in regard to women's demand for the vote intensified during the 1880s. Millicent Fawcett chose to emphasise women's supposed virtues in particular. In a speech in 1885 she argued,

It was because she believed that women would be first and foremost influenced by moral considerations, by honesty, by respect for the law, by the worship of duty,

1. *ibid* pp.86-89 for report of Millicent Garrett Fawcett's speech in London.
2. e.g. *ibid*, Vol.16 1885 p.143

by the love of their neighbours that she believed they would form an element which would add great strength and stability to the country. Therefore it was not only as a woman but as a patriot she most earnestly wished the extension of the suffrage to duly qualified women (Loud applause).¹

In another speech Millicent Fawcett explored the inter-dependence of domestic and public life: "some said the sphere of woman was her home; that was quite true, but it was also one reason why woman should take a part in political affairs. They wanted the home-side represented in politics (Applause) ... Woman at her best stood for mercy, pity, peace, purity and love". On another occasion she referred to women as "representing home life and the domestic interests of the nation much more fully than men could". Under women's influence "All those questions which bore on the home and moral life of the nation would receive much more attention, and be more carefully weighed" than at present.²

Late Nineteenth century suffragists did not retreat completely from the universalistic perspectives of earlier feminists, but wherever possible when discussing their writings they concentrated on those aspects which were most compatible with their own ideological position, notably in Mary Wollstonecraft's attitude to motherhood.

Elizabeth Robins, an actress, novelist and early translator of Henrik Ibsen into English wrote an introduction to a new edition of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1891. She declared that she found Mary Wollstonecraft's teachings "conservative compared to the more advanced principles now advocated by women".³ Nonetheless she asserted that the eighteenth century feminist would no doubt join the positivist

1. *ibid* vol.17 1886 p.112

2. *ibid* vol.18 1887 p.136 and vol.19 1888 p.113

3. Elizabeth Robins Pennell, *op cit* p.vii. She was better known as Elizabeth Robins and eventually became a leading member of the WSPU.

Frederick Harrison "in his outcry against the women disordered by the 'fever of a public mission'", for she who first described

the falseness of the doll's life...could not have been deceived by the sham ideals set up by the typical strong-minded woman of the present...she could hardly have thought them emancipatory, if, in obtaining recognition as human beings, they ignored their sex altogether... The main thing was to be done with sham for evermore, not to substitute for the old sham sensibility of puppetdom the new sham sexlessness of emancipation.¹

Mary Wollstonecraft's "womanliness" was the aspect of her which suffragists writing at the turn of the century preferred to emphasise.

In her turn Millicent Garrett Fawcett stressed Wollstonecraft's "keen appreciation of the sanctity of women's domestic duties...either to the individual, the family or the State", or again, her "great merit was that she did not sanction any depreciation of the immense importance of the domestic duties of women" but preached marriage "as the foundation of almost every social virtue". Mrs Fawcett claimed that it was this aspect of Mary Wollstonecraft's work which had saved the English women's movement from the follies of some other movements — "she stamped upon it from the outset the word Duty".²

These later feminists did not entirely ignore the universalistic arguments of earlier writers. Walter Lyon Blease in assessing Mary Wollstonecraft's significance in his early twentieth century history of the women's movement, *The Emancipation of Women*, emphasized the environmentalist analysis of human abilities presented by the early feminists, (though again Wollstonecraft's belief that "Maternity was the noblest of all duties" was also stressed.)³

1. *ibid* p.xxii

2. Mrs Fawcett in Brougham Villiers (ed) *The Case for Women's Suffrage*, London: Fisher Unwin, 1907, pp.163, 183, 189

3. W. Lyon Blease, *The Emancipation of Women*, London, Constable, 1910, pp.79, 82. See also pp.x-xii for his universalistic position on political freedom

Elsewhere Blease discussed the early feminists' "resentment against this eighteenth century cant of womanhood" with a reference to Mill's refutation of "the canting references to the 'sphere' of women, the creation of a particular ideal for all women irrespective of their widely differing characters". Blease went on to assert that women "are as clear and coherent in their ideas as the ordinary man of their class", rejecting the notion of "the periodic incapacity of women".¹

Helena Swanwick, one of the leading figures in the twentieth century movement, produced a classical universalistic feminist statement in her *The Future of the Women's Movement*, written in 1913. She insisted:

We have to resist the tendency to easy and cheap generalisations about woman, her sphere, her vocation and her capacity, based upon a very small amount of very partial investigation and a huge amount of inherited prejudice and native conceit.²

Echoing Mill and Wollstonecraft she argued:

Insofar as the deepest needs of men and women are one, men suffer as well as women from the ignorance and degradation of women.

and continued that insofar as men and women differed:

Both men and women suffer, if the specific feminine character is unillumed by science, the specific feminine activity hampered and checked by external law and economic necessity.³

Despite such evidence of acquaintance with universalistic feminist argument, motherhood was the aspect of women's lives which dominated feminist thinking in the late nineteenth century, one which remained an important theme in twentieth century suffragist debate.

1. Blease op cit p.99, 113, 180

2. Helena Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, London: G. Bell 1913 p.45

3. *ibid* p.25 and p.viii. See also p.16

Motherhood and "the Mother Influence" in Politics

By the twentieth century suffragists were putting much stress on women's service and duty to the State through motherhood. In doing so these feminists continued to accept the existence of certain specifically female aptitudes and qualities, arising out of this biological function, which peculiarly fitted women for participation in political life. One suffragist wrote:

It is universally acknowledged that marriage and motherhood are the women's crown

so that the married woman was

a more mature developed and responsible being than the spinster: she is moreover, the most precious possession of the nation, bearing and rearing, as she does, its children. A mother's instinct is held to be unerring; her sympathies are supposed to be wider and more humanised; her altruism proverbial... It cannot be too much insisted upon that motherhood is the strongest force in existence that makes for altruism, and altruism is the most essential factor in the wide and beneficial ordering of the State.¹

The main burden of this argument was summed up by Mrs Fawcett:

With regard to the differences between men and women, those who advocate the enfranchisement of women have no wish to disregard them or make little of them. On the contrary, we base our claim to representation to a large extent on them. If men and women were exactly alike, the representatives of men would represent us; but not being alike that wherein we differ is unrepresented under the present system.

She insisted

The Motherhood of women, either actual or potential, is one of those great facts of everyday life which we must never lose sight of.

She asserted that specific characteristics developed out of the experience of motherhood, and therefore she advised women

1. C. Smedley in Villiers op cit p.99. For a discussion of the development of the concept of rational motherhood and its implications for the development of feminist theory, see Yeatman, Gender Ascription.

do not give up one jot or tittle of your womanliness, your love of children, your care for the sick, your gentleness, your self-control, your obedience to conscience and duty for all these things are terribly wanted in politics.¹

It was precisely because of their expertise in domestic affairs and their dissatisfaction with the conditions of home-life for many that suffragists claimed the vote. They frequently turned arguments about women's place being in the home against their opponents:

to hear many of the 'Antis' talk, one would imagine that all the women of this country were sheltered inmates of happy homes, and that if they were not, it was somehow their own fault... What kind of homes are the noisome foul dens in which our sweated women workers drag out a miserable existence? Homes in which baby faces are white with hunger, baby feet blue with cold, baby hands set to hard and unfitting toil because the few miserable pence they can earn are necessary for the family exchequer.²

Largely continuing to accept that women's place was in the home, suffragists argued that the vote was needed to fulfil their duties within it: "The mothers are, to some extent, responsible for the world into which they bring their children: they are not mere breeding animals".³

Mrs Fawcett argued:

Depend upon it, the most important institution in the country is the home. That which threaten the purity and stability of the home threatens the very life blood of the country... Up to the present, my belief is that the home-side and the political side of things have been kept

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1. Mrs Henry Fawcett, *Home and Politics*, London Society for Women's Suffrage, n.d. Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/18. See also her *Men Are Men And Women Are Women*, NUWSS 1909, reprinted from *The English-woman*, Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/19
 2. Marion Holmes, *The ABC of Women's Suffrage*, n.d. Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/28. See also Charlotte Despard, no title, n.d., Women's Freedom League, Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/12
Margaret Macmillan in Villiers (ed) pp.116-8; Blease op cit p.175, Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, p.78; *The Common Cause*, 9 Nov. 1911, 16 May 1913, 29 Aug 1913, 16 Jan 1914; report of the sermon by Canon Scott Holland in St Paul's Cathedral, *The Times*, 3 May 1909
 3. Smedley loc cit. But see *The Common Cause*, 15 June 1911 for an attack on the notion that women could only become good mothers by labouring solely in the home.

too far apart, as if they had nothing to do with one another.¹

Suffragists continued to seek to expand women's role as home-makers to the work of the state. Margaret Macmillan wrote: "It is a fashion among pretty writers to say that the Home is woman's true sphere. The pretty phrase is TRUE. Woman's whole mission will probably be found at least to consist in making a great home of the whole habitable planet".² This emphasis on social housekeeping was to lead to an increasing association of the suffrage demand with social reform generally. Mrs Pankhurst argued:

We shall get it made possible for women to manage the business which men have always conceded is the business of women, the care of the sick, the care of the aged, the care of little children... I assure you that not one woman who enters into this agitation need feel that she has got to give up a single one of women's duties in the home. She learns to feel that she is attaching a larger meaning to those duties which have been women's duties since the race began, and will be till the race has ceased to be. After all, home is a very, very big thing indeed... The home is the home of everybody in the nation.³

Such associations between feminism and social reform were frequently expressed as the need for the "mother influence" in politics:

We desire the right of voting not that we may cease to be women, but because we are women, and because Parliament, chosen at present by men alone, is making laws that must influence very closely our work, the training of children and the conduct of home life. It is our very womanhood, with its inborn instinct to childward care, not merely the human nature which we share with men, that make many of us eager to be politically enfranchised.⁴

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1. Fawcett, Home and Politics. Compare with Lady Groves' contribution to Olga Shafer and Emily Hill, *Great Suffragists and Why*, London: Henry Drane (1909) pp.79-84
 2. in Villiers (ed) op cit p.115
 3. Mrs Pankhurst, *The Importance of the vote*, Glasgow University Special Collection 1331
 4. Mabel Atkinson in Villiers (ed), op cit p.126-7. See also Blease op cit p.181

On a similar tack Mrs Fawcett pointed to women's expertise in various fields — the care of children, the administration of the Poor Law, nursing, housing, temperance, as grounds for giving them the vote.¹

It was argued that once women obtained the vote, the State would become more caring, and public life would be purified. James Keir Hardie, the socialist leader and ardent suffragist declared: "We witness on every hand the effect of unchallenged male dominance, arrogant armaments, harsh and unfeeling administration of Law ... With the coming of the *mother element* into politics this would be gradually changed".² An apocalyptic style was usual to Charlotte Despard, the leader of Women's Freedom League. In a typical essay she averred the existence of "the great woman principle in life, in thought, in action" through the assertion of which would come "the promise of a new divine and human order ... which would indeed be that Kingdom of God upon Earth, promised by the Son of Man".³ The Australian suffragist Nellie Alma Martel who came to Britain to join the suffrage campaigns, struck a similar quasi-religious note: "Our army is growing, growing daily; women are drawing nearer each other and in so doing are getting nearer the Great Father of all". The fight for the vote was becoming women's religion, "the religion of humanitarianism".⁴

Associated with such ideas was the claim that women were blessed with greater purity and spirituality than men. Such views enabled Mrs Fawcett to declare: "I think we may surely claim for women in general a higher standard of goodness and virtue".⁵ Other suffragists shied away from such

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1. Mrs Henry Fawcett, *Wanted, a Statesman*, reprint of speech delivered 22 Nov 1909, Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/20
 2. James Keir Hardie in Villiers (ed) op cit p.83
 3. Charlotte Despard in Villiers (ed) op cit p.190-1
 4. Nellie Alma Martel in Villiers (ed) p.153. Examples from Australia and New Zealand were frequently used by suffragists to link women's suffrage with the cause of moral and social reform.
 5. Mrs Fawcett, *Home and Politics*, loc cit. See also Fulford *Votes for Women* p.83 for a similar quote; the report of a speech by Mrs Pankhurst in *The Glasgow Herald*, 23 October 1908; notes on the crime statistics for 1911 in Janie Allan's Papers, National Library of Scotland Acc4498

claims. Helena Swanwick wrote:

I wish to disclaim altogether the kind of assumption that one frequently finds implicit in much of the feminist talk of the present day - the assumption that men have been the barbarians who loved physical force, and that women alone were civilised and civilising. There are not signs of this in literature or history.¹

Nonetheless, she, like many others, looked forward to the end of war once women were emancipated: "War is waste and the women's movement may be taken as the type of all the great conflicts there have been between coercion and development, bullying and understanding, love and hate".²

The development of this kind of rhetoric around the biological function of motherhood was very often defensive. Helena Swanwick wrote:

I wish to declare at the outset that in my opinion any speculations about women, any scheme for their education and their life conditions which do not take into account the fact that they alone can be the mothers of the race, are thereby rendered worthless and foolish.³

She claimed that in the women's movement, both at home and abroad:

I have found the importance of motherhood more fully understood and more religiously proclaimed .. That they are in revolt against much that law and custom have laid upon motherhood is undoubted, also that they understand motherhood in a far wider sense than the vulgar one.⁴

Such defensiveness was necessary for Helena Swanwick was also arguing that motherhood should not be regarded,

.. as a specialised or vocational affair... Women should not be trained to be mothers: to do so at once introduces all sorts of arbitrary limitations and restrictions and hampers the very mission it is designed to serve. Women should be trained to be whole human beings; the measure of a woman's motherhood, like the measure of her love,

1. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, p.41

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid*, p.21

4. *ibid* p.22

is the measure of her whole nature.¹

Such feminists were attempting both to ward off the restrictive cult of motherhood which had developed by this time,² and to elevate women's role as mothers to justify their greater emancipation. They did not accept "That, although woman is the guardian of the race and bears the burden of motherhood, it is still to be left to man to dictate the terms of motherhood".³

It is interesting that when a group of women published an Appeal Against Female Suffrage in 1889, their characterisation of the nature and duties of women almost exactly co-incided with that propounded in much suffragist propaganda. They too stressed the importance of women's talents and abilities in a wide area of community affairs. They argued, however, that women had no right to demand "admission to direct power in that state which *does* rest upon force".⁴ Further, women's qualities of sympathy and disinterestedness "might be seriously impaired by their admission to the turmoil of active political life...we hold that citizenship is not dependent upon or identical with the possession of the suffrage. Citizenship lies in the participation of each individual in efforts for the good of the community."⁵

1. *ibid*

2. For a discussion of this see Anna Davin, *Imperialism and Motherhood*, *History Workshop*, No.5 1978 pp.9-65

3. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement* p.23

4. An Appeal against Female Suffrage, *The Contemporary Review*, Vol.25 1889 p.782. Enid Huws Jones, in *Mary Humphrey Ward*, London: Heineman 1973 p.137 wrote "Probably most of these ladies (antis) and certainly Mrs Humphrey Ward, were on a rational level less concerned with opposing female suffrage than with encouraging women to use what liberties they already possessed to work for public causes in their own localities... as middle class ladies they were more interested in the potentialities of individual women like themselves than in the political force of numbers, which Mrs Fawcett saw as an instrument of social justice".

5. An Appeal against Women's Suffrage loc cit p.783

On practical grounds the anti-suffragists argued that most women were "notoriously indifferent" to the suffrage issue, that all the existing injustices to women had been remedied through the existing machinery of late years, and that to give the vote to women on the existing basis would enfranchise large numbers of "immoral" women, while leaving respectable married women disenfranchised. They concluded: "We are convinced that the pursuit of mere outward equality with men is for women not only vain but demoralising. It leads to a total misconception of women's true dignity and special mission".¹ The editorial call for signatures to the Appeal at the end of the article stressed such pressure was needed "in order to save the quiet of Home life from total disappearance".²

In reply, Millicent Fawcett, after pointing out many of the inconsistencies and irrelevancies in the anti-suffragists' case, declared:

..the ladies of the *Nineteenth Century* Protest may be reminded that the friends of women's suffrage value the womanliness of women as much as themselves. True womanliness grows and thrives on whatever strengthens the spontaneity and independence of the character of women... We do not want women to be bad imitations of men; we neither deny nor minimize the differences between men and women. The claim of women to representation depends to a large extent on these differences. Women bring something to the service of the state different from that which can be brought by men. Let this fact be frankly recognised and let due weight be given to it in the representative system of the country.³

As this statement indicated, by the end of the nineteenth century abstract theoretical discussion about the implications of enfranchisement for the emancipation of women had been abandoned for a more pragmatic approach. Supporters of the cause found it enough simply to assert:

1. *ibid* pp.784, 785

2. *ibid* p.788

3. In *The Nineteenth Century*, vol.26 1889 p.96. See also Mrs Ashton Dilke's reply to the anti-suffragists, *ibid* p.97-103

The crown and the completion of the programme must be the attainment of the Political Franchise...the suffrage is the key of woman's position. Obtaining it, every privilege she can reasonably desire must follow. Failing to obtain it nothing...is secure.¹

Pragmatic arguments now dominated, a situation which Millicent Garrett Fawcett clearly favoured:

This characteristic and practical moderation and rather humdrum commonsense, which has stamped the movement in England, has prevented a good deal of what strikes one as rather comic about the movement in other countries. We talk about 'women' and 'women's suffrage'; we do not talk about woman with a capital W. That we leave to our enemies.²

By the time of the suffrage revival at the turn of the twentieth century the demand for the vote had also assumed symbolic importance: "Of this full emancipation of women, the political vote is assuredly not, as is rather commonly supposed in a land of party politics, the be-all and end-all. It is a symbol, whose practical importance — though considerable — is as nothing beside the fulfilment of the idea which it symbolises."³

Thus, the vote became both a symbol of, and a tool with which, to achieve emancipation and the argument had moved away from a claim based simply on notions of rights and of justice. Mrs Pankhurst summed up her position thus:

I think we may give the vote a threefold description. We may describe the vote as, first of all, a symbol of freedom, secondly, a safeguard, and thirdly an instrument. It is a symbol of freedom, a symbol of citizenship, a symbol of liberty. It is a safeguard

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1. Frances Power Cobbe, Introduction to Theodore Stanton (ed) *The Woman Question in Europe*, New York: Source Books reprint 1970 p.xiv
 2. Millicent Garrett Fawcett in Stanton (ed) op cit p.6
 3. *Gentles Let us Rest*, title page missing, reprint from *The Nation* circa 1910 Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/22

of all those liberties which it symbolises. And in these later days, it has come to be regarded more than anything else as an instrument, something with which you can get a great many more things that our forefathers who fought for the vote ever realised as possible to get with it.

Women wanted the vote,

..because we realise how much good we can do with it when we have got it. We do not want it in order to boast of how much we have got. We do not want it because we want to imitate men or to be like men.¹

Thus the universalistic perspectives of the earlier feminists became almost completely submerged, and pragmatic arguments based on a particularistic perspective came to dominate twentieth century suffragist thought.

By the end of the nineteenth century most feminists had come to accept the assumption of sex specific attributes and duties arising out of women's particular role as mothers, and their increased identification with the domestic sphere. They did not challenge the existence of a prescribed domestic role for women. What they *were* challenging was the exclusivity and separateness of the domestic and the public spheres.² Women's sex specific role could not be fully achieved, their sex-specific potential fully realised, unless they gained entry to, and became active in the public sphere.

While they were often prepared to make use of the rhetoric surrounding the separate spheres argument, they were effectively working for the breakdown of the barriers between the domestic and the public. This was

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1. Mrs Pankhurst, *The Importance of the Vote*, Lecture given 24 March 1908, Glasgow University Sp Coll 1331
 2. Ellen DuBois has made a similar point in relation to the American women's movement in, *The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement: Notes Toward the Reconstruction of Nineteenth Century Feminism*, *Feminist Studies*, Vol.3, 1975 pp.64-71; see also her *Feminism and Suffrage*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978 and Nancy Colt *Bonds of Womanhood*, pp.197-206

the crux of their disagreement with those in the women's movement who agreed with Mary Humphrey Ward. Although Mary Humphrey Ward became involved with anti-suffragism she would undoubtedly qualify as a "social" or "domestic" feminist, in the analysis presented by William O'Neill and Daniel Scott Smith. Her differences with the suffragists lay precisely in her acceptance that there existed a realm of activity — notably the government of Empire — which women were not suited to enter.¹ Suffragists, by contrast, did not accept *this* division of the world's labour. The vote became such a potent symbol of emancipation precisely because feminists saw the concept of "separate spheres" as the main stumbling block to women's future progress, and one best attacked by women's assumption of public roles.

Nonetheless, late nineteenth century feminists were themselves a product of a stage of history which has seen the elaboration of a domestic ideology concerning women's particular social role. Through the cult of domesticity women were offered increased status, notably as mothers, alongside an increasingly restricted social role which stressed their domestic duties within the household. Hence the problematic of motherhood came to dominate feminist consciousness. Feminist ideology absorbed, rather than challenged this identification of all women with motherhood. Feminists sought to build up women's status and extend their field of activity on the grounds of their biological function and the temperamental and moral characteristics which supposedly accompanied it. It was this

1. See Daniel Scott Smith, Family Limitation, Sexual Control and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America, *Feminist Studies*, Nos.3-4, 1973 pp.40-57 for the concept "domestic feminism". Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres*, London: Croom Helm 1978 has analysed the idea of "separate spheres" and provides a short discussion of the ideas of Mary Humphrey Ward pp.115-7, 133-6, though on the whole he concentrates on the male leadership of the Anti-Suffrage League. He does not discuss the interesting parallels in the thought of suffrage leaders like Millicent Garrett Fawcett, and anti-suffragist women like Mary Humphrey Ward

ideological perspective which hampered their ability to achieve any thoroughgoing critique of sex-role stereotyping, and which led to a compromise with the environmentalism of classical feminism to a stress on innate, inborn qualities in the female character.¹

Even so, their increasing association with social reform issues and their resistance to eugenic arguments which presented women as little more than breeding machines caused them to remain overwhelmingly eugenic in outlook.² While they accepted the belief that there were differing sexual aptitudes and characteristics accompanying the physical differences between the two sexes, feminists stressed that the social environment ~~ditions~~ determined how far these differences could be realised and utilised by society. They also challenged the assumption that such differences should involve social inferiority for women.

In this way feminists

acquired a conception of their sex as an aggregate... acquired a new sense of solidarity and of power to help themselves... were inevitably impressed with the ideas of their community of interests... It meant the realisation by each woman of the fact that she was an individual apart from each man, and it meant also the realisation by all women of the fact that they were a class apart from all men, with common interests different from and often opposed to those of the other sex.³

Consequently, nineteenth and early twentieth century suffragism has to be seen as something more than simply "a case study in nineteenth century liberalism".⁴ Indeed it signified the modification of classical equalitarian individualistic feminism by social forces beyond those of

1. For a fuller discussion of this aspect of feminism see Rossi, *Feminist Papers*, p.5

2. For a discussion of this, see Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right*, London: Penguin, 1977, ch. 6 & 7, and Carol Bacchi, *Race Regeneration and Social Purity. A Case Study of the Social Attitudes of Canada's English-speaking Suffragists*, *Social History-Histoire Sociale*, Vol.11 pp.460-474

3. *Ibid* op cit, p.167

4. Evans *op cit*, p.7

liberal politics. With the domestication of women came also the domestication of feminism. When early twentieth century suffragists came to associate their cause with more general social reform they argued for what was termed "the feminisation of democracy".¹

For nearly all suffragists this involved recognition of the value of women's particular and sex-specific qualities for the process of social reform and regeneration, through their right to act in the public sphere. Hence the increasing emphasis on the vote as an instrument to achieve other ends, rather than simply as a human right. For some suffragists, however, the "feminisation of democracy" also involved the participation of women in the creation of a greater democracy throughout society. Suffragist involvement with social reform became most significant in the twentieth century suffrage revival, and the ideas which accompanied and were produced by this association between feminism and progressive politics will now be discussed in more detail.

1. Blease op cit, p.219

CHAPTER 2 : THE 'FEMINISATION OF DEMOCRACY'

Twentieth century suffragist leaders like Mrs Fawcett and Mrs Pankhurst were to bring the ideological framework of late nineteenth century feminism to the suffrage revival at the turn of the century. Nonetheless twentieth century suffragism did stimulate an ongoing development of feminist critiques of society at this time. In this process the association of feminism with wider social reform demands was highly significant.

Writing on the American and Canadian suffrage campaigns respectively, William O'Neill and Carol Bacchi¹ have suggested that it was suffragism's increasing stress on social housekeeping through association with reform issues which led to the loss of a clearer feminist perspective. The argument to be presented here is that this was not the case in Britain. The previous chapter sought to show that the ideological and strategic inadequacies of late nineteenth century feminism were above all related to its absorption of ideas associated with the cult of domesticity. This chapter will explore the links which suffragists saw between their cause and that of progressive politics, and will seek to show how social reform concerns were in fact central to British suffragists' development of feminist critiques of society in the period before the First World War, notably in the identification and analysis of women's economic and sexual oppression. Further, the suffragist struggle for the "feminisation of democracy" was often to represent more than simply an alliance of social reform and feminist interests. It marked the growing recognition by many feminists that their demand should now be posed within a fully democratic framework. For such suffragists the alliance with progressive politics represented a desire both to participate in the formation of a new democracy, and to work for the development of a welfare state.

1. O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave*, pp.33, 47, 357; Carol Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred* The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists 1877-1918, PhD Thesis, McGill University 1976; see also Parker, *The Ovenbirds*, p.10

Although the suffrage revival around the turn of the century produced little theoretical discussion, it did produce a great wealth of literature in pamphlet and periodical form which has so far received scant analysis from historians of the movement. This material indicates a clear and coherent body of concerns among suffragists, from which may be constructed an account of feminist analysis of women's situation at this time. Evidence will be drawn from the literature of all three organisations, the National Union, the WSPU and its breakaway the Women's Freedom League (WFL).¹

The founding of the WSPU in 1903 is often taken to represent the development of a more ideologically advanced feminism within the British suffrage movement.² In fact the differences of opinion between the constitutional wing of the movement, the National Union, and the militant wing, the WSPU and the other militant society, the WFL, were largely concerned with party political tactics. Both wings drew on the ideological heritage of the late nineteenth century campaigns. Indeed, as material in this chapter seeks to show, the more progressive thinkers and writers with respect to feminist theory were to be found working within the National Union. The militant suffragette of the WSPU was not necessarily a more advanced feminist than the constitutional suffragist of National Union (The term "suffragette" is used to distinguish a militant supporter of votes from women from a constitutionalist. "Suffragist" may either refer to any supporter of the women's franchise, or be used to specify a constitutionalist). Only the publication of Christabel

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1. See below Ch.4 for a discussion of the disagreements between militants and constitutional suffragists. The pamphlets referred to in this thesis are to be found in the Special Collections of Glasgow University Library but the Fawcett Library, City of London Polytechnic also has extensive holdings of such material. The major suffrage journals were *The Common Cause* (NUWSS) *Votes for Women* (WSPU), *The Suffragette* (WSPU), *The Vote* (WFL)
 2. e.g. Jane Marcus, *Transatlantic Sisterhood*, *Signs*, Vol.3, 1978, pp.744-755 makes this assumption

Pankhurst's *The Great Scourge*, in its openly anti-male stance, may be seen as representing an ideological breach within the suffrage movement, and its implications will be discussed later.

Suffragism and Progressive Politics

The fortunes of the women's suffrage movement in Britain were always closely associated with those of the Liberal Party and progressive politics in general. The gradual revival of the suffrage cause in the mid 1890s reflected the growing concern with problems of domestic politics which was eventually to bring the Liberal Party to victory in its electoral landslide of 1906. Twentieth century suffragists frequently suggested the inter-dependence of progressive politics with the emancipation of women through their enfranchisement. Writing in 1906 the journalist Brougham Villiers welcomed the revival of the suffrage movement:

All this is well, for the issue raised is the greatest of modern times. On its decision depends nothing less than the character of the whole progressive movement in England. Under our eyes, the young democracy is taking shape; it is stating its peculiar problems and formulating its answers to them. Questions of education, temperance, unemployment, housing, land, poverty and finance, little regarded by the last generation, form the subject matter of politics in the present, and will do so still more in the immediate future. Yet ... so long as women remain without direct influence in the life of the nation these things can only come to life in a vitiated atmosphere. The removal of the sex disqualification will bring fresh air into English politics.¹

Similarly, another writer believed that the women's cause had revived for the same reason as Liberalism, in a new and growing "desire for the amelioration of the conditions of human life", and in particular "the

1. Villiers (ed.) *The Case for Women's Suffrage*, Introduction p.18. See also Blease, *The Emancipation of Women*, 1968, p.236. The organisational revival of the suffrage movement will be discussed below, Chapters 3, 4 and 5

striking re-emergence of interest in domestic politics".¹

A theme which was to become insistent during the pre-first World War suffrage campaigns was the link between women's suffrage and the fate of Liberalism. Many suffragists were to become increasingly disillusioned with the Liberal government, and to feel that the existing Liberal leadership was taking the Party away from its ideological roots. A leading propagandist for the suffrage movement and a member of the National Union, Helena Swanwick wrote:

When the Liberal Party ... identifies itself with the movement it will once more step into the line of progress; until then it is true to say that the progressive women and the Labour party which supports them are the only democrats. Moreover, the penalty of supporting reaction in one direction is that the logic of events drives men into the logic of thought. Many a Liberal who hoped he could restrict his illiberalism to women, is finding himself forced into general principles of reaction which will sooner or later — horrible to contemplate — overwhelm men too.²

Not surprisingly then general issues of social reform became central to the twentieth century suffrage demand. All the suffrage organisations were careful to avoid committing themselves to any specific platform, but the whole of their activity reflected these concerns. It could not have been otherwise, for by now the suffrage organisations drew to a considerable extent on existing women's social and moral reform agencies, both for membership, and for a wider support for their cause within the community. Consequently, the National Union always maintained close links with organisations like the British Women's Temperance Association (BWTA), the National Union of Women Workers and the Women's Co-

1. Mabel Atkinson in Villiers (ed) op cit pp.126-7

2. Swanwick, *Future of the Women's Movement*, p.52. The suffragists' relationship with the Liberal Party is an important theme in this thesis, and will be explored more fully in later chapters

operative Guilds (WCG), at both a local and a national level.¹

Hence suffragists came to urge their cause on other women as a public service and a duty. In addressing *Women Who Are Well Off* one of the suffrage pioneers, Mentia Taylor, stressed how the women's vote would be used to help poorer women; "It is your *duty* to take an interest in the matter of women's suffrage, as affecting the welfare of your poorer sisters". Similarly, in a draft speech, leading National Union worker Catherine Marshall wrote: "The only real freedom is the freedom to serve, to give of our best. The children of the State, the weak, the sick, the oppressed are crying aloud for a mother's as well as a father's care". Women's consciences were awakening to this cry in their demand for the vote.²

Another suffragist, writing in *The Common Cause*, the journal of the National Union, noted: "It is increasingly true that the more earnestly women engage in social work for women, the more they realise the truth of Mrs Fawcett's simile, that 'they are pulling a bell handle that has no bell at the other end'".³ The centrality of social reform concerns to the suffragist demand was well expressed by Mrs Pankhurst in a letter to the Labour Member of Parliament, Philip Snowden: "If you knew how I long to get this vote question settled, so that women may get into real social work".⁴

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1. See Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of such links. For a discussion of middle class philanthropy and the challenge to the sex-stereotyping of female passivity see B. Corrado Pope, *Angels in the Devil's Workshop*, in R. Bridenthal and C. Koonz, *Becoming Visible*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977 p.296f
 2. Mrs Taylor, *To Women Who Are Well Off*, NUWSS, 1905, Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/58; Catherine Marshall, draft speech January 1913, Catherine Marshall Papers, Cumbria Record Office. Her notes continued: "Women's Suffrage = Power of Service to the State, power of women to protect their practical side of life in homes, family and children".
 3. L.M. McCraith in *The Common Cause*, 7 Sept. 1911
 4. Quoted in David Morgan, *Suffragists and Liberals*, Oxford: Blackwells 1975, p.69

The process was clearly two-way, with social reform fuelling the women's suffrage demand, and vice versa. A leading member of the National Union, Lady Frances Balfour recalled her part in the movement: "To work in it and for it, was a perpetual enlightenment. It led me into many side tracks, some philanthropic, others social".¹

This aspect of suffrage activity could only be strengthened by the activities of the Liberal government of the period. Mary Stocks, active in the National Union noted the paradox when she recalled:

Between 1905 and 1914 the Liberal administration was demonstrating as never before the potentialities of legislative enactments as an instrument of social reform. It did in fact during its seven years in office kindle popular faith in the possibility of change by legislation. At the same time Asquith was exerting his very considerable influence over a pro-suffragist majority in his Cabinet and in the House of Commons to exclude .. the sex most intimately concerned with social reforms.²

It was a common assertion among suffragists that women were particularly suited to social welfare politics. W. Lyon Blease argued:

Let it be admitted that the differences between the sexes are not merely physical. Women in politics will probably pay closer attention to the mechanics of public health, social welfare against disease, improvement of housing conditions, schemes for garden cities, attempts to mitigate or prevent the abuse of economic privilege and the protection of children from ignorance, sickness and neglect.

Consequently, he could argue, "the feminisation of democracy" was essential to future social progress.³

This aspect of the twentieth century suffrage movement reflected the growing rejection of nineteenth century philanthropy in favour of the

1. Lady Frances Balfour, *Ne Obliviscaris*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930, p.172

2. Mary Stocks, *My Commonplace Book*, London: Davies, 1970, p.63

3. Blease op cit p.219

twentieth century's welfare state. The views of one leading suffrage agitator, Miss Abadam, expressed this clearly:

Charity in her opinion may slightly alleviate these evils after they have occurred; it cannot prevent them, the sum of national misery is too great .. to be appreciably altered by individual or even organised benevolence. Where an evil has a central economic cause, it can only be removed by a central economic power. Politics, *rightly engineered* — that is by the dual control of women as well as men — provide the only adequate remedy. The practical woman philanthropist is realising this at last and feels how futile are the means at her command to gain her ends.¹

Such views were part and parcel of British feminism's move away from its earlier liberal individualistic expression. Speaking specifically of women's economic position Helena Swanwick wrote: "We abandoned the principle of laissez-faire some half century ago, and most of us have no desire to return to it, for under a system of absolutely free industrial competition, women must go under".²

Many suffragists noted recent political developments as only strengthening the case for their demand. Cicely Hamilton, of the Women's Freedom League, wrote in 1908:

One of the chief factors in strengthening the agitation of women for political enfranchisement has been the recognition and practical adoption by the modern State of the root principles of socialism .. that is to say that the State has abandoned, for good or evil, the doctrine of laissez-faire; and has definitely claimed and established rights to interfere in and regulate the life of the citizen in the interests of the community.³

Similarly Lady Henry Somerset, a leading temperance worker and suffragist, argued that women needed the vote to regain the influence

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1. Miss Abadam, in Shafer and Hill (eds) *Great Suffragists and Why*, p.222
 2. Swanwick, *Future of the Women's Movement*, p.75
 3. Cicely Hamilton, *Women's Vote*, NUWSS reprint from *The Sunday Times*, 15 March 1908, Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/23. See also Blease op cit pp.175-6, p.237

and power which they had previously wielded in various spheres: "The child was taken by the State ... the education of her child was no longer in her hands ... Without the vote, too, woman was dumb as to the conditions which ruled the labour market".¹

Mrs Pankhurst declared:

If it was ever important for women to have the vote, it is ten times more important today, because you cannot take up a newspaper, you cannot go to a conference, you cannot even go to church without hearing a great deal of talk about social reform and a demand for social legislation (which was) of vital importance to women. If we have the right kind of social legislation it will be a very good thing for women and children. If we have the wrong kind of social legislation, we may have the worst kind of tyranny that women have known.²

The British suffragists' demand remained in the twentieth century as it had been in the nineteenth, for equal voting rights with men. As property was still the basis of the franchise in Britain, this left the suffragists in a difficult position in regard to democratic demands for universal suffrage, which were beginning to be voiced again in the early years of this century. It has been estimated that only about 60% of adult males held the vote in Britain at this time.³ This made it difficult for women's suffragists to appeal to democratic arguments in favour of women's enfranchisement. In the early years of the twentieth century it led them into frequent conflict with those who were advocating adult suffrage.

Sometimes suffragists got round this difficulty simply by ignoring the existence of a large number of voteless males. Mrs Pankhurst declared:

Government without the vote is more or less a form of tyranny. Government with the vote is more or less

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1. Lady Henry Somerset in Shafer and Hill (eds) p.59
 2. Mrs Pankhurst *The Importance of the Vote* loc cit. See also Maude Royden's speech in Deputation to Asquith 8 August 1913, MSS Asquith p.89, Bodleian Library
 3. Neal Blewett, *The Franchise in the United Kingdom 1885-1918, Past and Present*, No.32 1965, pp.27-56

representative according to the extent to which the vote is given. In this country they tell us we have representative government. So far as women are concerned, while you have representative government for men, you have despotic government for women.¹

The issue of women's suffrage versus adult suffrage was to cause increasing tension between suffragists and political progressives in the pre-war period. This problem was eventually resolved when the constitutional wing of the movement came to frame its demand in the context of full franchise reform from 1912 onwards.²

In the meantime, while a few suffragists argued for votes for women on the existing property franchise, as a bulwark against universal suffrage, many others supported full adult suffrage, while feeling it strategically necessary to first secure a recognition of women's right to vote. It is clear that on the whole the political ideology of the suffrage movement in the twentieth century was, in general, progressive, and that the women's cause had become closely associated with issues of social reform and the prospects of progressive politics in the shape of the Liberal Party. Suffragists were arguing for the entry of women into the political life of the country, both to serve women's interests and to bring about a more just and humane society.

Helena Swanwick explaining the title of the suffrage journal of which she was the founder-editor, wrote: "I chose the name *The Common Cause* to indicate my conviction that women's cause was men's, but also because I was frankly sick of 'Woman this and Woman that'".³

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1. Mrs Pankhurst loc cit. Married women also presented twentieth century suffragists with a problem just as they had in the nineteenth century, see below Ch.4
 2. "Suffragist" in this thesis will always refer specifically to women's suffragists (as was the practice at the time). Supporters of adult suffragists will be referred to as "adultists". See Ch.4 for further discussion of this issue, and Chs.7-11 on changes in NUWSS policy.
 3. Swanwick, *I Have Been Young*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1935, p.207

However, this breadth of view did not hinder this same writer in retaining one of the clearest feminist positions of any propagandist in the suffrage movement. In the following review of the ideas about women expressed by Helena Swanwick and other suffragists of this period I hope to show that feminism at this time was not necessarily compromised by an association with social reform. Indeed suffragists used the insights they gained from analysis of social reform issues to construct a considerable critique of patriarchy.

In their analysis of women's subjection suffragists located two main structures of oppression — women's inferior economic position and the exploitation of their sexuality. While most suffragists supported the institution of monogamous marriage as in women's interests they also explored ways in which economic and sexual exploitation were presently contained within it. Consequently, they explored ways in which women's position within marriage might be strengthened.

The Economic Subjection of Women

Many of the middle class social workers who became active in the suffrage movement had previously concentrated their interests on the working and living conditions of working class women. One of the most effective suffrage campaigns to be based on the needs of working class women was that among the textile workers of North West England. Esther Roper began suffragist agitation among these women in the mid 1890s. Her fellow activist, Eva Gore Booth, wrote of how such women

live laborious days of poverty-stricken and upright independence, and produce by their labour so large a proportion of the material wealth of the country. Here is a force that must in the end be reckoned with.

Meanwhile their conditions were becoming

more and more desparately difficult. In fact, we are bound to care more, not less, and for a very simple reason: every year that goes by sees the slow development of the tendency to nationalise all industrial questions. Political and industrial conditions can no longer be disentangled.¹

Industrial women workers were nearly always paid lower rates than men in similar work, and were restricted to working in the less skilled processes. This was "not due to original sin or to some sex aberration which makes them unable to understand the usefulness of money". Nor was it necessarily due to want of organisation among women workers. Eva Gore Booth pointed out that male wages had risen fifty to sixty percent since men had first won an extension of the franchise. Unionisation had not been enough: "If you want to increase a person's industrial value, you must increase his importance, you must make it worth somebody's while to please him".² The argument that the vote would raise women's wage levels was a constant one in suffrage propoganda. Another writer insisted that "so far as they possess them, men won political power and industrial security in one and the self-same struggle".³

Suffragists frequently made the claim that the industrial system had stolen women's traditional occupations from them, and thus driven them out of their homes and into the factories. The American suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt, who was well known in Britain, argued

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1. Eva Gore Booth in Villiers (ed) op cit pp.57-61. Keir Hardie used a similar argument in his contribution to this book pp.80-81, and concluded that with increasing labour legislation, and without the vote women "will suffer from sex legislation, quite as much as men have hitherto suffered from class legislation". See also *Some Reasons Why Working Women Want The Vote*, NUWSS n.d. Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/43
 2. *ibid*
 3. Geraldine Hodgson, *The Parliamentary Vote and Wages*, NUWSS 1909, Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/26. See also Marion Holmes, op cit; Frederick Pethick Lawrence, *Women's Votes and Wages* n.d. Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/32; Violet Shillington, *Women Wage Earners and the Vote*, NUWSS n.d. Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/52; George H. Wood, *The Woman Wage-Earner*, n.d. Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/64

Complicated conditions brought about by a rapidly developing civilisation, competition for bread or sordid ambition, had led men into the sacred precincts of the home, there to steal every occupation invented and developed by women, and they have carried them into the factories, workshops and offices of the world.

The surplus of women workers meant that

Working women are utterly at the mercy of selfish employers, of hard economic conditions and unfair legislation.

Women needed the vote to defend themselves in this situation.¹

Cicely Hamilton developed a similar theme, and insisted "Woman has always worked for her living, though man in the face of the facts, refuses to believe it. No objection has been made to her doing her share, and more than her share, of the world's toil. Objection is raised only when she demands her share of the world's pay, her right to economic and political independence".² The feminist historian W. Lyon Blease also noted this development, but added that at least it had taken some women "outside the cramped circle of domesticity".³ In reference to women's industrial work, Mrs Pankhurst argued "If women had sufficient intelligence to earn their own living, to pay their rent and obey the law which seven and a half million of men in the country were making for them, surely in justice the vote should be given them."⁴

Suffragists were particularly concerned about a number of attempts in the early years of the century to further limit women's work oppor-

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1. Mrs Chapman Catt, address to the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, 26 April 1909, NUWSS, Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/6
 2. Cicely Hamilton, *Women's Vote* loc cit. See also Charlotte Despard, *Women's Franchise and Industry*, n.d. Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/13, where she stated "for the home he has substituted the factory. And now he tells her that the factory is his, and that she, be she wife, widow or maid, must not interfere with him there. The home, which he had deprived of interest and use, is hers: the factory and shop are his".
 3. Blease, op cit p.93
 4. *Votes for Women*, 23 July 1908

tunities, notably legislation aimed at ending women's employment as barmaids, at the pit-brow and as printers.¹ A suggestion from Cabinet Minister John Burns that there should be legislation to prevent married women's work, as a possible solution to the unemployment problem, provoked particular anger. Mrs Pankhurst referred to the proposal as "an act of tyranny". While the legislation was presented as an attempt to free married women of additional burdens, it proposed no compensation for loss of earning, nor gave any rights to the wife over some part of her husband's earnings. Mrs Pankhurst insisted "Infantile mortality and physical degeneration are not found in the homes of well-paid factory operatives but in the slums and among the families of casual workers".²

On this issue Cicely Hamilton protested that society was "drifting towards an era of repressive legislation — of class legislation — whose aim and object will be the exclusion of women from the paid labour market and the confinement of the larger half of the community to some form of (chiefly unpaid) work as it pleases the male portion of the nation to assign to them".³

Internal conflicts within suffragist thought on the control of women's work were ever-present. The example of bar-maids provides one straightforward instance, where the temperance beliefs of many suffragists came into conflict with their feminism. Nonetheless in general suffragists appear to have opposed the attempts to limit women's work in

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1. On the barmaids controversy see Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, London: Virago, 1978, pp.239-240; for the chain-makers see *The Common Cause* Notes and Comments 21 April 1910; for Edinburgh print-workers see *The Common Cause* 15 Sept 1910, 22 Sept 1910, 29 Sept 1910, 30 Mar 1911
 2. Mrs Pankhurst, *The Importance of The Vote* loc cit
 3. Cicely Hamilton, *Women's Vote* loc cit

bars.¹

The problem posed by the question of protective labour legislation for women was altogether more complex. The individualistic, equalitarian tradition within feminism had frequently opposed such legislation. In the 1870s Mrs Fawcett and her husband had opposed the extension of the Factory Acts for women workers, feeling "it would impose a handicap both upon the status and upon the opportunities" for women. They did not oppose the principles of the Factory Acts, only their unequal application to female workers.² Henry Fawcett succeeded in having the conditions of women workers in private houses excluded from the provisions of a consolidating Factory Act, with the support of Emma Paterson of the Women's Protective and Provident League. In the view of many twentieth century feminists this exclusion had only enabled the practice of "sweating" women workers to increase, e.g. Barbara Hutchins commented on Henry Fawcett's successful amendment: "The ground has not yet been recovered and the State still countenances the overwork of women precisely in those industries which are most prone to abuse".³

By the turn of the century, suffragists like Clementina Black of the National Union, who had acquired an extensive experience in trying to improve the lot of women workers over the previous two decades or so, had now become firm advocates of the extension of protective legislation for women.⁴ Such feminists explained women's low wages and unemployment, not as a result of such legislation, but because of the lack of training

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1. See the discussion in Liddington and Norris loc cit, also the report of the Women's Liberal Federation Conference in *The Glasgow Herald* 15 May 1907. Here the suffragist Eva McLaren opposed a resolution calling for the limitation of the employment of barmaids, on the grounds that such legislation should not be passed while women remained unenfranchised, but her amendment was lost
 2. Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, London: John Murray 1933 p.90
 3. Barbara Hutchins, *The Historical Development of the Factory Acts* in Beatrice Webb (ed.) *The Case for the Factory Acts*, London: Grant Richards 1902 (2nd ed.) p.92
 4. Clementina Black, *Some Current Objections to Factory Legislation for Women*, in Webb loc cit pp.193-223

facilities for women, and their transience in the workforce. The development of sweating, particularly in those trades which employed large numbers of women, was the critical factor in this change of emphasis among feminists. Organisation among such workers was notoriously difficult, and no longer seemed adequate to ending this aspect of women's exploitation. Consequently Clementina Black and those who thought like her also became active in organisations like the Anti-Sweating League, and began to work for minimum wage legislation, and similar protective measures.¹

The early years of the century had seen numerous Sweated Industries Exhibitions, but as Mrs Pankhurst noted in 1908:

Nothing has come of it all ... look at the Governments. What do you get in the forefront of their programme? You get an eight hours day for miners. But you get nothing for the sweated women.

Miners had the vote, women did not. She concluded:

I think that women, realising the horrible degradation of these workers, the degradation not only to themselves but to all of us, caused by the evil of sweating, ought to be eager to get political freedom, in order that something may be done to get for the sweated women labourer, some kind of pay that would enable her to live at least a moral and a decent life.²

Suffragists also took up the difficulties confronting middle class women who needed or wanted to work, particularly their exclusion from certain professions, like the law, and the lower rates of pay for women in others, like teaching. All the suffrage organisations saw women

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1. Clementina Black, *Legislative Proposals*, in Gertrude Tuckwell et al, *Women In Industry From Seven Points of View*, London: Duckworth, 1908 pp.186-202.
 2. Mrs Pankhurst *The Importance of the Vote*. See also Margaret Macmillan in Villiers (ed) op cit p.118; report of a speech by Henry Harben n.d. Janie Allan Papers, ^{Acc. 4498} National Library of Scotland; Charlotte Despard, *Women's Franchise and Industry* loc cit; Evelyn Sharp's Notebook for 1909, a collection of material on the position of women, Bodleian Library Ms Eng Misc d669

teachers as an important source of recruitment, and a considerable amount of suffrage propaganda was directed specifically at this group. The unequal pay within the Civil Service also received attention in the speeches and writings of suffragists.¹

Another aspect of the problem of professional employment was the need for improved educational opportunities for girls, though there was a considerable range of opinion among suffragists as what constituted suitable education. Some argued that girls should receive exactly the same instruction as boys, for example in the area of physical education, while others tended to argue that women had specific aptitudes and interests which should be specially catered for in the education provided for girls. Noting the provision in a recent government Children's Charter to enable boys to train for entry to more worthwhile careers, one suffragist commented: "Its object is excellent, but it must not be allowed to deepen the impression that boys are *only* to be breadwinners and girls *only* to be mothers".²

Helena Swanwick similarly opposed education for marriage and motherhood:

If a girl's mind is caged and her education concentrated upon sex, it is not mothers ... you are rearing, but lunatics, deficient, hysterical and anaemic... A girl child is not a small woman, and just as we should all disapprove any attempt to make little fathers of the boys, so we should disapprove of the unhealthy endeavours to make "little mothers" of the girls.

The training of girls as breeders only would involve their complete subjection to men. She rejected utterly "the theory of the cow-woman".³

1. See Liddington and Norris op cit for account of the National Association of Professional Women for Women's Suffrage. On equal wages see Mrs Pankhurst *The Importance of the Vote*, Shillington op cit
 2. *The Common Cause*, 11 April 1913
 3. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, pp.148-152

Beyond the specific industrial and professional problems of women, suffragists also explored the issue of women's economic independence. While they believed that the achievement of independence by single women would be straightforward once they were armed with the vote, the situation of married women gave rise to another set of conflicts within suffragist ideas. Mrs Pankhurst referred to the experience of the married textile workers:

These women say a shilling that they have earned themselves is worth two shillings of their husband's money, for it is their own. They know far better than their husbands how much money is needed for food, how much is needed to be spent on the home...I do not think there is a woman in Lancashire who does not realise that it is better to earn an income of her own than to depend on her husband.

The well-to-do commonly provided nurses for their children, and why should not the working class woman?

We should like to say this to Mr John Burns (the Cabinet Minister who suggested restricting married women's work), that when women get the vote, they will take very much better care of babies than men have been able to do.¹

Nevertheless, many suffragists by this time had fully internalised the domestic stereotype of women's role, putting much stress on their concern for the well-being of the home and family. Working married women, then, presented them with a problem. On the one hand they recognised the importance of establishing some degree of economic independence for all women, including the married, but on the other they believed that working mothers often meant ill-kept homes and ill-nurtured children. Thus, while admiring the independence of the married textile workers, Mrs Pankhurst could also speak of "the gross injustice of making economic independence impossible to the woman who is giving her time, care and labour to that which is, or should be, most precious to

1. Mrs Pankhurst, *The Importance of the Vote*

the community — the life and well-being of the children".¹ Still, they fought the ideas of some middle class women associated with women's trade unionism, who sought the exclusion of child-bearing women from industry.

One such, Emilia Dilke, attacked the feminist position in that to argue that the Factory Acts

should under no circumstances take account of the differences of sex is to fight against indisputable facts which must in the end, prove too strong for us. There is no danger to society in the recognising of equal human rights for both sexes, if we are also ready to recognise the *divergence of their capabilities*, for the relations of men and women to each other, their functions in the family and the state, must ultimately be determined — however ill it may please the most ardent female reformer — by the operation of *natural law*.

She concluded

This principle lies at the bottom of all reasoned Trade Unionism, which, insofar as it is concerned with the organisation of women's work, has for its ultimate object the restoration of as many as possible to their post of honour as queens of the hearth.

Consequently, she argued that women's employment should be forbidden where the occupation endangered her child-bearing capacity, and that there should be limitations on work after childbirth.²

For the suffragists, Caroline Osler, a leading member of the National Union, rejected the idea that the needs of the race required such protection for mothers, adding

It is noteworthy, however, that the conception of legislative protection never goes beyond restrictions: no one proposes to supplement 'thou shalt not labour' by adding also, 'thou shalt be maintained'. Neither has it yet been proposed to hold an investigation into the habits of life of fathers, with a view to State interference with any outdoor pursuits of theirs which may tend toward physical danger to the race.

1. *ibid*
 2. Emilia Dilke, Preface to Amy Bulley and Margaret Whitley, *Women's Work* London: Methuen 1894, p.vii and xiii. See also pp.157-159

In support of working mothers Caroline Osler quoted the report of the Birmingham City Medical Officer for 1908 which showed that the infant mortality rate was 190 per 1000 where the mother was working, but 207 per 1000 where she was not.¹ Suffragists tended to see high infant mortality rates as a direct result of female poverty.

In her evidence to the Royal Commission on Divorce in 1912 Helena Swanwick opposed the suggestion that married women should be excluded from work outside the home: "I think the whole difficulty is that we are trying to keep women in the home and making the home intolerable. If you want to keep women in the home you must give them independence". She thought the existing Factory Act limitations on return to work following childbirth both unfair and unworkable. "It simply prevents them from working and does not give them any provision. I should like to see some system of maternal insurance. I agree with women being protected most emphatically, but I do not regard the law as protecting them adequately, because it does not give that maintenance". At present women had to evade the law as a matter of necessity. With a system of maternity insurance it would then be possible to extend the limitation on the return to work after childbirth.

Under the present system "the very fact of marriage" made women economically weak, and consequently she understood why working class women held on to their jobs whenever possible. Asked if she thought it better they should work than remain in the home, she replied: "Under the present conditions. I speak as I should feel myself. If I were a woman of that class I should want to have my own money".²

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1. *The Common Cause* 21 April 1910. See also Clementina Black, *Married Women's Work*, London: Women's Industrial Council, 1915 p.5
 2. Royal Commission on Divorce Vol.II Cd 6480 pp.462-5. See also Clementina Black's review of Dr Elizabeth Sloan Chesser, *Women, Marriage and Motherhood*, in *Sociological Review* Vol.7 1914 p.165, where she comments: "Housework, as it is among the conditions ordinarily existing in wage-earning families ought to be recognised by enlightened eugenicists as a trade unfit for mothers"

The economic dependence of women both within and upon marriage was one of the suffragists' main criticism of the existing situation. Mrs Pankhurst pointed out: "It entirely depends on her getting a good ticket to the lottery. If she has a good husband, well and good: if she has a bad one, she has to suffer, and she has no remedy".¹

Many feminists at this time took up a scheme suggested by H.G. Wells in 1908, the "endowment of motherhood", whereby the state ensured an income for women who had to stay within the home to care for their families. Mrs Fawcett appears to have supported a similar scheme. In her evidence to the Royal Commission on Divorce she asserted her belief that:

The position of the wife in the family would be improved if the economic value of her work in her household were recognised by giving her a claim, either to a definite sum as wages, or a proportion of her husband's wages during his life ... Their work is as essential to the wellbeing of the family and the State, but it is taken as a matter of course and its economic value is unrecognised.

Such a scheme, she believed, would discourage married women from working.

Social workers among the poor often speak of the harm that is done to home life by married women going out to work in factories for wages. I believe that the desire of the married women to earn wages in a factory would be very materially diminished if she received from her husband some definite share of his wages corresponding to the settlement made on wives by their husbands in the wealthier classes.

It would also serve to "elevate the position of the wife in the family".²

While Helena Swanwick did not give her support to this scheme she did want to see the law altered with regard to maintenance orders. Wives should be able to apply for such without first seeking a legal separation. "I should like to see the law altered so as to make the

1. Mrs Pankhurst op cit

2. R.C. Divorce loc cit p.373. This point was commented on in more detail in the evidence of a Metropolitan Magistrate and suffragist Cecil Chapman p.48

married women more independent, because I think she would stay in the home. We are now trying to keep women in the home. At the same time we are tightening up the dependence on the husband, and I think he is not fit for it".¹

A leading member of the Women's Freedom League, Edith How Martyn, went so far as to suggest that women should receive a wage for their housework (she suggested £2 5s for a 72 hour week). She argued that "At present most women's economic position is that of a blackleg ... In order to minimise blacklegging by women, we shall have to learn to value ourselves and our time, and to put a money-value on our work". She believed the emancipation of women would not come "until married women shouldered the responsibility of their economic independence".²

Thus while most suffragists wanted to see women remain within their homes once married, they were adamant that this situation could not be achieved at the price of their economic independence. They also sought the economic advancement of single women, and once again, exhibited a complex reaction to the use of state regulation and intervention to this end.

Suffragists accepted that marriage would dominate the adult lives of most women. They sought ways to secure their economic independence whilst occupied by child-rearing, but they also insisted that not all women were equally suited to this task: "It is a mere delusion to insist that in all cases, without exception, the mother is the best person to tend the babies".³ Meanwhile, Helena Swanwick argued, there were many women, who because of the unequal ratio of the sexes within the population, would never be enabled to marry, yet who

1. *ibid* pp.462-5. See also her discussion of the endowment of motherhood scheme in *Future of the Women's Movement*, pp.82-4
 2. *The Daily Herald*, 23 December 1912
 3. Swanwick, *Future of the Women's Movement*, p.145

probably desire intensely to be mothers, and would be good ones; but it is only when the egoistic male feels that the unmated woman may be active and content, that his sensitive vanity is up in arms, and he is dismayed at the notion of a woman, of her free choice, foregoing man. He is content there should be millions of spinsters, if only they are unhappy.¹

It was a common conceit of feminists of this period to refer to, and analyse, marriage as a trade, and the principal one open to all women. The most notable example of this was Cicely Hamilton's book *Marriage As A Trade*.² However, Cicely Hamilton went far beyond most suffragists when she located marriage as the root cause of women's oppression: "I hold and hold very strongly, that the narrowing down of women's hopes and ambitions to the sole pursuit of the sphere of marriage is one of the principle causes of the various disabilities, economic and otherwise, under which she labours today", so that now it had become practically compulsory for those women who were invited, to marry.³

Because a woman was denied access to equal economic opportunities, she was forced to exchange "the possession of her person for the means of existence" for "the housekeeping trade is the only one open to us".⁴ However, more and more women had found themselves forced to earn their own living, and in doing so "the horizon widened with a rush, and the implanted, hampering faith in our own poor parasitic uselessness began to wither at the root and die".⁵ It was now open to women to decide for themselves what their proper sphere should be, and to refuse if they wanted the life of marriage and domestic occupation.

Like Helena Swanwick she attacked the tendency to use women's education to create nothing more than an "unintelligent breeding machine

1. *ibid* p.146

2. Cicely Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade*, London: Chapman Hall, 1909

3. *ibid* p.6

4. *ibid* pp.14, 15

5. *ibid* p.24

... The strongest proof of the essential servility of woman's position".¹ She denied the existence of any natural division of labour. Though she accepted the likelihood that child-rearing would always come more easily to women, she argued that a large part of the world's work did not require qualities exclusive to either sex: "One is led to the conclusion that the idea of woman as wife and mother — and nothing else — must be of comparatively modern growth".² Consequently, she rejected "the parrot cry anent the sphere of women being the home; we could not listen to its chirping even if we would. For our stomachs are more insistent than any parrot cry, and they inform us that the sphere of woman, like the sphere of man, is the place where daily bread is to be obtained".³

Clementina Black looked forward to a time when child-rearing and household work would be taken over by trained experts and both husband and wife released for work outside the home, as preferable to a system which "relegated all women to the care of children combined with the care of households".⁴

But few suffragists would have endorsed such views. Most saw marriage as the necessary and natural life work of most women, and therefore sought only to improve women's conditions within it. The burden of both Helena Swanwick's and Mrs Fawcett's evidence to the Royal Commission on Divorce was their desire to strengthen the institution of monogamous marriage. Mrs Fawcett stressed: "I regard the permanence of the marriage tie as of the utmost importance both for the family and for the State". Helena Swanwick argued that "every marriage should be whatever else it is, a civil contract" particularly as, in her view working class couples "would find a civil marriage a rather more serious

1. *ibid* pp.48-9

2. *ibid* p.110

3. *ibid* p.168

4. Black, *Married Women's Work*, p.14

affair than going to church". She too held that "the law should be concerned as far as possible to preserve monogamy, as monogamy is the ideal at which we aim, and when it fails to secure monogamy it should admit that it has failed".¹ The present divorce laws, in allowing adultery to men, only served to encourage effective polygamy.

Elsewhere, when discussing marriage, Helen Swanwick insisted:

What is urgently needed is that the problem should be dealt with by men and women not in the spirit of bargaining, or endeavouring each to beat the other, but with a single endeavour to do right by one another and by the child. Nature has so arranged matters that the women cannot evade a considerable portion of the burden of parentage. Men can, and not infrequently do, evade the whole burden of parentage. Together all good men and women should so contrive their body politics that every child shall have the care and nurture it requires.

though she recognised that in this pursuit

the women may have to sacrifice liberty, genius, life itself.²

She did not see how women could ever compete on an equal basis with men in the economic world. Nor could they bear and support children unaided by men: "Such proposals depend on the evolution of a race of Super-women" and were utopian: "In this world of reality we must face the fact that women, for every child they bear, in health and strength are made less capable of producing exchange value (called wealth), and that not only motherhood, but potential motherhood, affects and always will affect the market value of a woman's work".³

The feminists of this period were seeking rather to improve the condition of women's lives within marriage. One aspect they paid considerable attention to was housework. The poor housing in which many women had to pursue their domestic work was a frequent theme in suffrage

1. R C Divorce Vol.II, loc cit pp.371, 459

2. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, pp.87-8

3. *ibid* p.69-70

discussions.¹ Helena Swanwick insisted that most women would prefer housework to any other: "It is not housework that so many women are revolting from. It is largely the horrible conditions under which so much housework had to be done".² She, alongside many other suffragists, argued that it was a quite separate function from child-care and looked to improved technology, greater specialisation and community provision to release women from many of its more tedious aspects. She also hoped that in the future, those women who so desired should have the possibility of sharing cooperative housekeeping and cooperative nursery provision, to release them for work which they found more rewarding.³

The Sexual Subjection of Women

From the late 1860s the feminist movement in Britain had close association with the social purity movement, notably in Josephine Butler's campaigns for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1870s and 1880s. These links developed even more strongly during the twentieth century suffrage campaigns, and reflected contemporary feminist concern with the sexual exploitation of women through commercialised vice. The associated problems of what was termed the White Slave Trade, and the spread of venereal diseases, both came to dominate suffrage propaganda between 1912-14.

These campaigns reflected a more general concern for social purity which became current at this time, provoked most immediately by growing

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1. e.g. Why Home-Keeping Women Want the Vote, *The Common Cause*, 16 May 1913
 2. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, pp.91, 93-4. See also *The Common Cause*, 28 Nov 1913, 13 Mar 1914
 3. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, pp.95-6. See also the article on Cooperative Housekeeping in *The Common Cause*, 12 Sept 1912, which argued that in the meantime where both husband and wife worked the housework should be shared. For wry reflections on this issue by a socialist suffragist, see Hannah Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up*, London: Virago reprint 1978 pp.96-7

medical concern on the spread of venereal infection, and by the scandal surrounding the Piccadilly Flat case in 1913 (the prosecuting of a brothel-keeper, Queenie Gerald, who apparently catered for the sadistic sexual tastes of a number of leading political and establishment figures). Whereas the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts campaigns had focused on the issue of civil liberties, the social purity campaigning of twentieth century suffragists explored wider issues concerning the sexual exploitation of women.

Many writers on the British suffrage movement have viewed this aspect of suffragist propaganda with considerable distaste, as reflecting the views of a few pathologically disturbed extremists only. These analyses have usually centred on the publication of Christabel Pankhurst's discussion of the spread of venereal disease in *The Great Scourge* in 1913.¹ Such assessments are unhelpful in that they do not explain why these issues should have become so important to so many reformers at this period, or what particular significance they held in feminist ideology at this time. While few may have subscribed to the more extreme of Christabel Pankhurst's assertions on these problems, there was undoubtedly a widespread fear of a rapid and widespread moral degeneration within British society, which was seen to have a particularly destructive impact on women.

The repeated difficulties met by Criminal Law Amendment Bills (to control various aspects of commercialised vice) within the House of Commons were sufficient to persuade suffragists that the future of social purity was closely tied with the outcome of their own demand. Linking their cause to these wider objects also enabled them to reach a far larger body of opinion than committed feminists.

1. e.g. Fulford, *Votes for Women*, pp.285-7; Rosen, *Rise Up Women*, Ch.17; Dangerfield, *The Strange Death*, p.184; O'Neill, *The Woman Movement*, London: Allen & Unwin 1969, pp.40-42; David Mitchell, *Queen Christabel*, London: Macdonald Janes, 1977, pp.227-30

For example, Walter McLaren, a leading suffragist MP, when addressing the annual meeting of the Ladies National Association in 1909, declared:

the root of prostitution was planted in the inferiority of the position of women... it was not merely the traffic in women which was the direct result of the inferior legal position of women, but it was the whole idea of sexual morality and prostitution that was based on this injustice. The fundamental error was that women existed for men and not for themselves.

The law confirmed this error by maintaining their inferiority. He urged the members of the Ladies National Association to work for women's suffrage.¹

W. Lyon Blease similarly linked the struggles for the vote with the fight for social purity: "The difference between racial and religious disabilities and sexual disabilities is that bound up with the latter is in no little uncleanness" in that it gave rise to "not only an economic oppression, but also a sexual degradation which is often worse than death". The vote was important for it would indicate the increased worth which society was prepared to put on women.²

The link between economic subjection and sexual oppression was a commonplace in suffragist thinking:

No discussion of the economic position of woman would be honest which did not take into account the undoubted fact that women can make more money by the sale of their bodies than in any other way .. every poor sweated girl knows she can in one night double her week's wages if she chooses. This is a fact. If we do not fearlessly face it, we may as well give up talking about the women's movement, for it will only be play.³

The sale and international movement of women for the purposes of commercialised vice — the White Slave Trade — was an aspect of this problem

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1. Walter McLaren, *The Equality of Women Before the Law*, a speech to the Annual Meeting of the Ladies National Association 25 May 1909, Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/34
 2. Blease op cit p.170
 3. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, pp.99-100.

which received particular attention.¹ The agitation centred on a proposed Criminal Law Amendment Bill (which also became known as the White Slave Trade Bill) introduced in 1912, which suffragists attempted to make an issue during by-elections.² In July of that year Mrs MacKrindy donated twentyfive percent of the profits of her book, *The White Slave Market*, to the suffrage cause: "Our only hope for progress and social reform is by making our influence felt in elections. The White Slave Traffic and other cruelties to women will never be killed or cured till we have the vote".³

As the issue began to gain public attention, suffragists experienced several attempts to censor their publications on the subject, as they had with their pamphlets on prostitution and venereal disease. *The Common Cause* noted, after an article on the White Slave Trade had provoked controversy over its publication: "Now that the paper is attacking with virility some abuses of modern life — and those abuses that are most apposite to the demand for the Suffrage — it seems some people would desire to have it burned and prevented from contaminating the twentieth century home".⁴

Its involvement with moral reform issues also provided the suffrage movement with a far wider source of possible support than simply committed feminists. At this time a variety of Church Leagues for Women's Suffrage were established, and churchmen became prominent on suffragist platforms. Speaking on the question of prostitution, one such (the Reverend R.J. Campbell) declared: "Broadly speaking, the man owns all

1. See e.g. George Kerschener Knight, *The Traffic in Women*, *The Common Cause*, 17 March 1910

2. See *The Common Cause*, 18 July 1912 for Hanley by-election campaign reports, and 20 June 1912, 22 November 1912 for progress, and demonstrations in support of, the Criminal Law Amendment Bill

3. Quoted in *The Common Cause*, 18 July 1912

4. *ibid* 16 Feb 1911

there is to own. Man is woman's capitalist. Women sell themselves to men because men have control of the sources of wealth. The stronger sex has a practical monopoly in the fields of politics and industry". The vote was essential to fight female poverty, the root cause of prostitution.¹

At a Women's Suffrage Service, in Edinburgh in 1911, the Reverend James Black stated his belief that with the women's vote:

The Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of peace, righteousness and purity, would be hastened thereby. Indeed, in my view, there are certain questions which perplex and agitate public life and morality which will never be adequately settled until the women of Britain had an opportunity to record their judgement .. When all is said and done, there is no-one so intimately concerned in the cleansing of our streets, in the safeguarding of innocent life, in the suppression of temptation, in the purity of national custom, in the cause of holy wars, in the advent of just social conditions, as are the mothers, the wives and the sisters of Britain.²

Such sentiments were summed up in the following suffrage hymn:

Thou whose coming broke the fetters
That of old upon us lay,
In our further fight for freedom,
Help the women of today:
Give us greater power for service,
Greater strength our part to play.

Sin and suffering, shame and sorrow,
Need and want against us stand;
Open ills and shrouded evils,
Breathe their poison o'er the land:
Lord that we may serve our country,
Put the weapon in our hand.³

The question of prostitution was clearly an emotive one for many women at this time. Maude Royden, a prominent organiser for the National

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1. Rev. R.J. Campbell, *Women's Suffrage and The Social Evil*, speech to the Men's League for Women Suffrage 17 December 1907, Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/5
 2. Rev. James Black, *Address to a Women's Suffrage Service*, Edinburgh 26 March 1914, Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/3
 3. *ibid*

Union, recalled reading Lecky's *History of European Morals*, which described the prostitute as "the high priestess" of society: "the knowledge that it is so set my latent feminism afire ... and showed me the real meaning of the suffrage movement."¹ Rather than disgust or anger with the prostitute, such suffragists saved their ire for a system which they felt safeguarded their own respectability at the cost of other women's misery. Thus Janie Allan, a wealthy supporter of the WSPU, explained her participation in a window-breaking raid as an expression of deep anger "because I know the horror and misery of the lives of thousands of women" (prostitutes) while MPs acted to block measures like the Criminal Law Amendment Bills, which sought to combat commercialised vice.² Another feminist and social purity worker, Dr Helen Wilson, insisted "So long as one woman is trampled under foot, and made an outcast for the supposed benefit of others, all womanhood is degraded".³

Helena Swanwick also argued against the habitual division of woman into good and bad: "this is unreal and tiresome and stupid and harmful enough", but it was only compounded by those who attempted to put "good" women on a pedestal.⁴ She defined prostitution as a woman's selling her body to a man for whom she had no love and concluded "we have to admit that there is a vast deal of prostitution within the married state".⁵

Suffragists linked prostitution with an increasing threat to married women through the spread of venereal diseases. They welcomed the

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1. Maude Royden, typescript autobiography *Bid Me Discourse*, p.62 Fawcett Library
 2. Undated notes in Janie Allan Papers loc cit
 3. Helen Wilson, *The Moral Revolution* in Zoe Fairfield (ed) *Some Aspects of the Women's Movement*, London: Student Christian Movement, 1915 p.126
 4. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, p.101
 5. *ibid* p.103

establishment of the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases in 1913, itself an indication of how widespread concern on this issue had become. Mrs Fawcett declined to sit on the Commission through pressure of suffrage work, but it did include three women, one of them the suffragist wife of Bishop of London, Mrs Creighton.¹ The evidence presented to the Commission indicated that women had a particular cause for concern regarding the diagnosis and treatment of venereal diseases.

For many women the public discussion of this problem was in itself a revelation. Many previously had had no knowledge of the existence, let alone the nature, of these diseases. The Royal Commission had plentiful evidence of the widespread ignorance on the matter, even among general practitioners.² A major advance in diagnosis, the Wasserman test, was still not universally available or utilised in many hospitals, while some general hospitals routinely refused to treat venereal disease, referring patients to the Lock wards of the Poor Houses. The evidence of the women doctors who spoke before the Commission provided further testimony of the deliberate attempts to keep back knowledge of these matters from women. The care of patients with venereal disease was still generally excluded from the training of nurses at this time. It was common for doctors not to inform married women patients of the nature of their infection, for fear of interfering in the husband/wife relationship.³ Nor was there a regular procedure at hospitals for contacting the husbands of women being treated for one of these diseases.

1. See copy of a letter from Mrs Fawcett to Asquith 13 September 1913, CMP. The Commission included three women, Mrs Creighton, Mrs Burgwin and Dr Scharlieb

2. Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases Appendix to the first Report 1914 Cd 7475, evidence of Dr Helen Wilson p.178

3. *ibid* evidence Dr Florence Willey, pp.392-401. See also the discussion between Dr Scharlieb and Dr Wilson pp.187-8, and Dr Jane Walker's evidence to the R.C. on Divorce *loc cit* Vol.III p.25

Medical opinion at the time held a surprisingly high proportion of gynaecological cases to be the result of venereal infection,¹ and at least one of the doctors from a women's hospital who gave evidence reported that "practically all our gonorrhoeal cases are infected married women. The cases are quite few really in any woman in the prostitute classes".² Venereal infections were also held responsible for a high proportion of the considerable infant mortality rate prevailing at this time, as well as a number of serious childhood ailments. Dr Florence Willey estimated that about thirty three percent of the still births at her hospital were the result of syphilis.³ The final report of the Commission estimated that the number of syphilitic cases among the population of the large cities "cannot fall below ten percent" while gonorrhoeal infection "must greatly exceed this proportion". In the light of such evidence from the experts of the day, whether accurate or not in hindsight, the contemporary reaction of suffragists no longer seems unreasonable nor extreme.⁴

The debate on venereal disease provided suffragists with an even more acute sense of the sexual oppression of women. Reflecting on this problem Helena Swanwick wrote:

It is possible to tell devoted ignorant wives that it is their part to endure all and never to refuse. Medical men have kept silence, priests have preached and lawyers have advised submission and ignorant mothers have handed on these precepts to their daughters. 'La femme est nee pour souffrir'. But when she gets to know that the sacrifice is depriving her of motherhood and poisoning the children to come, how then? Will she be so much in love with sacrifice? (She stressed) healthy girls are not sterile and the causes of sterility

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1. Dr Florence Willey estimated that at least 11.6% of her hospital's gynaecological cases were the result of venereal infection. The Commissioners thought this rather a low estimate.
 2. R.C. Divorce Vol.III Cd6481 contains evidence on this issue from several women doctors
 3. R.C. Venereal Diseases loc cit p.391
 4. Final Report of the R.C. Venereal Diseases Cd8189

are not to be found in the women's movement.¹

Once again suffragists insisted that infant mortality rates reflected further evidence of women's oppression rather than the fact that many mothers worked.

Christabel Pankhurst's *The Great Scourge* is the best known expression of a significant aspect of the debate on venereal disease, namely its evident anti-male stance. The statistics which she used on the extent of venereal disease among men led Christabel Pankhurst to conclude that women would be wise to avoid marriage and choose the celibate life. At this same time long-time male supporters were being discouraged from continuing their association with the WSPU and the WSPU slogan became "Votes for Women and Chastity for Men".²

But it would appear that such attitudes were not particular to the militant wing of the movement. A National Union organiser from this time, Wilma Meikle, later recalled the prevalence of such attitudes, particularly among the older generation of suffragists.

These were the women who crammed their shelves with pamphlets on venereal diseases, who suspected all their male acquaintance of harbouring venereal taint, who hounded the clergy to hold 'purity' meetings in every big town, who collected stories of that White Slave Traffic whose truth is now buried fathoms deep beneath a surge of legends. These were the women who regarded the majority of men as conscious and wilful oppressors.³

On Wilma Meikle's account the attitude of the younger women was very different, although they came by their sexual education in haphazard ways:

Young women at the universities poured over their work and at last came out into the world earnestly

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1. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, pp.17-18. See also pp.1, 4-5
 2. See *The Suffragette* for August and September 1912, and Sylvia Pankhurst's account of the campaign in *The Suffragette Movement*, London: Virago (reprint) 1977 pp.521-3
 3. Wilma Meikle, *Towards a Sane Feminism*, London: Grant Richards 1916, pp.84-5

convinced that there was something certainly wonderful and possibly glorious about the mystery called sex and that it was their business to discover it.

Having been taught little enough at home and school,

some of them went to the British Museum with large notebooks like those they had been accustomed to take to university lectures, and soulfully took notes of books — chosen quite without system — on physiology and certain branches of medical science. Others who were occupied in social work learnt much from the sexual woes of the poor. And some who still cherished a university-bred enthusiasm for the suffrage cause discovered that, whether they sold papers in the streets or canvassed householders or addressed meetings, they were certain to have stories of erotic troubles poured out to them by suffering women, and not seldom by men. Questions of sex were continually dashed against their consciousness; it was impossible to escape them.¹

It seems then that the anti-male attitudes which social purity campaigns appear to have encouraged were not restricted to the militants, but may have reflected a division of views between the older and the younger generations of suffragists. Certainly the debate surrounding social purity issues appear to have led many suffragists to consider the nature of human sexuality, an issue on which their views often diverged quite considerably, and on which significant changes occurred during this period. In a pamphlet entitled *Homo Sum* one anonymous suffragist attempted to explore the differences in male and female sexuality. The style is stilted, sometimes mystical, and it is not always easy to divine her meaning, nevertheless her conclusion was clear. Female sexuality was essentially passive, and potentially dangerous; in man "his form of sex self-feeling is dominant and positive; woman's is more usually submissive and negative .. woman, qua woman, qua *sex*, is in subjection".

She denied that this was any reason for withholding the vote from women, and warned Anti-Suffragists against their frequent stress on the

1. *ibid* pp.87-8

need for women to remain womanly: "To be womanly is one thing, and one only; it is to be sensitive to man, to be highly endowed with the sex instinct". Consequently to urge womanliness was to "urge her to emphasize her sensitiveness, already perhaps, over-keen, to force her attentions on an element in life which nature has already made quite adequately prominent. We intend to urge her to be refined, we are in peril of inviting her to be coarse".¹

In contrast Helena Swanwick dismissed the existing "semi-savage taboos" which prevented an open discussion of such issues. She argued against the common wisdom which held that sexual intercourse was "necessary for the health of men, and that if they cannot have enough of it within marriage, it is necessary that they should have it outside marriage .. The truth is that sexual intercourse is as necessary for women as for men". The opportunity of bearing children was just as much a part of the wider scope which feminists desired for women as opportunities at present restricted to men. Consequently, she opposed the enforced chastity which was the lot of so many spinsters, both for their sake and for the sake of the prostitutes who were said to exist to satisfy men's supposed greater sexual needs.

If social conditions were altered, should we not find that a large number of women at present unmarried would be willing to enter into relations of love and affection with men, and might not this greatly diminish the 'necessity' for prostitutes? We can most of us imagine a state of things infinitely preferable to the present, in which the virginity of some three and a quarter millions of women is secured by the holocaust of the remaining quarter of a million, and all the attendant evils and disasters to the rest of humanity.²

However such views were far in advance of those held by many other suffragists, and one wonders whether Millicent Garrett Fawcett had read

1. *Homo Sum, a letter from an Anthropologist to an Anti-Suffragist*, no publisher no date, Glasgow University Sp Coll f255/29
 2. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, pp.106-7

the whole of Helena Swanwick's book before agreeing to write the introduction. Sexual liberation was also preached by a new feminist journal, *The Freewoman* (later *The New Freewoman*, then *The Egoist*) from 1911. When the Anti-Suffragists attempted to "smear" Mrs Fawcett by claiming her association with this new paper, she retorted that she had only ever seen one copy, sent to her anonymously, on which occasion "I looked it through, thought it objectionable and mischievous, and tore it up into small pieces".¹

The Freewoman was started by two former — and disaffected — organisers of the WSPU, Mary Gawthorpe and Dora Marsden. Its correspondence columns reveal the attitudes of some of the more progressive suffragists on a number of issues, in response to the journal's attempt to open up discussion on the nature of sexuality, the significance of birth control possibilities for feminists, the part played by the institutions of monogamous marriage and the family in the subjection of women, and possible alternatives.² While it is clear that some contemporary feminists welcomed this new departure, ~~that~~^{ey} did not always necessarily concur with the editorial position on such issues. There was considerable controversy on the nature of female sexuality, the desirability of widespread access to birth control information and technology and similar matters.³ Other suffragists expressed considerable disgust with the paper as a whole and many subscriptions were withdrawn after only the first few issues.⁴

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1. Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, p.236. See also Mrs Fawcett's evidence to the R.C. on Divorce loc cit on her view of the impact of recent "socialist novels" in this matter
 2. I am grateful to Helen Rugen, Edinburgh University for helpful discussions on the developing ideas about sexuality in this period. See also Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and The New Life*, London: Pluto, 1977
 3. *The Freewoman*, 21, 28 December 1911, 11 January 1912
 4. *ibid* 21 December 1911

Cecily Hamilton provides one example of an advanced feminist of this time who nonetheless shared the more repressive view of sexuality which was general among suffragists. In contrast to Helena Swanwick she believed that celibacy was a preferred state for most women,

and I will admit frankly that I am exceedingly glad that it seems, in these days, to suit so many women .. not because the single life appears better than the married, but because I believe that the conditions of marriage, as they affect women, can only be improved by the women who do without marriage and do without it gladly.

She believed that such widespread celibacy among women would put an end to male sex ascendancy inasmuch as it would encourage women to secure their economic independence, break down the division of labour within the home and re-adjust wage scales.¹

The evidence provided by the suffragists' campaign undoubtedly suggests a widespread rejection of their own sexuality among the women of this generation. Evidence by women to the Royal Commission on Divorce testifies that many women experienced in marriage both economic and sexual subjection. There was a genuine fear of the repeated child-bearing which was the lot of so many, with the physical and mental ill-health and the increased poverty which frequently accompanied the birth of a child.²

Nonetheless suffragists stressed the need to strengthen monogamous marriage and women's situation within it. For example, one suffragist warned of "the trail of evil" which would follow any tendency to polygamy: "What is wanted is a higher and fuller ideal of monogamous family life". She argued that in the tendency "for late marriage and for the

1. Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade*, pp.205-7

2. R.C. Divorce Vol. III Cd6481, pp.149-173, evidence of Margaret Llewellyn Davies and Elizabeth Barton for the W.C.G. For comparison see Nancy Cott, *Passionlessness; an interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology*, *Signs* Vol.4, 1978, pp.219-236

undue limitation of families, there is the most real danger to family life".¹ Other suffragists, while upholding the ideal of conventional marriage, argued for women's right to voluntary motherhood.

In an article entitled "Motherhood" in *The Common Cause* the writer stated that "Women are placed in such sex-slavery when they marry that the mistress is safer than the housewife. The wife may be forced to bear children at the will of another. Could there be a more inconceivable desecration of all that is divine in us, than reluctant motherhood?"² On a similar note, another suffragist, Mildred Ransome, while discussing the London dock strike reported "Two of the burning questions of the day cropped up continually, the birth rate and the death rate .. What is the good of bringing children into the world if they perish by starvation, and calling for more and more children if those that are born cannot find a better fate than to die of inanition".³

Nonetheless, there was considerable hostility to the increasing use of artificial birth control methods. The correspondence in *The Freewoman* showed that most feminists still regarded abstention as the only right means of birth control. Part of the suffragists' desire for greater control over their own bodies was reflected in their demand for increased sex education to start in childhood. Helena Swanwick saw this as an essential pre-requisite for women's emancipation. She claimed "the women's movement is one to open the doors of the world to women that they may know the nature of their own bodies (to every mother her

1. Fairfield op cit pp.188, 192
 2. *The Common Cause* 18 July 1912
 3. *ibid*

workshop) and the bodies of men their mates".¹ Many hoped that such education would also lead men to make fewer sexual demands on their wives.

It is clear then that Edwardian feminists felt particularly oppressed in the matter of their sexuality, and that this was reflected both in their attitudes to vice and to marriage. A writer in *The Common Cause* insisted:

It is impossible to show the depth and moral passion of the women's liberation movement without showing the root at once of women's weakness and women's strength. Mere sex is the ground of her disability. How can one deal effectively with the one unless one speaks truly and candidly of the other? .. all the questions of women's economic, legal, and political subjection, the future of the race, the hope of humanity, are involved in the question whether the rival trades of prostitution and of marriage are those alone which shall be open to women.²

Helena Swanwick, in similar vein, wrote that while emancipation would not remove women's sex attraction, the conditions of society should be such as to make it possible for women to be independent of their attraction of men .. What the progressive women deprecate is that all their chances in life should be dependent on sexual charm, and some of them badly crave for a rest from sex, and they desire to be just broadly human.

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1. e.g. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, pp.14, 108, 202. A sense of women's sexual exploitation seems to have sometimes informed adherence to militancy e.g. Mary Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance*, London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1953 p.12, remembered of her paper-selling activities for the WSPU: "The sex filth which elderly men in particular seemed determined to inflict on us was the most hateful part of my daily experience .. Months of filthy remarks and rotten fruit and vegetables reduced me to a state of depression". Of her first involvement in window-breaking she recalled: "I had never broken a window in my life; but the experience made me into a militant. In a sense I was glad to hit back, to hit out at anything if I could in some way express my detestation of all the filthy remarks I had had to listen to".
 2. *The Common Cause*, 14 April 1910

She continued:

Men cannot deny that women need food, like men, and that women catch infectious diseases, like men, and that women, like men, need satisfaction for their sexual nature, although by their action men sometimes do not demonstrate their knowledge. But there are other needs — of the human spirit — less demonstrable, which women have as much as men .. Now, if sex is so tremendously strong in women, it cannot be necessary artificially to nurse it and to render all activities impossible; if it is not so predominant after all, but women are whole human beings, just as men are, with all sorts of capacities, then it is cruel to endeavour to restrict them against their nature, and must, in the long run be injurious to them and the whole of society.¹

From this discussion of the ideas of the twentieth century women's suffrage movement it is clear that British feminism at this time was not always coherent and was sometimes contradictory in its statements about women and society. The acceptance of sexist interpretations of women's qualities and attitudes, based on their maternal function, was something inherited from the late nineteenth century suffrage campaigns. But these feminists had also inherited the ideas of Mill and Wollstonecraft and consequently also held sometimes contradictory, universalistic arguments for women's emancipation.

Helena Swanwick expressed the problem thus: "Women in the movement often wished that the word humanist had not been appropriated, because it would far more properly connote the women's movement than the word feminist".² She bemoaned the lack of a word in the English language to correspond with the Latin 'homo', adding: "I have not used the neuter, lest it should alarm nervous persons. Perhaps when we have got over the panic fear of unsexing ourselves, we may find it safe to speak of a human, just as we do of a baby, as it".³

1. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, pp.127, 160, 166
 2. *ibid* p.vii
 3. Swanwick, *I Have Been Young*, p.207

But while it is clear that much suffragist propaganda adopted a sexual stereotype of women, this did not prevent the development of a sharp and clear feminist perspective on many issues confronting women at that time, notably in their exploration of women's economic and sexual exploitation. To point to their general acceptance of monogamous marriage as a failing is not to take into account the historical situation of such women. At a time when women's economic opportunities were still severely limited, marriage offered the only respectable goal for most. Nor were suffragists lax in working out a considerable critique of women's position within marriage. Institutionalised monogamy was simply a sensible demand for women who felt themselves particularly vulnerable through their sexuality, and economic weakness.

Similarly, although suffragists by and large accepted the domestic role for women, they also demanded a far wider sphere of activity, and continued to deny the existence of a barrier between domestic and public concerns. They were also exploring ways in which to reform the domestic sphere, and to release women from its more arduous burdens. Their acceptance of a degree of sex-stereotyping had led them to argue for "the feminisation of democracy", both to right women's wrongs and to achieve a total reform of society. In this way the association of feminism with broader social reform issues not only sharpened suffragist critiques of patriarchy but also encouraged the increasing democratisation of the suffrage movement. Middle class and working class women were able to locate common concerns in issues related to their economic and sexual exploitation. Middle class feminism came to see more clearly the necessary link between general social progress and the advance of women's interests.

The ideas discussed in this chapter were common to both wings of the suffrage movement, constitutional and militant, and there is no evidence that an adherence to the tactics of the WSPU or WFL signified

a more progressive ideological commitment. Indeed militants like Christabel Pankhurst and Cecily Hamilton seem to have taken a more repressive line on matters concerning women's sexuality than did some constitutionalists like Helena Swanwick. Both constitutional and militant suffragists developed a considerable critique of patriarchy. In this respect Helena Swanwick's prose may have been more measured than Christabel Pankhurst's, but it was no less telling:

If to some reasonable and civilised men it may seem that I have given undue importance to the foolishness and barbarisms of another kind of men, I would ask those men to remember that these are among our masters and we may not ignore them ... We might like to treat them with the contempt they deserve but we have at present to live under their laws that they help to make. Doubtless, when we are free, we shall suffer fools more gladly than we do now, having less to fear from them.¹

Finally, by 1914 some among the more progressive suffragists were already in the process of questioning their ideological inheritance, and beginning to challenge the sexist assumptions which underlay such suffragist propaganda. As the demand for the vote increasingly neared success, they began to challenge existing feminist orthodoxy, and to explore how suffragism related to a wider feminist commitment. While this led these dissidents to emphasize sexual and economic liberation, nonetheless, mainstream feminism in Britain continued to see motherhood as the central experience in most women's lives. This was the suffrage movement's ideological legacy for inter-war feminism.²

1. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, p.xi
 2. See Conclusion for further discussion of this point.

PART TWO: ASPECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

CHAPTER 3 : THE ORGANISATION OF THE NATIONAL UNION
OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES

The twentieth century women's suffrage movement was not simply the creation of a few charismatic personalities, and a somewhat noisy campaign. Rather it reflected the growing involvement of feminists in the wider politics of social reform. It was not only that suffragists now linked their demand with the cause of social reform in their speeches and propaganda, but also that this involvement encouraged the adaptation of suffrage organisation and tactics to such political forces as mass party politics and the rise of Labour. The course of the National Union's development was central to such processes.

This chapter begins with a short account of the circumstances leading to the foundation of the National Union, and continues with a more detailed investigation of its organisational characteristics. Particular attention will be devoted to the National Union's constitutional structure, the process of organisational growth at both central and local level, the importance of links with other social reform groups, and the scope and nature of various forms of National Union propaganda, including its weekly journal, *The Common Cause*.

It is argued in the course of the next three chapters that twentieth century suffragist activity represented a development beyond the exclusive reliance of nineteenth century suffragists on parliamentary lobbying, conducted by a small elite of middle class women on behalf of equalitarian reform. The new generation of suffragists increasingly came to realise that the framework of their demand, and the construction of their organisations had to become relevant to a wider body of support.

The 1888 Split among Suffragists

It was dissatisfaction with the nature of existing suffragist organisation which caused dissension among suffragists in the late 1880s, and a challenge to the leadership of Lydia Becker.

Controversy had first arisen when suffragist leaders decided to specifically exclude married women from their proposed amendment to the 1884 Reform Bill.¹ With the failure of even this restricted demand at least some of the major suffrage bodies began to experience a falling away of support, and considerable financial difficulties.²

In late 1888 an attempt was begun to re-orientate the support of the suffrage demand by recommending a change of rules for the Central Committee for Women's Suffrage, the overall liaising body of the various independent local societies. The dissidents desired to open up membership of the Central Committee to other women's organisations with wider aims than solely women's suffrage, and thus draw on a broader base of support.

One speaker on behalf of this new direction asserted that "women's temperance work, work on behalf of the young and on behalf of education, had been a far greater advocate for women's suffrage in the country than anything done by the Women's Suffrage Society in London". Another argued that if suffragists "looked at the Arbitration Society, the Peace Society, the Temperance Society and other organisations, they could not but hope that they would, by being represented on their committee, add great force and potency to it".³

These changes to the constitution of the Central Committee were opposed by Lydia Becker, with the support of Millicent Fawcett, on the grounds that they were simply the work of "party wire-pullers" and the "caucus managers" of the Liberal Party, who sought to bring the suffrage

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1. See the discussion of this development of the Annual meeting of the Central Committee, *The Women's Suffrage Journal* Vol.16 1885 p.127
 2. While the Manchester Society had been able to raise over £2000 in 1884, its income had dropped to £756 in 1887. No figures were published for 1888 but a liability of £149 was announced. The figures for the Central Committee show a similar decline, see the *Women's Suffrage Journal* reports of the annual meetings, Vols 15, 18 and 19 for the relevant years
 3. *ibid* Vol.20 1889 p.12

societies under the control of the recently formed Women's Liberal Federation.¹ In their view it was essential that suffrage organisations remain non-party.

It is true that when a new suffrage body arose out of this controversy, The Central National Society for Women's Suffrage, it was dominated by many active Liberal Party workers, and that a large number of women's Liberal Associations affiliated to it. But it is also significant that Lydia Becker referred to the new suffrage society as representing the "left wing" and "extremist section" of the suffrage movement. In particular she saw its abolition of the marriage disqualification from its demand as an "uncalled for and gratuitous obstruction to the main cause".²

Lydia Becker died in 1890, and the suffrage demand lost one of its most dedicated workers, together with *The Women's Suffrage Journal* which she had edited. For a time, too, it looked as if the important Manchester National Society, which she had founded, might be wound up. In the meantime, the links between the women's suffrage and other social reform movements which were to determine in large part the nature of suffragism in the twentieth century continued to develop.

The Formation of the National Union

The first fully national suffrage organisation was created in 1897, with the formation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Previously suffrage campaigns had been organised through a number of

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1. See report in *The Women's Suffrage Journal* Vol.20, 1889 p.7-15. A history of the Central Committee and a discussion of the proposed changes can be found *ibid* Vol.19 1888 pp.110-118
 2. *The Women's Suffrage Journal* Vol.26 1889 p.49. Manchester, Bristol and North of England Societies remained affiliated to the Central Committee, Edinburgh Society affiliated to the Central Society while other societies like Birmingham remained neutral

autonomous suffrage societies centred on the larger cities, and co-ordinated through the Central Committee in London.

The formation of the National Union arose from the renewal of suffragist activity in the mid 1890s. The various suffrage societies began to revive with the collection of a new national petition for women's suffrage, The Special Appeal, which was commenced in 1892. Through this work, old disagreements were forgotten, and suffrage organisation began to develop once more. The Special Appeal campaign resulted in the collection of 25,700 signatures.

There were further indications of a revival of interest in the suffrage issue. In 1892, Rosalind, Countess of Carlisle, the President of the Women's Liberal Federation, had refused Gladstone's request to further shelve the women's suffrage issue. A split had then occurred among women Liberals, and while the Women's Liberal Federation began to press the suffrage cause, another group in the newly-formed National Women's Liberal Association, continued to hold aloof from the demand.

The women's suffrage issue was also attracting the attention of other groups of women. The recently formed Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG), at its Annual General Meeting 1894, had passed a resolution calling for women's suffrage and had organised a petition among its members.¹ This represented one of the earliest initiatives among working class women.

When in 1897 a private member bill passed its second reading with a majority of 71, suffragists were sufficiently encouraged to come together for a renewed effort, and the National Union was formed, under

1. Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics*, pp.164, 141 Catherine Webb *Woman With a Basket*, Manchester: Coop. Wholesale Society 1927 p.97

the leadership of Millicent Fawcett.¹ The new body was to be non-party — those suffragists who had previously led the split in the old Central Committee over the affiliation of the Women's Liberal Federation, had by now given up hope of achieving suffrage through the Liberal Party alone. Only specifically suffrage societies might affiliate to the new organisation.

The object remained equal votes for women on the existing property franchise. Recent changes in the married women's property laws whereby a married woman might hold property in her own right, and in the local government franchise, meant that married women were now beginning to find their way on to local registers. Their specific inclusion or exclusion from the demand was effectively no longer a controversial issue among suffragists as their ability to vote was now a political reality. Nonetheless, future conflicts were to arise over very similar areas — the National Union's identification with the interests of the Liberal Party, and the position of married working class women in relation to the equal suffrage demand.

Membership was open to any who supported the objects of the National Union, including men. Both the militant societies, by contrast, were to limit their membership to women only. Men had been prominent in the leadership of the earlier suffrage societies, and this remained the case within the National Union for its first few years. Gradually, however they became excluded from the national leadership, although men remained prominent in some of the branch societies, and the advice of, for

1. The founding societies were the Central and East of England Society, the Central and West of England Society, the Birkenhead and Wirral Society, the Birmingham Society, The Bristol and West of England Society, the Liverpool Society, the Luton Women's Franchise Association, the Nottingham and District Society, the Sligo Society, the Southport and District Society, the North of England Society, NUWSS Annual Report 1897. Since this research was undertaken the fullest run of NUWSS Annual Reports, in the Fawcett Library, has been lost.

example, male politicians and influential journalists continued to be sought.

Over the course of the next decade the National Union was to evolve a complex, democratic constitution through which it bound together an ever-increasing network of branches. Gradually organisations expanded out from the larger centres of population, until even a quite small Highland town like Rothes might boast a National Union branch society. No region proved totally resistant to suffrage organisation. Some of the major provincial societies became increasingly important, e.g. Manchester and Newcastle, both in providing a new generation of suffrage leadership, and in significantly influencing the formation of central National Union policy.

The National Union's growth was achieved in a number of ways: through the organisation of large public demonstrations and meetings (activities more usually associated with the WSPU); intensive educational campaigns at all levels of the community; and finally through the maintenance of its links with other women's social and political organisations.

In contrast the WSPU centred its activity on the larger cities alone, was autocratically governed (i.e. it had no constitution and policy was decided at leadership level, with no reference back to the membership) and developed largely independently of other women's groups. In its early days it had a close association with the labour and socialist movement, though this was gradually eroded, at least at leadership level.¹

The discussion of National Union growth which follows will draw on material concerning three major National Union Societies, in Manchester, Glasgow and London, as well as the records of its national headquarters. All three societies have left some internal records, and provide inter-

1. Rosen, *Rise Up Women*, for a full study of the WSPU's organisational development.

sting contrasts and comparisons,¹ The Manchester and Glasgow Societies were later to lead opposing wings of the National Union in the discussions concerning the formulation of its policy with regard to the Labour Party.

The Constitution and Government of the National Union

During the first few years the Executive of the National Union was composed of representatives from each society in the Union and administered the central work of the organisation — largely at this time parliamentary lobbying, the issuing of occasional leaflets, and co-ordination of the activities of local suffrage societies. A general meeting of delegates from each of the affiliated societies met once a year. For the first few years the individual societies of the National Union remained largely autonomous in directing their own activities, and the central body effectively had little power beyond advising programmes of work.²

Up to 1906 one member from each society was delegated to sit on the Executive, which then elected the officers. After 1906 the Executive Committee and Officers of the National Union were elected by direct ballot of the membership for a period of one year. As well as the

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1. The records of the North of England Society consist of a minute book for 1912-14, and an almost complete run of annual reports, both in the Manchester Public Library Archives Dept. Glasgow Society records consist of a full set of minute books in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, though no annual reports appear to have survived for the pre-First World War period. London Society records consist of some minute books and some annual records in the Fawcett Library.
 2. For a while the issuing of an annual report from the central body even appears to have been suspended, the local societies preferring to issue their own individual reports. Instead, it was recommended that Head Office issue only "occasional papers", NUWSS Executive Mins 6 November 1902, 4 December 1902. The NUWSS Executive Minutes (incomplete) are held at the Fawcett Library. Copies of odd Minutes are also to be found among the papers of Millicent Garrett Fawcett, (henceforth MGFP) in the Fawcett Library, and Catherine Marshall (henceforth CMP) at the Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle

Annual Meeting, to which societies sent delegates to discuss National Union policy, there were to be three further quarterly Council Meetings.¹

The tremendous expansion experienced by the National Union between 1906 and 1909 — from 31 to 130 branch societies — led to the introduction of internal re-organisation through the formation of federations, whereby the societies within an area formed joint committees to improve the co-ordination of work in those areas. In 1910 the constitution was amended to take account of this new development, laying down rules for the formation and government of federations of local societies within the National Union. These federations organised an area agreed between the local societies involved and the National Union Executive. Each federation appointed a committee which had to include representatives from each affiliated society and at least one member of the National Union Executive. This member would have no voting rights on the committee unless she also represented one of the societies within the federation.

The two quarterly meetings of the National Union Council which fell between the Annual meeting and the Half-yearly meeting were now given over to the Provincial Council. This Council was composed of the National Union Executive and three members elected annually by each federation, at least one of whom was an officer of that federation. It held the same powers and functions as the General Council, except the power to change National Union policy. The aim of these changes was to improve liaison and cooperation between branches and facilitate the formation of further branches, as well as bringing the National Union Executive into better contact with opinion within the branches. By 1910 fifteen federations had been established. By 1913 the federations

1. NUWSS Annual Report 1907; NUWSS Executive Minutes 7 December 1905

had also undertaken the function of initiating and conducting election work in their areas, according to the policy ~~laid~~ laid down by the National Union General Council.¹

The National Union for all its democratic machinery, was to see a continual struggle between head office and the local societies for control of the suffrage campaigns. It is clear that the constitutional recognition of federations of local societies within the National Union represented part of this continuing struggle. Catherine Marshall, of the Keswick Society, who was later to become one of the National Union's most creative and competent leaders, had put an amendment supporting the principle of federations at The National Union Council in March 1910. She clearly had the support of the Birmingham Society, whose secretary suggested that she and Catherine Marshall should take the work of organising the new federation scheme off the hands of the National Union's head office, and outlined a plan of the work that would be involved. She wrote:

It is a horrible thought that a plan of organisation, which really could do so much is left to be carried out by people who either do not like it, or do not know what it means.²

Catherine Marshall also had the support of at least one member

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1. The NUWSS's General Council consisted of the Executive, the Honorary Secretary of each Federation, and duly elected representatives from each affiliated society, the number depending on the size of the society's membership — one representative for between 20 and 49 members, two for between 50 and 99 members, three for a membership between 100 and 199, and one additional representative for every 100 members thereafter. See NUWSS Annual Reports 1909 1910 and 1913 for the Rules, as amended at the annual meeting 21st February 1913, and *The Common Cause* 24 March 1910, 21 April 1910, 28 April 1910 for a discussion of the construction and purpose of the National Union's Councils and their meetings. The Federations formed by 1912 were Eastern Counties; Kentish; Manchester and District, Midlands East; Midlands West; North and East Ridings of Yorkshire; North-Eastern; North Western; Oxford, Berks and Bucks; South Wales; South Western; Surrey, Sussex and Hants; West of England; West Leics, West Cheshire and North Wales; West Riding of Yorkshire; Scottish
 2. E.M. Gardner, Secretary of the Birmingham and Midlands Women's Suffrage Society, to Catherine Marshall 22 March (1910) CMP

of the Executive, Maude Royden (only newly elected), who wrote:

I dare say the National Union will never realise what a debt it owes to you for your amendment — or only some of the rarer sort will.

She was prepared to be the Executive member on Catherine Marshall's local federation but added,

I am a little anxious about the working of this device. If it brings the Executive into touch with the societies it will be very much to the good. But if you want to discuss things *without* your Executive member is she obliged to be present? I am hoping either that you need not summon her (me) unless you wish it; or that you will feel yourselves free to hold part of your meeting before I put in an appearance. Don't you think this would be wise? Or am I imbued with too great a distrust of the Executive? It did strike me as appallingly out of touch with the Council the other day.¹

The National Union federations were to prove an extremely effective organisational focus, but as these letters predicted they were also to become alternative centres of power to that of the Executive, and this was to lead to important challenges over policy in the future.²

The strong autonomy demanded by National Union societies was particularly clear in regard to the finances. The National Union had two levels of funding. Nationally, the work of its head office was supported by subscriptions from its branch societies, but more importantly by special appeals for specific campaigns. Locally, the branch societies also raised their incomes by subscription and special appeals, and played an important part in raising the special funds established by the head office for national work. Nonetheless, the shortage of funds for the work of the central body is a constant theme in the National Union's earlier annual reports. In 1907 the Treasurer pointed out that the only

1. Maude Royden to Catherine Marshall, 23 March 1910, CMP

2. Most clearly seen in the work of the Election Fighting Fund, see below, Chs. 7 and 9

regular income for the central body was less than £100 in membership fees, and that a more realistic regular income had to be established. In 1908 the income from subscription had risen to £500, but the greater part of the head offices expenses had to be found from donations and special appeals. It was estimated that £10,000 would be needed for the following year's work as the National Union's growth necessitated more organisers and other staff. By 1909 the Treasurer was calling for £20,000 if the existing rate of development was to be maintained.¹

The local autonomy of the National Union's societies also made it difficult to assess its total income. In 1912 Mrs M.P. Stanbury, the Chairman of the Finance Committee, wrote in *The Common Cause*:

We are constantly asking and hoping that our 400 societies will send us short statements of accounts, that we may publish a truer report of the income and expenditure of the Union. Our work becomes increasingly decentralised. The formation of the Federations within the Union and their rapid development have done much to stimulate local activity in all directions. From some of the Federations come full and interesting annual reports, but their balance sheets no more show the financial position of the societies than do our Central accounts. In annual subscription the National Fund is notably poor. Much as the Finance Committee would like to have a fuller and steadier list of annual subscribers, it is not, perhaps to be wondered at that we live largely on donations to the various funds for specific purposes opened during the year. To get any true idea of our regular subscription list we ought to hear once a year from every society in the Union, and I seize this opportunity to urge again every secretary to help in this respect.²

This was never achieved and the figures which the National Union published of the total income from 1908 were estimates calculated on the basis of those societies which did send in full figures.

Nevertheless, as the National Union grew in resources and scale of activity the functions and influence of the central body expanded far beyond its original sphere of co-ordinating the work of a number of

1. NUWSS Annual Reports 1907-9
2. *The Common Cause*, 8 August 1912

separate societies. Despite the repeated complaints of its Treasurers the Executive had increasingly large sums of money to deploy. An important source of its influence was its responsibility for the training, employment and deployment of the National Union's organisers. These were usually sent out from head office to local societies, and were directly responsible to the organising sub-committee of the Executive. A few of the more active societies, for example the North of England Society, trained and employed their own organisers, but this increasingly became the responsibility of the central office. By 1912 the number of organisers employed by the National Union had risen to 61, and two new grades had been introduced, assistant organiser and organiser-in-training.¹

The Early Organisational Strategy of the National Union

The first effective political initiative from the National Union appears to have been a Conference held in London on 17th October 1905. The intention was to draw up a national scheme of work in preparation for the general election expected during the next three-four years, and to establish a special fund for such work. The aim was to raise £2000 during the first year of the fund's existence. £500 was raised immediately, and this had risen to just over £1600 by the following November.

With this the National Union was to appoint its first three organisers to put into operation the scheme of work agreed at the 1903 conference. This aimed to establish a non-party women's suffrage committee in every Borough, County and Riding, and if possible in every County constituency. The emphasis was to be the establishing of contact

1. See NUWSS Leaflet Information & Instructions for Organisers, London; Women's Printing Society, n.d. for an indication of thoroughness expected of National Union organisers.

with local political party associations, with the hope of ensuring the selection of suffragist candidates, and the obtaining of pledges from MPs, once elected, on the suffrage issue. The local press was also to be pressured, by interviews with the editors where possible, and letters on the demand whenever appropriate. Local societies were also to undertake public meetings from time to time, and were to otherwise seek to extend their membership and influence by distributing suffrage literature, and forming new committees in new localities wherever possible.

It was agreed that the local society should be responsible for organisation in the Borough in which it existed, and as many of the neighbouring County Divisions as it felt able to manage. Those divisions not covered by the smaller societies should be the responsibility of the larger suffrage bodies. To begin with a corresponding secretary was to be appointed for each Parliamentary division, with a view to eventually forming a women's suffrage committee which would affiliate to the National Union. The central office of the National Union undertook to organise the Parliamentary work, to assist MPs who might introduce Bills or Resolutions and to organise deputations to the leaders of the political parties. It was also to administer the campaign fund and make grants for the work of the local societies outlined above.¹

The overwhelming burden of early plans of work emphasised the National Union's fundamental belief in a private member bill as the best path to women's enfranchisement, and its commitment to the traditional forms of pressure group politics. There is little sense here of a desire to build up a mass or popular movement. Yet elsewhere it is clear that some National Union leaders were becoming increasingly aware

1. For the outline of the plan of work see NUWSS Annual Report 1905-4; for the appointment of organisers see NUWSS Executive Minutes 4 February 1904

of the need for a more widely-based movement. A resolution at the annual meeting of the National Union in 1902 had pointed out the increasing difficulty which confronted any private member bill in the Parliamentary system of the day, and believed it "increasingly urgent to extend the organisation of all friends and sympathisers with the Women's Suffrage Movement throughout the country".¹ The National Union Executive too was evidencing increasing awareness of the importance of attracting working class women to the cause.²

Undoubtedly by far the most important factor encouraging such an awareness was the success of the suffrage campaign among the textile workers (and other women industrial workers) in the north west. This campaign was initiated by the North of England Society, For Women's Suffrage, one of the founding societies of the National Union.

The North of England Society for Women's Suffrage (NESWS) 1898-1906

The founding societies of the National Union were spread throughout the country (though Scotland and Wales were not yet represented), but the National Union's early annual reports suggest that the movement's greatest strength at this time was in the north west, and being organised by the North of England Society, centred on Manchester. Of the 60 public meetings organised during the National Union's first year of activity 20 were in Manchester.³ Similarly the report for 1900 records 122 public meetings since June 1898, 105 of which took place in the area of the North of England Society.

By 1899 the North of England Society consisted of 13 branches or affiliated societies, four of which were formed in the year 1898-9. It

1. NUWSS Annual Report 1901-2

2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 5 October 1899, 1 December 1904, 6 April 1905

3. NUWSS Annual Report 1897-98

was active in holding meetings with other women's organisations — 26 that year. Amongst those addressed were branches of the Women's Liberal Federation, the Women's Cooperative Guild and the British Women's Temperance Association. There was also a meeting with the ILP, and nine open air meetings. In this respect alone the North of England Society was already breaking away from the pattern of occasional drawing room meetings, and larger, rather elaborately staged public meetings which still characterised most National Union branch activity at this time.¹

The following year the society's work was concentrated on the collection of a women's suffrage petition from textile workers. Esther Roper, the Secretary of the North of England Society had begun the work of collecting textile workers' signatures as part of the national Special Appeal which had been launched in 1892. Just two months work outside the factory gates in 1894, undertaken by two working women, Annie Heaton and Mrs Winbolt, produced 3500 signatures.² The work now took on a significance of its own, and over the next few years the North of England Society concentrated on organising the textile workers' support. Esther Roper's close friend, Eva Gore Booth, was active in the local women's trade union movement, and the Society worked in close cooperation with trade union, Women's Cooperative Guild and ILP branches.

By 1899 56 meetings are listed in the annual report: 15 with WCGs, 11 with ILP branches, 3 with Labour Churches, 1 with a trade council, 3 with Social Democratic Federation branches, 2 with Women's Liberal Associations, 13 with trade union branches and 33 open-air meetings, but there were also numerous other open air meetings, cottage and factory gate meetings. 15,000 signatures for the petition were collected that year, and the help of

1. NESWS Annual Reports 1898-9, 1899-1900

2. NESWS Annual Report 1894

the WCGs, ILP and Labour Churches in this work received special mention.¹

This petition was presented to Lancashire MPs at the House of Commons the following year with well over 29,000 signatures and the annual report recorded:

Its marked effect in convincing people that working women were thoroughly in earnest in their demand for enfranchisement, determined the Committee to help the textile workers in Yorkshire and Cheshire to organise similar petitions.

22,000 signatures had already been collected in Yorkshire. Work was also beginning among Lancashire women in the smaller trades of the area. The meetings held by the society follow the pattern of the previous year, including 7 WCGs, 4 trades union branches or trades councils, 1 Labour Church, 2 ILP branches, 13 mill meetings as well as 2 WLAs, one with a university settlement and 5 temperance meetings.²

The next year a further textile workers deputation travelled to London to present another petition. 68,000 signatures had been collected in the previous two years for it, and the NESWS committee reported that:

Many more would have joined in the Petition if there had been more time. One member of the Deputation said every adult woman in her mill had signed. Another reported that in her town 2,800 out of the 3000 women textile workers had signed. It would be possible to multiply such instances indefinitely. The Committee were so much impressed by the work that they determined to organise more thoroughly the support received from the textile workers, so as to enable them through their Trades Unions, and by direct appeal to Parliament to press their claim to success.

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1. NESWS Annual Report 1898-9, 1899-1900. It is interesting to note that eight out of the 19 petition workers listed, mostly trade unionists or WCG members, were married women, some with young families. See Jill Liddington, *Rediscovering Suffrage History*, History Workshop No.4 1977 pp.192-201 for some biographical details of a few of these women and Liddington and Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us* pp.288-292
 2. NESWS Annual Report 1900-1

They believed there was particular significance in the election of David Shackleton as Labour MP for Clitheroe. Of the 18,000 trade unionists in his division it was claimed more than 9,000 were women and Shackleton had acknowledged that his chief financial support came from women workers. "It is obvious that if we can raise and organise these Trade Union women in the interests of women's suffrage, they will have very great power in pressing forward this matter". The report further claimed that Clitheroe was not unusual in the proportion of women amongst its trade unionists. It added "If the supporters of women's suffrage who are better able to give money than are these women, will do their share of the work, we may look forward with cheerful courage to the future".¹

Through the campaign among the textile workers the demand for votes for women became linked with that for labour representation. The involvement of working class women in the suffrage movement in large numbers also raised the issue of the limited nature of the demand for equal votes for women on the existing restricted property franchise. The textile workers preferred to phrase their demand in terms of womanhood — and, by implication, full adult — suffrage.²

Meanwhile other women workers were also being organised by the North of England Society. In 1902-3 work was undertaken among the women in the Staffordshire potteries and the nail and chain-makers of Cradley Heath (on behalf of the Central Society, (later the London Society) and the Birmingham Society). The next year women in the Leicester and Hinckley hosiery industry were added to the petition work. Meanwhile the pattern of meetings with organisations of the labour and socialist movements continued.³

1. *ibid* 1901-2

2. See following Chapter, for more details

3. NESWS Annual Reports, 1902-3, 1903-4

The central committee of the National Union had offered continual support in this work, organising the London end of the deputations, the presentation of petitions and the accompanying demonstrations, as well as making grants for the work.¹ Suffragists in other National Union societies had been considerably impressed with this activity, as evidenced by the Central and Birmingham Societies employing the North of England Society to undertake similar work in their areas. The Edinburgh Society also imitated the North of England Society in organising similar petitions among Scottish textile workers.² The textile workers' plan to run a women's suffrage candidate in the next election was enthusiastically supported by the National Union and a fund was established by the central committee particularly for this project.³

In 1904, however, a breach occurred within the North of England Society which was to lead to the splitting away of that group of suffragists most concerned with the campaign among women industrial workers. The annual report of the society for 1904-5 notes that a number of its former committee members had resigned and formed a new body. These included Esther Roper, Eva Gore Booth, Christabel Pankhurst, Mrs Dickenson, Mrs Haworth, Mrs Keenan, Miss Reddish, Miss Renton, the Reverend Steinthal and Mrs Thomasson. The cause of the dispute and the name of the new society referred to, are not given. The dispute may have represented some clash of interests between the North of England Society

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 7 December 1899, 6 June 1901, 5 December 1901, 9 January 1902
 2. NUWSS Annual Report 1904-5
 3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 11 June, 9 July 1903, 4 February 1904, 6 April 1905; NUWSS Annual Report 1903-4. The women's suffrage candidate at this time was Hugh Sweeney, and the constituency chosen was Wigan. In the 1906 election Thorley Smith was the candidate run, and he polled 2205, beating the Liberal into third place, see Fulford *Votes for Women*, pp.105-6 and Liddington and Norris op cit pp.164-5, 197-200 for further details of the election

and a new local suffrage group; the WSPU, formed in Manchester in 1903 by Mrs Pankhurst, or resistance to its continuing close alliance with local labour and socialist groups.

Whatever the cause of the dispute in the North of England Society the retiring committee clearly desired to go out with a last defiant gesture. Its report for the year 1904-5 recorded an energetic campaign in Lancashire, and a Free Trade Hall demonstration addressed by Keir Hardie, Philip Snowden and trade union representatives. The audience was composed "almost entirely" of working people. Open air meetings in the cotton districts had drawn audiences of 600-1500. To rub in the point the report added "the fact that the WCG have taken up the question so earnestly and are organising amongst their branches means a valuable addition to the forces of the women's suffrage movement. The Socialist women are also working extremely hard, holding outdoor meetings in great numbers".¹

For the next couple of years the activities of the North of England Society became altogether more sedate. A new emphasis on drawing room meetings and talks to "various temperance and Political societies" is to be found. Nonetheless, the tradition of open-air meetings, cottage and works meetings and links with labour and socialist organisations did not disappear altogether, and remained considerably stronger than in many National Union societies. This was undoubtedly a factor in the Manchester Society's future dedication to the National Union's policy of working with the Labour Party from mid-1912 on.²

An investigation of another National Union branch, the Glasgow Society, offers interesting contrasts and comparisons. While it too exhibited the close links between suffrage and other social reform

1. NESWS Annual Report 1904-5

2. This point is well-illustrated by comparing the lists of meetings provided in the NESWS Annual Reports for 1904-5 and 1908

organisations common by the turn of the century, it never became so deeply involved in the organisation of working class support as the North of England Society.

The Glasgow Society

The Glasgow Society (full title the Glasgow and West of Scotland Women's Franchise Association) was formed by a small group of local women in 1902, and officially affiliated to the National Union in 1903. Many of its most prominent founding members were also active in local Liberal political associations, including Mrs David Grieg, Mrs Frame, Helen Waddell, Miss Dalziel, Mrs Latta, Professor Lindsay and Andrew Ballantyne, while the local Women's Liberal Associations were invited to send delegates along to its Executive meetings. The Society's continuing loyalty to the Liberal Party was to become a particular source of dissension between 1906 and 1909.¹

Two of the first organisations its committee canvassed for support were the local British Women's Temperance Association (BWTA) and the Scottish Temperance and Permissive Bill Association (STPBA). A representative from each of these bodies soon joined the Executive Committee. After the Glasgow Society's organiser, Miss Johnston, addressed the Glasgow BWTA in 1904, it agreed to establish its own women's suffrage committee.² One of the Society's Vice-Presidents, A. Cameron Corbett, MP, was also one of the leading temperance advocates in the city. Presiding at the annual meeting in 1904 he declared that his support for women's suffrage was based on the belief that it was

1. See below Chapter 5

2. Glasgow Society Minutes 25 October 1902, 27 January 1904. Mrs Cockburn acted as the BWTA's representative, and Miss M.M. Henderson for the STPBA

"likely to promote the cause for temperance".¹ Other temperance leaders in the city also associated themselves with the women's suffrage cause from time to time: Sir Samuel Chisholm, Sir John Ure Primrose, the Rev. James Barr, while a number of the city's suffragists were also active temperance advocates: Frances Melville, Mrs W.C. Frame, Mrs Somerville, Mrs Rankin, Mrs William Reid, Mrs Frank Smith, Mrs R.S. Henderson and Mrs Annie Swan.² Mrs Reid eventually went so far as to resign the secretaryship of her temperance society to concentrate on suffrage work, "feeling sure she can better obtain temperance reform when women have the vote".³ When A. Cameron Corbett provided £5 to start a free membership role for the Glasgow Society, the BWTA was, not surprisingly one of the first organisations to be informed of the opportunity. Its assistance was also sought by the suffragists when they were planning a petition of women municipal voters in support of a women's suffrage bill in 1910.⁴

The other social reform groups with which the Glasgow Society appears to have had particularly close links were the Scottish Council for Women's Trades (SCWT), the National Union of Women Workers (NUWW)

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1. *The Glasgow Herald* 14 October 1904. At various times Archibald Cameron Corbett was a patron of the BWTA, President of the Scottish Band of Hope, the STPBA and the Scottish Temperance Institute, see *The Scottish Temperance Annual* 1904 and 1909. The Glasgow Society had heard similar points made in Lady Frances Balfour's speech to its first public meeting, and was to hear it repeated by the chairman of another of its meetings in 1907, *The Glasgow Herald* reports, 15 December 1902, 28 January 1907
 2. Temperance records consulted include the *Scottish Temperance Annuals* 1904, 1909, the STPBA Ladies Auxiliary Finance Committee Minutes, the Glasgow District Union of BWTA Grand Bazaar Leaflet October 1913, in the offices of the United Kingdom Alliance Temperance Association, and the Glasgow BWTA respectively. UK Alliance records have since been transferred to Glasgow University Archives. The suffragists in this list and those that follow include both militants and constitutionalists; the distinction is not relevant to this point and several of these women moved in and out of the two wings at different times.
 3. *Votes for Women* 30 March 1911. Mrs Reid was shortly to leave the militants and become active in the Glasgow Society
 4. Glasgow Society Minutes 15 April 1908, 5 September 1910. See below Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of the Conciliation Bills 1910-12.

and the Scottish Christian Social Union. The SCWT contained at least 31 of the city's most prominent suffragists among its most active members, of whom Margaret Irwin is the most notable example.¹ Similarly suffragists like Helen Waddell, Mrs Peter Rintoul, Mrs Aitken and again Margaret Irwin belong to the Glasgow branch of the NUWW. The Glasgow Society sent delegates to the annual NUWW conference, and secured representation on its Council.² Among the members of the Scottish Christian Social Union, an association of social workers, were Margaret Irwin, Mrs Frame, and Mrs Reid, while many of the churchmen involved were also active in suffrage circles including the Rev. Rolland Ramsay, the Rev. Dr Wells, the Rev. Norman McLean, the Rev. David Watson.³

In the area of local government, Glasgow suffragists were also prominent. Several belonged to the Association for the Return of Women to Local Government Boards, while a number stood as candidates for town and parish councils, and served on the Glasgow School Boards. Suffragist members of the Association included Miss Burnet, Margaret Irwin, Lady Frances Balfour, Mrs Grieg, Grace Paterson. M.S. Ker, Miss Burnet and Mrs Aitken succeeded in being elected as parish councillors, while Grace Paterson and Mrs I.D. Pearce served on the School Board.⁴

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1. These included Mrs J.T. Hunter, Secretary of the Glasgow Society, Andrew Ballantyne, Chairman of the Glasgow Society from 1906, Frances Melville, Mrs David Grieg, Janie Allan, Mrs Frame, Archibald Cameron Corbett, Mrs Reid, Dr Marion Gilchrist, Helen Waddell, Frances Burnet, Very Reverend Provost Dean, Reverend David Watson, Rev. Professor George Adam Smith, Edward Alston, Rev. C. Rolland Ramsay and one of the founders of the WSPU in Glasgow, Mrs I.D. Pearce.
 2. Glasgow Society Minutes 13 October 1902, 5 May 1903, 11 September 1903, 26 February 1904, 13 September 1905
 3. *The Glasgow Herald* reports 17 October 1906, 12 November 1912, 10 December 1912, 6 February 1914; *The Common Cause* 26 February 1912, 16 January 1914; *Women's Suffrage Record* June 1904. The Christian Social Union acted as a centre where christian social workers could meet to discuss their work; it also organised summer schools on Social Studies, and provided recreational facilities in the working class areas of the city
 4. *The Glasgow Herald* 17 October 1906, 16 October 1907; Glasgow Society Minutes 15 December 1913, 29 November 1911

Glasgow suffragists frequently made explicit their view of the link between women's suffrage and the prospect of social reform. Professor Henry Jones, addressing a meeting of the Glasgow Society referred to women's votelessness as "one of the unrectified bits of barbarism", and asserted his belief that with women's suffrage "the pace of social legislation might be accelerated". Similarly, analysing the Society's growth in membership during 1905, its Secretary, Mrs J.T. Hunter noted that "wage earning women particularly are fast becoming alive to the value of the vote, and all women engaged in public work, and indeed, how comparatively futile much of their work is owing to their unfranchised condition". At a public meeting of the Society in 1908 Councillor Pratt asserted that women's suffrage was essential "if any great progress was to be made in the solution of many grave social problems."¹ Turning the argument around Glasgow suffragists also pointed to the increasing amount of social and labour legislation which affected women's lives, and in which they should have a voice.²

The Glasgow Society was impressed with the achievements of the textile workers. Its committee averred "any help possible should be given to the textile workers in their self-sacrificing efforts". Nonetheless, its own support was limited to a very small financial contribution, though it recommended that National Union headquarters make a grant of £100 available, to support an election campaign the textile workers were planning to run.³

The Glasgow Society was never to be very diligent nor very success-

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1. *The Glasgow Herald* 9 March 1905, 2 November 1905, 11 April 1908
 2. See for example Mrs Hunter's letter to *The Glasgow Herald* 19 January 1906, outlining the suffragists' case for their demand; Lady Frances Balfour's speech to the Society's first public meeting, reported *The Glasgow Herald* 15 December 1902 and Professor Latta's speech to the Scottish Universities Women's Suffrage Union, reported *The Glasgow Herald* 8 June 1914
 3. Glasgow Society Minutes 23 December 1903, 27 January 1904

ful in attempts to attract working class membership. The Scottish Cooperative Women's Guild (SCWG) had been among those women's organisations initially contacted by the new suffrage society, and a suffrage speaker had been invited to address the quarterly council meeting of the SCWG in September 1902. The following year six different SCWG branches received speakers from the Glasgow Society. Like the Liberal and Conservative women's organisations it was also invited to send a representative along to Glasgow Society Executive Committee.¹ But this appears to have been the limit of Glasgow Society's contacts with the working class organisations. Undoubtedly this situation reflected the overwhelming strength of women Liberals within the branch, and the local Liberalism's deep suspicion of independent labour politics. It did not involve itself with public demonstration and never initiated organising activities beyond the sedate style of public meeting, except under pressure from organisers sent from National Union headquarters.

A recurring facet of the society's work was its suspicion of London head office. When the National Union had been re-drawing its constitution in 1906, the Glasgow Society had hoped that an entirely separate Scottish organisation might be achieved. After receiving its copy of the draft of the new constitution it had replied to the National Union that, while it sympathised with the objects of the new scheme,

1. *ibid* 13 October, 7 November 1902, 24 April 1906, 19 May 1909; *Women's Suffrage Record* October and December 1903. The SCWG representatives on the Glasgow Society Executive in the pre-war years were Mrs Tulloch, Mrs Sage and Mrs Croll successively.

it felt the "distance from England is so great" that it would annul the benefits to be derived from re-joining the National Union. It believed a Scottish Union would be a more effective way of extending its work, but it did not get the support such a development would have needed from the Edinburgh Society.¹

Consequently when the Birmingham Society had first put up the scheme for federations of local societies within the National Union in July 1909, Glasgow had been very quick to give the idea its support. It was revealed that the Secretary and Chairman of its Executive had already been considering a scheme for a Scottish Federation and had invited all the Scottish societies to attend a conference to discuss such a scheme. This now went ahead on 2nd October 1909. A Scottish Federation had been established by the end of the year, and it was to this body that the Glasgow Society was to look for its leadership in future. Suggestions and requests for participation in schemes from London continued to meet with little sympathy. The Glasgow Society played little part in the wider councils of the National Union and usually sought proxy representatives for the council meetings. Its relationships with organisers sent or recommended by London continued to be fraught with disagreements.²

The London Society

Being centred on the capital city the London Society tended to work very closely with National Union headquarters, particularly on the planning of major demonstrations, etc. Its leadership often overlapped to

1. *ibid* 29 November 1906, 23 December 1906

2. *ibid* 28 June 1909, 1 September 1909, 3 November 1909, 1 December 1909, 27 April 1910. See also the dispute over a 1909 by-election campaign between Glasgow Society and National Union organisers *ibid* 10 March, 31 March, 11 April 1909.

some extent with the National Union's Executive Committee. Altogether a less clear branch identity emerges than can be found in the records of the Manchester and Glasgow Societies, though this may only reflect the somewhat less complete records which it has left behind. Nonetheless, a short account of the early activities of the London Society illustrates both the links between the National Union and the wider women's movement, and the recognition among many constitutional suffragists of the importance of working class women's support.

The London Society of the National Union was formed by the uniting of two older suffrage societies, the Central and East of England Society for Women's Suffrage, and the Central and West of England Society for Women's Suffrage in 1900. It grew steadily during the early years of the National Union and by 1903 was considering increasing the number of public meetings it organised. One of these meetings, at the Caxton Hall on 24 November 1903, aimed "to show the relation and importance of women's suffrage to philanthropic, social and temperance work". Mrs Bryant, a speaker there, "insisted particularly on the need of a vote for the working women", while another speaker stressed the need for women's influence on legislation.¹

In 1904 one of the petitions it helped organise contained 10,408 signatures from members of the British women's Temperance Society (BWTA). In 1905 one of its organisers undertook to start a new branch in Portsmouth and did so by first contacting the local National Union of Women Workers, which agreed to set up a suffrage sub-committee. A new National Union branch then followed.²

The Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG) had recently begun a suffrage campaign and the London Society urged National Union headquarters to

1. London Society Annual Report 1903
 2. *ibid* 1904, and London Society Minutes 21 June, 19 July 1905

encourage its other branches on "the desirableness of entering into communication with the (WCG) branches in their respective district with a view to inviting members of the Guild to public meetings, and to supply the speaker when desired for the Branch meetings".¹ In planning a Hyde Park demonstration in 1906 the London Society consulted with the WCG, temperance societies and the Women's Liberal Federation, as well as the WSPU which had newly arrived in London.² The WCG and WLF were again represented at a demonstration organised by the London Society in 1908, while the WCG organised a variety of women workers for a Pageant of Women's Trades and Occupations, financed by the London Society,³ in April 1909.

The London Society appears to have worked particularly closely with Esther Roper and Eva Gore Booth even after they had left the National Union, through cooperation both with the textile workers organisation and the Industrial and Professional Women's Suffrage Society. In 1903 the London Society invited the North of England Society to send its organisers to work among Staffordshire pottery workers, and a small suffrage committee of women workers was formed in each of the larger pottery towns.⁴ The London Society then financed similar work among the nail and chain makers of Cradley Heath, Leicestershire hosiery workers, and the textile workers of Dunfermline.⁵ In 1906 Esther Roper, Sarah Dickenson and Sarah Reddish initiated a campaign among London cigar-makers, with help from their trade union and finance from the London Society. This was followed by similar attempts to organise among the

1. London Society Minutes 25 January 1905

2. *ibid* 25 September 1906

3. London Society Annual Report 1908 and Margaret Llewellyn Davies to Philippa Strachey 21 April 1909, Fawcett Autograph Collection (henceforth FAC) Fawcett Library

4. London Society Minutes 8 July 1903, 2 March, 13 April 1904, Annual Report 1903

5. London Society Annual Report 1904

London clothing workers, though neither campaign appears to have met with much success. Delegations of textile workers were also present at two demonstrations organised by the London Society and the National Union in March and November 1907.¹

When in 1909 the Women's Trade Union League arranged a Women's Labour Day Demonstration, the London Society, after some pressure from the Anti-Sweating League, agreed to loan its banners for the procession.² Similar cooperation between the London Society and women's labour organisations continued throughout the pre-war period.³

The Organisational Expansion of the National Union

In the years between its foundation and the emergence of the WSPU as a national force in 1906, the National Union had experienced continuous growth in terms of branches, membership and level of activity, largely under the impetus of a forthcoming general election.⁴ In the first year's work of the pre-election campaign 133 new committees were formed, (committees were formed by contacting a number of interested women in a locality, and it was hoped these would then form the nucleus

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1. Esther Roper to Palliser 19 November 1906 FAC. London Society Minutes 26 September 1906, and annual reports 1906, 1907. The London Society also cooperated with the Industrial and Professional Women's Suffrage Society in a London demonstration November 1907, see correspondence between Esther Roper and Philippa Strachey 16, 19 October, 17 November 1908, FAC.
 2. Margaret Macdonald to Philippa Strachey 26 May 1907, J.J. Malcolm, Anti-Sweating League to Philippa Strachey 12 June 1909 and her reply 22 June 1909. Nonetheless the Society received at least one protest from its membership, pointing out Mary MacArthur's lack of sympathy for the suffrage cause, Marjory Lee to Philippa Strachey 9 July 1909, FAC.
 3. e.g. Esther Roper-Philippa Strachey correspondence on protest meeting on attempts to exclude women from pit-brow work 3 September-28 October 1911; Philippa Strachey to Susan Lawrence 18 January 1912; Philippa Strachey to Marion Phillips 18 April 1913, FAC.
 4. Between 1897 and 1906 the number of NUWSS societies rose from 16 to 31, the periods of most rapid growth being 1903-4 (after the 1903 conference to plan the general election work) and 1905-6 (the period of the general election campaign), NUWSS Annual Reports 1898-1906

of a new society), "An unprecedented number of meetings and large demonstrations" also took place. On 14 March 1905 "the most remarkable and impressive demonstration ever held in London in support of the Parliamentary Enfranchisement of Women" took place. 2500 were present and an overflow meeting of 200 had to be arranged. Before the election 395 prospective candidates were canvassed, of whom 249 gave positive support to the women's demand. The National Liberal Federation, the Women's Liberal Federation, the National Liberal Association and the WCG had all pronounced their official support for women's suffrage, while at the ILP annual conference an adult suffrage resolution had been defeated by a large number in favour of a women's suffrage resolution.¹

The National Union's developing close links with other organisations is also clear in the activity of this period. When planning a convention on women's suffrage on 24-26 November 1904, the National Union invited the help of the WCG, teachers' unions, post office employees and other women's organisations. The following year the BWTA and WCG were among those invited to send delegates to another convention.² Most of the local societies were recording increases in membership, which in some instances was considerable, e.g. Barnsley's membership more than doubled in one year, 50 new members joining after one of its public meetings; Cambridge grew from 111 to 161 in the same year while Hull achieved 200 members at its inaugural meeting, and went on to grow rapidly.³

1. *ibid*, 1904-5

2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 6 October 1904, 14 September 1905. The British Women's Temperance Association had already collected a petition of 100,000 of its members in support of women's suffrage, NUWSS Annual Report 1903-4. The local society reports in the NUWSS annual reports also bear out this involvement with other women's groups, particularly WCGs, temperance societies and the NUWW, see NUWSS Annual Report 1904-5.

3. NUWSS Annual Report 1904-5

The women's suffrage demand had already established itself as an important issue among women in the first years of the twentieth century. Through the work of the National Union's central committee, and in particular the scheme of work drawn up in October 1903, this demand was provided with organisational expression. The interest in the issue amongst existing women's organisations, both middle and working class, were the basis on which the National Union built its own growth. The annual report for 1905-06 could justly declare:

In face of the General Election, and the fact that Women's Suffrage is, at last becoming a practical question, there is need for redoubled energy and strong initiative among our supporters. The popularity of the movement gives cause for great hope, and, if we can focus the widespread force of favourable opinion now existing, we may reach our goal within a reasonable time.....The moment has come for a great forward movement, and those who are in earnest will concentrate their energies of thought and action during the next few months, into a united effort to bring the long struggle to a victorious end.¹

The formation of the WSPU caused the National Union a series of internal disputes over policy, but the enormous growth which the National Union experienced between 1906-1910 must also be remembered, and must in large part be seen as a spin-off from the WSPU's work. Dual membership of both constitutional and militant societies was not uncommon in the early years of the movement.²

While the National Union had developed from 16 societies in 1898 to 31 in 1906, the years from 1906 to 1910 saw its organisation grow from 31 branch societies to 207.³ Membership figures are only available from 1909, but these show a growth in the period 1909-1910 from 13,161 to 21,571. Information on National Union income shows that the Central Fund grew from £1,534 in 1904 to £5,500 in 1910. However, as has already

1. NUWSS Annual Report 1905-6
 2. See below Chapter 5 for further discussion
 3. See Tables p.107

THE ORGANISATIONAL EXPANSION OF THE NATIONAL UNION

<u>SOCIETIES</u>		<u>MEMBERSHIP</u>
1897 - 1898	15	
1899 - 1900	17	
1901 - 1902	19	
1903 - 1904	25	
1904 - 1905	26	
1905 - 1906	31	
1906 - 1907	32	
1907 - 1908	70	
1909	130	13,161
1910	207	21,571
1911	311	30,408
1912	411	42,438
1913	478	52,336
1914	496	54,592

SOURCES: NUWSS Annual Reports 1897-8, 1899-1900, 1901-2, 1903-4, 1904-5, 1905-6, 1906-7, 1907-8, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914

FINANCES

	<u>CENTRAL FUND</u>	<u>LOCAL SOCIETIES</u> (always incomplete)	<u>TOTAL INCOME</u> (estimated)
1904	£1,534		
1905	£891		
1906	£1,504		
1907	£1,470		
1908	£3,296	£4-5,000	
1909	£3,385	£8-10,000	
1910	£5,503		£20,000
1911	£5,734	£12,670	£21,000
1912	£10,486	£17,499	£35,000
1913	£18,886	£25,000	over £45,000

SOURCES: 1904-1907: *The Common Cause*, 4 April 1913: 1908-1913: NUWSS Annual Reports 1908-1913. The estimated total income for 1912 and 1913 did not include those funds raised by the Election Fighting Fund Committee — £4,158 in 1912, £4,035 in 1913.

been indicated these figures represented a very incomplete assessment of National Union financial resources. In 1908 the National Union estimated its total income was between £7,000 and £8,000, and this had risen to £20,000 by 1910.¹

In 1912 the National Union began to imitate WSPU fund-raising efforts, calling for donations during major staged meetings, many of the larger of which had been orchestrated beforehand. A meeting at the Albert Hall on 23rd February 1912, addressed by Mrs Fawcett, Lloyd George and Lord Lytton raised £7,000. Another in November of that year raised £5,700. This would explain a large part of the enormous increase in National Union income in 1912 — from an estimated £21,000 in 1911 to an estimated £35,000 in 1912, an increase out of all proportion to the growth in terms of membership, though it appears that some funds were now also being directed away from the WSPU and into the National Union coffers.²

In membership terms the National Union clearly benefited from the advent of the WSPU on the national scene from 1906. In 1908 the number of suffrage societies within the National Union doubled from 32 to 64, with the addition of another 70 branches among the larger societies (Birmingham had five branches, London 35, Manchester 10 and Newcastle seven). This was naturally reflected in large increases in membership. No national figures are available, but the London Society claimed 1425 new members, while the Manchester Society's membership increased from 219 to 1060. Such advances caused the Annual Report to declare that the

1. These figures have been taken from *The Common Cause* 4 April 1913 for 1904-7 period, and the relevant annual reports of the NUWSS for 1908-14, together with a NUWSS Information Bureau handout, *Formation and Growth of the NUWSS*, n.d. circa April 1914, MGFP

2. See below for the re-direction of WSPU funds to the National Union, Chapter 10

movement was "entering a new phase ... The Promised Land is within sight".¹

This scale of growth continued throughout 1909 with the number of societies increasing to 130. The number of organisers had to be increased from six to ten. A new journal, *The Common Cause*, was launched to put the constitutionalist point of view on suffrage policy.² National Union growth seems to have benefited both from the interest in the suffrage issue which the WSPU had succeeded in arousing, and from the increasing violence which accompanied WSPU activities from 1908, and undoubtedly pushed many towards constitutional agitation. (After 1908 it was no longer, officially, possible to belong to both the National Union and a militant society).

Propaganda and Educational Activities

The most impressive indicator of the National Union's expansion during this period was the growing scale of its propaganda campaigns. 1906 had largely been taken up with general election work, and there-

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1. In 1906-7 the National Union had only grown from 31 to 32 Societies. The annual report for 1908 did cover a 15-month period, but the development was nonetheless considerable.
 2. NUWSS Annual Report 1909. The London membership increased from 2563 to 3111, that of the NESWS from 1060 to 1741, Edinburgh from 400 to 700, and Glasgow from 330 to 492. It is not possible to make direct comparisons with WSPU growth as the annual reports run for different periods — the National Union's Annual Report for 1908 covers 15 months to December 31, 1908, the WSPU's from March 1908 to February 1909. However the WSPU's Annual Reports for 1908-9 shows that its income for that year was over £20,000. It employed 30 paid organisers, and had established 11 regional offices for eight provincial districts (these were separate from local branch offices, if these existed at all). These offices were in Bristol and Torquay (West of England), Manchester, Preston and Rochdale (Lancashire), Birmingham, Leeds and Bradford, Newcastle, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen. There are no membership figures. The Annual Report for the following year, 1909-10 shows an income of a little under £32,000, though the number of organisers had fallen to 26, working 23 separate districts. Again Ireland and Wales do not appear to be worked by the WSPU. Andrew Rosen, *op cit* pp.114, 133

after organising suffrage opinion within the new House of Commons, now dominated by the Liberal party. The National Union was prominent in the women's suffrage deputation received by the Prime Minister, Campbell-Bannerman, on 19 May 1906. Deputations were a recurrent theme in National Union work, both nationally and locally. The major ones were those of the textile workers to Parliament in 1901-2; the deputation to Campbell-Bannerman 19 May 1906, those to Asquith on 30 January 1908, 21 June 1910, 14 November 1911 and 8 August 1913. Those in 1908 and 1913 were considered of most significance by the suffragists, as they both produced indications of a government reform bill initiative. Such activity remained within the tradition of parliamentary lobbying established by the earlier nineteenth century suffragists.

The following year, however, saw the National Union's first major effort to take the issue out on to the streets, with a large procession from Hyde Park to Exeter Hall on 9 February 1907. This became known as the Mud March, because of the bad weather that accompanied the 3-4,000 marchers. A conference organised by the National Union, of all interested bodies, had preceded the march to agree on a mutually acceptable demand. This conference was impressive in the breadth of National Union contacts which it indicated, encompassing trade union branches, political associations and a variety of social reform groups. The resolution agreed upon declared that "neither sex nor marriage should be a qualification or disqualification for the vote". Another mass meeting was organised at the Queens Hall on 26 March 1907, in support of W.H. Dickenson's private members suffrage bill.¹ 1908 saw similar large-scale demonstrations and processions in London, Manchester and Edinburgh.

1. NUWSS Annual Report 1908. Further discussion of the background to this bill will be found in Chapter 4

The frequency of these National Union demonstrations increased considerably during the period of the Conciliation Bills between 1910-12 — for example those on 28 June 1910, 9 July 1910, a national convention of suffragists on 3rd May 1911, participation in a WSPU march in June 1911, a Suffrage Week organised during 5-12 November 1910, an Albert Hall demonstration on 12 November 1910 and another on 4 December 1912 at the London Opera House. Undoubtedly the most successful of the National Union demonstrations was the Women's Suffrage "Pilgrimage" staged in the summer of 1913. Groups of women set off from various points all over the British Isles on 18 June to march to London for a final demonstration in Hyde Park on 26 July, collecting new groups of marchers along the way.

On the whole the marchers met with a sympathetic reception during their stops for meetings along the way, but Maude Royden's memories of it were not all pleasant.

One of the most sacrificial acts we were called on to do for our fellow-workers was in connection with a particularly successful piece of advertisement called a Pilgrimage ... For some reason this idea caught on with the press and we had a huge advertisement ... but to balance it we also attracted a gathering storm of opposition. As the pilgrims neared London the meetings grew more and more rowdy and at last some of the speakers were rather badly hurt.

After such incidents the suffragists would hold a repeat meeting the next day which was

invariably a success, all the decent feeling in the place being aroused by the spectacle of the women being roughly handled and showing such courage.

The National Union organisers hit on the ruse of sending speakers from London to hold a meeting one day ahead of the processions -

so that the fury might fall on us and the pilgrims might come in for the peaceful aftermath.¹

1. Maude Royden Bid Me Discourse, Typescript autobiography, pp.44-5; Fawcett Library. The Hyde Park meeting had a further significance. The National Union had been holding weekly meetings there since May to support the principle of free speech and to protest at the banning of the WSPU's meeting there

This demonstration seems to have greatly impressed the politicians as well as the press, and was followed by two deputations of "pilgrims", one to anti-suffrage Ministers, including Asquith, and another to suffrage supporters in the Cabinet. C.P. Scott wrote to Catherine Marshall, after he had approached Lloyd George to receive the latter deputation, that he had found the Minister "in a very friendly disposition towards the women" and added "Your gathering in Hyde Park was a fine demonstration and its reception full of hope". In the event the suffragists were to draw far greater comfort from the reception they received from the anti-suffrage Ministers.¹

At the local level, Strachey states that as early as 1907 the National Union was holding 200 meetings a week throughout the country.² Similarly, Helena Swanwick recalled of this time "The pace became furious. I find that in 1908 I addressed 150 meetings all over England and Scotland with an average attendance of 600 persons".³ Many of these meetings retained the middle class atmosphere of the garden party and drawing room meeting, with musical entertainments and dramatic performances (usually of a suffrage play), but equally significant is the number of meetings held specifically for members of the Women's Cooperative Guilds, the Railway Women's Guild, adult schools, ILP branches, trade councils, Mothers Unions etc.⁴ For the active National Union member life could be as hectic as for those in the WSPU, though branches clearly varied greatly in the degree of enthusiasm and initiative which they expressed.

Catherine Marshall, of the Keswick Society, for example, pioneered the idea of suffragist stalls in the markets of smaller country towns,

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1. C.P. Scott to Catherine Marshall 28 July 1913, CMP. The response to these two deputations will be detailed in Chapter 10
 2. Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett*, p.227
 3. Helena Swanwick, *I Have Been Young*, 1938, p.193
 4. See for example the lists of NUWSS meetings *The Common Cause*, 18 April 1912, 1 August 1912

and these were soon well-established in Keswick, Penrith, Norwich and Cambridge. Other more adventurous propaganda work included a suffrage caravan tour of the South of Scotland and the North of England in 1908. More of these followed in 1909, when the Edinburgh Society also introduced the idea of cycling tours, where suffragists would cycle from village to village, holding impromptu meetings on the village greens.¹

By 1908 National Union head office had begun to organise propaganda campaigns around by-elections, sending down temporary organisers to extend the work previously left to the local societies, when it had been limited to little more than canvassing candidates. Seventeen such campaigns were organised that year, and the annual report stressed the belief that "it is by spade work in the constituencies that the cause of women's suffrage will ultimately be won".² 1909 saw the commencement of another new scheme, known as the Voters' Petition, which involved the collection of signatures of pro-suffragists outside the polling booths in the 14 by-elections which occurred that year. In the general election of 1910, only general suffrage propaganda was undertaken, except in the constituencies of noted supporters or opponents of the cause. To qualify for National Union electoral support a candidate had to include women's suffrage in his election address, and promise to oppose any future extension of the franchise which excluded women. The Voters' Petition was again worked, in 290 constituencies, and resulted in the collection of about 300,000 signatures.³

Thus the National Union member was no longer expected merely to attend and organise an occasional meeting, or canvass prospective MPs. Strachey recalled that increasingly they

1. The idea of caravan and later cycle tours was of course not new, and was borrowed from the socialist movement of the time

2. NUWSS Annual Report 1908

3. Except where otherwise noted this account of National Union activity 1906-9 is based on the appropriate annual reports

Advocated the cause as they went about their ordinary lives. They lived as they had always lived, among people who knew and laughed at them, and they braved all their conventions by standing up at street corners and in the public parks to address passers by. They chalked the pavements and sold their newspapers in the streets, they walked in the gutters with sandwich boards, and toiled from house to house canvassing for members, collecting money and advertising meetings.¹

Helena Swanwick testified to the resolution needed for much of this work, but added "perhaps my most fervent detestation was for the diabolical device which sent us to the polling booths, there to stand all day and collect the signatures of the voters for our Voters Petition". The work had not been so bad in country and working class districts, but at one station, in the business centre of Manchester, the gentlemen voters hit on the idea of treating the suffragists as prostitutes touting for business.

Being an active member of the National Union could require as much heroism as membership of the WSPU. Frequently speakers were mobbed and bombarded with rubbish, often in mistake for suffragettes. Helena Swanwick suffered such a fate in Macclesfield where together with Margaret Ashton and Margaret Robertson, she was chased from the town by a crowd stirred up by the local Liberals.²

Maude Royden recalled her life as a full-time organiser for the National Union:

For years I spoke to meetings every day in the week, often including Sunday, and sometimes twice in one day ... We all worked at this pitch and were all ready to help each other.

She recalled

It is a grim business starting an open-air speech when there is no one present but your colleague and a dog. Of course the colleague takes her

1. Strachey, *The Cause*, p.306
 2. Helena Swanwick, *I Have Been Young*, pp.199-201

stand in front of you and assumes an air of passionate interest, but even that does not help greatly.

Full-timers not only spoke but sold newspapers, gave out handbills, and not infrequently had to advertise their own meetings, "carrying a sandwich board is a really vile job".¹

Suffragists were also encouraged to give up some part of their holidays to participate in one of the caravan or cycle tours. For the less confident summer schools were provided where they would hear lectures on the legal position of women, the history of women and similar topics. There were speaker classes daily and practical work was undertaken in the neighbourhood in the afternoons and evenings.²

The National Union shared the WSPU's preoccupation with attracting press coverage, though its methods of pursuing such publicity were quite different. The annual report for 1905-6 analysed the problem as one where the majority of newspapers were

In the habit either of suppressing altogether news favourable to the movement, or of reducing their reports to the most meagre and jejune proportions (while) at the same time the widest publicity was given to any incident, however trivial, that was believed to be damaging to women's suffrage and its supporters.

Nonetheless there had been some improvement in the situation that year and the National Union officers declared:

This more satisfactory attitude of the Press may perhaps in part be attributed to the effect produced on editors by small deputations, chosen by the Executive Committee who have waited on them and explained the exact character and methods of work of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.

The implication is that the WSPU's impact had only been negative.

1. Maude Royden, op cit, pp.43-45 Fawcett Library
 2. For details of one such summer school see *The Common Cause*, 11 April 1912, 18 July 1912.

Local societies were encouraged to follow up such work with the provincial papers.

Where a paper proved itself favourable to the cause the National Union sought to promote it by announcing it in the annual report, and later in the regular Press Department column in *The Common Cause*. However it was not until 1911 that this work was put on a regular footing, and a Press Department established under Catherine Marshall, who had been working a very successful scheme in her home federation in the north west. To begin with the department communicated with over 20 London papers, and 50 provincial papers. It was hoped the Federations would gradually take over this work in their own areas — all but two had already appointed press secretaries, and their reports covered over 400 papers. More than a third were declared favourable to the suffragists, and an eighth were considered anti.¹

By the following year the National Union had succeeded in having its own "Review of the Year" reprinted in 70 papers; more than 30 papers now provided a weekly column for the suffragists. 812 papers had been listed for supervision, while 566 were already being monitored. Of these 224 were reported sympathetic, 47 anti, 183 neutral, and 112 unclassified. It was noted that "the chief advance has been amongst the Labour papers". *The Labour Leader* had issued a women's suffrage supplement, and *The Christian Commonwealth* a special suffrage number. *The Daily Citizen* came in for special praise (though the National Union was soon evidencing discontent with much of its suffrage comment) and *The Daily Herald* was given a mention in the list of pro-suffrage papers. By the following year 770 papers were being monitored and *The New*

1. NUWSS Annual Report 1911. The seven papers providing special suffrage columns at this time were *The Standard*, *Eastbourne Gazette*, *Cheltenham Chronicle*, *Cheltenham Examiner*, *St Helens Advertiser*, *North Western Chronicle* and the *Oxford Times*

Statesman had issued a special women's supplement.¹

From its earliest days the National Union issued leaflets and pamphlets periodically, and to begin with its societies had often published their own literature. By 1912 this work had become large enough to necessitate the establishment of a Literature Department, at head office. In that year 10 new pamphlets and 45 new leaflets were issued, with sales amounting to between £100 - £150 a month. On specific occasions, particularly during trade union and labour campaigns a considerable amount of literature was issued free. In 1913 sales reached £250 during one month, and in 1914 the department opened a book shop for material on all aspects of women's concerns, and for the National Union's educational courses.²

National Union branches provided a wide-ranging educational service on a variety of topics affecting the lives of women, particularly those concerned with industrial and social reforms. On what appears to be yet another initiative from Catherine Marshall, it was decided at a Provincial Council Meeting in May 1913 to attempt to co-ordinate a series of thorough-going educational campaigns on a selection of specific topics throughout National Union branches. Catherine Marshall's resolution for the meeting read:

That in order to create more concentrated pressure behind the Women's Suffrage agitation special campaigns be organised from time to time throughout the country with the object of focussing public attention on one particular aspect of the case for Women's Suffrage, and that the following subjects be recommended for the programmes of such campaigns:

- 1) the disabilities of wives and mothers
- 2) the disabilities of professional and industrial women
- 3) the inadequate care of the State for the welfare of children
- 4) the need of greater driving power behind the demand for

1. NUWSS Annual Reports 1912-15. With the outbreak of war the Press Department was merged with the Information Bureau, and was reporting universally favourable press opinion.

2. *ibid*

moral reform.

Catherine Marshall's resolution was accepted and the first campaign, in the autumn, concentrated on "the State and the Child". A reading list and syllabus for study was available from head office to help local branches, together with a list of possible speakers. Public meetings, small lectures and study circles were arranged on the theme at local level. An Information Bureau established at National Union headquarters specifically to provide material on women's suffrage, legislation specially affecting women, and the economic position of women.¹ The themes of these campaigns were also taken up by *The Common Cause* to provide further information and debate.

The Common Cause

The National Union had had plans to start a monthly franchise paper in 1907 but abandoned them on the appearance of the weekly *Women's Franchise*, owned by Mr Francis of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage.

In 1909 the National Union withdrew its support from the paper when its editor refused to exclude reports from the WFL.² A new suffrage journal was established in Manchester. The paper *The Common Cause* was largely financed by Margaret Ashton,³ a leading member of the National Union in the north west. Helena Swanwick, another Manchester-based suffragist was appointed editor-manager at a salary of £200 per annum, and with a staff of one to keep the books.⁴ Gradually, as the paper expanded, a manager, sub-editor, advertisement manager and office girl

1. Catherine Marshall's notes for Exeter Council 23 May 1913, Catherine Marshall Papers; NUWSS Annual Report 1913.

2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 6 February 1908, 9 April 1908, 4 June 1908, 3 July 1908, 23 July 1908, 17 November 1908, 20 November 1908. At this time the WFL was involved in a number of sensational demonstrations, of which the National Union's leadership disapproved, see Chapter 5

3. *ibid* 3 December 17 December 1908, 7 January 1909

4. *ibid* 21 January 1909, NUWSS Annual Report 1909

were added to the staff.¹ The paper ran to 16 pages, occasionally expanding to 20 and appeared weekly at a cost of 1d.

Helena Swanwick was a close friend of C.P. Scott, the editor of *The Manchester Guardian*, and sought his advice on the running of the paper. She herself felt that the suffrage movement needed a "paper of wider interests and more advanced political thinking"² and the material published in *The Common Cause* is evidence of this commitment. While developments in the suffrage movement are fully covered, including discussion of the militants' activities, a large part of the paper was concerned with wider aspects of women's situation in society, and particularly with issues involving social reform demands.

The work of the local federations and societies was reported regularly, though these reports were patchy, dependent on the efficiency of *The Common Cause* correspondent within each federation, and the societies' secretaries. A list of forthcoming meetings throughout the country, including subject, speaker and the host organisation, was also provided. Another useful source for rank-and-file activity and opinion is the correspondence columns. Helena Swanwick followed Scott's advice to include such a page without censorship or bias to leadership opinion. She recalled she had to fight hard to maintain the correspondence column in such a form.³ Controversy within the National Union on the position of women in the Liberal Party, on WSPU policy and the new National Union election policy in 1912 are all recorded.

There are no circulation figures for the paper at this time, but in 1910 it was reported that sales had doubled over the previous year, and £1300 was raised for fresh capital. At the suggestion of the Provincial Council there was a conference of representatives from the

1. Swanwick, *I Have Been Young*, p.207

2. *ibid* p.228

3. *ibid* p.225

federations and the Board of Directors and staff of the paper to share views on its development.¹ In 1911 the management of the paper moved to London. Every federation now had a *Common Cause* correspondent and these met with the editor occasionally to exchange views. Sales were reported to be increasing, though it was noted that the paper was still not taken by the full membership of the National Union (30,408).

In August 1912 Helena Swanwick resigned as editor. She had been several times criticized for the severity of her editorials against the WSPU's increasing use of violence. She believed some of the Executive were also pleased to see her go, thinking her "too advanced" and "too individual". However this may be, under the editorships of Clementina Black and Maude Royden the paper continued its deep concern for social reform, and its strongly critical view of existing society. Helena Swanwick was also asked to continue writing some of the editorials.

By 1912 the paper had fallen into severe financial difficulties. A letter in Catherine Marshall's papers declared "*The Common Cause* is at present nearly bankrupt, so that it is necessary either to raise some more capital or to hand it over to the National Union if the latter is willing to take over the responsibility".² Arrangements went ahead for the National Union to take over the paper. Henry Brailsford, a leading radical journalist of the day, offered the advice that it should "have editor a level-headed business person, and then have a staff of leader writers in close touch with National Union" ... "*Common Cause* looks too much like the *Spectator* or *Nation*, not enough like a newspaper — *Labour Leader* and *Votes for Women*".³ Certainly the leader writers

1. NUWSS Annual Report 1910

2. Kathleen Courtney to Mr Hendy, solicitor, 29 November 1912, CMP

3. Catherine Marshall's notes on the *Common Cause* committee, n.d. circa early 1913, CMP

now varied and with the appointment of Maude Royden as editor a large sales drive began.

She reported that during the Pilgrimage the circulation rose from 15,000 to 18,000, and reached almost 30,000 during the week it arrived in London.¹ A *Common Cause* competition among National Union branches in September 1913 revealed that while in the winning societies 60 per cent, 58 per cent and 47 per cent of the membership respectively took the paper, in one society it was as low as just under 7 per cent and only a few societies sold the paper to more than 40 per cent of their membership.² A campaign to double the paper's circulation was launched in November, and by early December circulation had risen to 22,000. By the outbreak of war the paper was paying its way and looked like becoming a financial asset to the National Union.³

These developments in the National Union's propaganda machinery reflected the continuing growth which it experienced up until the war. During the years 1910-14 its membership almost tripled, and to this must be added those enrolled in the Friends of Women's Suffrage scheme, an associate membership scheme aimed particularly at working class support, if we are to have a full assessment of its influence. There were 53,000 friends in 1914, after only two years of working the scheme. This meant the National Union was organising a total of 94,000 suffrage supporters by the outbreak of war. By this time too, it was able to raise £45,000 for its year's work.⁴

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 31 July 1913

2. *ibid* 18 September 1913

3. *ibid* 4 December 1913; NUWSS Annual Report 1915. On the outbreak of war many advertisers withdrew and circulation fell off, in particular that part sold at meetings, which were now considerably curtailed. Helen Ward and Helena Swanwick replaced Maude Royden for a few months as editor, due to her ill-health. The paper continued to appear weekly throughout the war, though it dropped to 12 pages, and in 1918 the price was raised to 2d.

4. For more details of the Friends of Women Suffrage Scheme see Chapter 7

It would appear that the National Union's growth during this time was reflecting both the increasing support for the cause generally and to some extent the decline in WSPU support. Rosen has indicated that the WSPU's support may have been in decline from as early as 1909 — at a time when National Union growth was just beginning to really take off — and this was clearly accelerated by the extremism of the WSPU's later activities.¹

The WSPU was also undoubtedly undermined in part by government action to suppress it. Moreover there was considerable demoralisation after the split between the Pankhursts and the Pethick Lawrences in 1912, on the use of large-scale destruction of property as a tactic and by adverse public reaction to its increasingly dangerous activities. As will be discussed below, the campaign around the Conciliation Bills between 1910-12 was particularly suited to the skills and traditions of the National Union, and the best aspects of its organisation became particularly apparent at this time. The defeat of this campaign and the change of policy it forced upon the National Union meant that from 1912 it was able to offer even more effective challenges to the government, and unite in a common fight with the labour and socialist movements. At the same time a new generation of leaders of impressive skill and originality — Catherine Marshall, Kathleen Courtney, Margaret Robertson Ethel Williams, Maude Royden, Margaret Ashton, Helena Swanwick — were emerging from the provinces and were to provide the backbone of the new policy of association with the Labour Party.

1. Rosen, op cit pp.211-12

CHAPTER 4 : WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE VERSUS ADULT SUFFRAGE:
WORKING CLASS WOMEN AND THE VOTE

Though the early years of the century saw considerable organisational expansion within the suffrage movement, the widening of the base of support which this had entailed brought new internal tensions and conflicts. Working class suffragists were to be at the centre of a major controversy within the movement concerning the limited nature of the equal suffrage demand, given the existing restricted, property-based franchise.

In the past there have been conflicting assessments of working class women's participation in the women's suffrage movement but a recent study of the suffrage activities of the textile workers leaves one issue no longer in doubt.¹ Working class women *were* active in the women's suffrage cause to considerable effect, though they frequently preferred to work outside the larger national suffrage organisations. However, such participation involved considerable dilemmas for these women, which are still in need of greater exploration.

As the previous chapter sought to show, the advance of the suffrage campaigns among the textile workers of North West England made an important contribution to the revival of the cause around the turn of the century. Not only had it stimulated several constitutional societies to engage in similar organising activities among other groups of women workers, but it had introduced Christabel Pankhurst to suffragist agitation.² The growing link between the suffrage and socialist causes in Lancashire was a direct stimulus to the formation of the WSPU. While it remained based in Manchester, labour and socialist groups were

1. Liddington and Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, see also Fulford, *Votes for Women*, pp.102-108. Compare these with the negative estimates of working class involvement with women's suffrage in Bridget Hill, *The Emancipation of Women and the Women's Movement*, *Marxist Quarterly*, January 1956 pp.40-57 and R.S. Neale, *Working Class Women and Women's Suffrage*, in his *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul 1972, pp.143-195

2. Rosen, *Rise Up Women*, pp.24f; Liddington and Norris op cit pp.170f

the main source of the WSPU's organisational strength.

However, as the campaign to enfranchise women advanced, some sections of the labour and socialist movements became increasingly antagonistic to the call for equal votes for women on the existing franchise, viewing it as a middle class demand. Suffragist leaders for their part remained intransigent in refusing to associate their own cause with the growing demand for adult suffrage. They feared such a demand might result simply in a manhood suffrage bill with the women's cause being shelved for yet another generation. Consequently, working class women were faced with the following conflict of loyalties. Either they put the cause of sex equality above their class interests and supported the limited demand for equal votes, at a time when many working class men remained unenfranchised. Or they put class interests above sexual equality and supported the adult suffrage demand, while suspecting that for many self-avowed adultists in the labour and socialist movement, a *manhood* suffrage measure would be acceptable.

Faced with this dilemma working women's organisations, notably the textile workers and the Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG), attempted to bring the suffrage movement into a closer alliance with the labour and socialist movements, by linking women's suffrage to the call for adult suffrage. To do this they first attempted to broaden the limited basis of the women's suffrage demand supported by all the national suffrage societies. Secondly, they sought to strengthen the commitment of adultist opinion to the principle of sexual equality. At the same time they began to promote the possibility of an alliance between the constitutional wing of the suffrage movement, the National Union, and the Labour Party, as the best political strategy for suffragists. This chapter will look firstly at the impact of suffragist organisation on working class support, and then at the efforts of working class women to widen the

suffragist demand while seeking to strengthen the cause of sexual equality within the councils of the labour and socialist movements.

Working Class Women and Suffrage Organisations

a) The National Union

The National Union's efforts to organise working class support were patchy, varying from society to society, though its importance had been recognised early by the central leadership.¹ Among its early leadership it also figured several women prominent in socialist politics — Isabella Ford, Margaret Macdonald and Ethel Snowden. Gradually it began to produce propaganda material aimed specifically at working class women, while more and more of its organisers were drawn from a working class background. As has been illustrated, in the early years the WCG was seen as the main channel of communication with organised working women, and it was regularly consulted on the organisation of demonstrations and other activities, at both a local and national level.

The North of England Society continued to show a concern with working class membership, even after the textile workers had left to form their own organisation. This was evidenced by the introduction of a 1d subscription in 1908. A new secretary, Kathleen Courtney, and a new organiser, Margaret Robertson joined the Society in 1908 and soon re-established the old pattern of open-air meetings, factory gate meetings, alongside the Society's more conventional drawing room meetings and garden parties. The two represented a new generation of National Union leaders, and were to become prominent in the campaign within the constitutional wing for an alliance with the Labour Party.² In 1910 they initiated a new departure with the formation of the South Salford

1. NUWSS Annual Report 1902; NUWSS Executive Minutes 3 October 1901
 2. NESWS Annual Report 1908, 1910. MPLA M50/1/4/23-48. Also see below Chapters 7 and 9

Suffrage Club, aimed specifically at working class supporters. Several Labour-Suffrage clubs on similar lines were to follow.¹

Helena Swanwick, who was active in the North of England Society at the time recalled this work: "The encouragement we got from the poor and the inarticulate was best of all. Said one 'What you bin sayin, Ah bin thinkin' long enough, but Ah never gotten t'words reet'".² Ida O'Malley reported a similar experience at a meeting for working women organised by the London Society in 1911: "They were so poor and so loaded with babies and so gloriously enthusiastic. The resolution was passed standing with huge applause — it really was *thrilling*".³

Ada Neild Chew, a women's trade union organiser and socialist, explained her growing commitment to women's suffrage and her decision to join the National Union thus:

I have not changed my opinion as to the immediate value and wisdom of trade unionism for women workers, but it has been forced on my consciousness more and more that whilst women are at a political disadvantage trade unionism is necessarily limited (which does not detract from the value of trade unionism, but emphasises the importance of the vote). But I could not see that anything less than Adult Suffrage would be of any use to the working woman, and therefore opposed a limited measure as being reactionary. Now, after many months of anxious thinking, I have come to the conclusion that we cannot get on at all whilst women have no means of even presenting their point of view, and that we shall be at a standstill till this necessary 'first step' is taken; and that to be determined to wait until all women can vote is as reactionary and as impracticable as to oppose all reform because it does not go as far on our way as we wish it to go.⁴

Despite such responses many working class women clearly found off-putting the middle class atmosphere of the National Union's more typical activities.⁵ The subscription to the National Union would also have

1. NESWS Annual Report 1910, MPLA M50/1/4/23-48

2. Swanwick, *I Have Been Young*, p.204

3. Ida O'Malley to Catherine Marshall n.d. circa June 1911, CMP

4. Letter to *The Common Cause*, 16 February 1911

5. *ibid* 18 April 1912. See also Liddington and Norris *op cit* p.225

been beyond the reach of many working class women. "A Mother of the Working Classes" wrote to *The Common Cause*: "We need solid moral support more than subscriptions, and where the spirit is true and willing, but the purse is weak, we should surely not draw the line of membership at a set subscription".¹ Eventually the National Union designed activities like the Suffrage Clubs, and the Friends of Women's Suffrage Scheme aimed specifically at working class membership.² They were to become particularly important once the National Union decided to extend its work to organising suffrage support within the labour and socialist movements.

b) The Lancashire and Cheshire Textile and Other Workers Representation Committee (LCTOWRC)

The history of the textile workers suffrage campaigns well illustrates the problems confronting working class women working who supported the suffrage cause. On the one hand the equal enfranchisement demanded by the suffrage societies would have left the vast majority of working class women disenfranchised for want of the required property qualification. On the other hand, the Labour Party was, at this time, moving away from its earlier commitment to women's suffrage, in favour of an adult suffrage demand, which might well result only in manhood suffrage.

The existence of this predicament has been well documented in Liddington and Norris' study of the textile workers' campaigns. It is not very surprising then that the initiative for this work shifted over time from middle class suffragists based on the National Union's North of England Society to a newly formed working women's association, the Lan-

1. *The Common Cause*, 2 May 1912. See also another letter from Ada Neild Chew *ibid* 7 November 1913 suggesting ways to contact working class women for suffrage work.

2. A copy of one issue of the *Friends of Women's Suffrage Newsletter* exists in Catherine Marshall's papers for 1912

cashire and Cheshire Textile and Other Workers Representation Committee, set up in 1903.

The LCTOWRC was the only suffrage organisation aimed particularly at working class women. It was formed with the specific intention of running a suffrage candidate at the next election in Wigan.¹ The growth of suffrage interest among the working women of North West England was thus closely related to the demand for independent labour representation within the House of Commons. The Committee's early manifesto declared:

During the last few years the need of political power for the defence of the workers has been felt by every section of the Labour world. Among the men the growing sense of the importance of this question has resulted in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee with the object of gaining direct Parliamentary Representation for the already enfranchised working men.²

The women textile workers sought similar direct representation, so as to further their own particular industrial interests, e.g. limitation of hours.

As they based their arguments for votes for women on the specific needs of the woman industrial worker to be represented in Parliament, they formulated their demand in terms of full womanhood — and therefore by implication, adult — suffrage.³ Nonetheless, they continued to support the more limited demand of the national suffrage bodies as an important step towards this goal.

Between 1903 and 1909 the LCTOWRC sought to arouse a wider degree of support for their cause within the labour movement,⁴ with little success. Consequently, many of its leading activists eventually came to concentrate much of their suffrage activity through the National Union,

1. See Liddington and Norris pp.164-5, 197-200

2. Quoted by Eva Gore Booth in Villiers (ed) *The Case for Women's Suffrage* p.50

3. Liddington and Norris op cit p.183f

4. *ibid* pp.231f

often as organisers of working class support. Ada Neild Chew, whose explanation of her abandonment of adultist agitation in favour of votes for women was quoted earlier, was one such. Other textile workers' leaders who came to concentrate their efforts within the National Union were Mrs Aldersley and Selina Cooper.¹ The degree of disillusion with the Labour Party's failure to support the principle of sexual equality was expressed thus by Eva Gore Booth:

It is no exaggeration to say that among the more progressive workers there has grown up a deep feeling of bitterness and disappointment, a feeling which culminated this year when the Labour Party, led away by a theoretical inclination for the very stale red herring of immediate and entire adult suffrage, refused to fulfil their written pledge and press forward a measure for the enfranchisement of women ... Their position is absolutely indefensible. They have built up the whole of the Labour Party on what they are pleased to call a property qualification, a qualification that gives votes to houses and lodgings, not to flesh and blood, a qualification that, according to their own often repeated statement, no democratic person could accept or even compromise with as a temporary instalment of justice ... In fact they have eaten their cake and enjoyed and digested it, it is only when a hungry beggar asks for a slice that they find out that it is poisonous.²

It was the unresponsiveness of the organised labour movement which caused this pioneering attempt to link socialism and feminism to founder and drove these working class suffragists back into a closer working relationship with the middle class suffrage organisations.

3) The WSPU

The foundation of the WSPU in 1903 had in itself also been a reflection of the growing importance of the suffrage issue among working class and socialist women. Mrs Pankhurst aimed to use her organisation as a ginger group within the labour movement. In its early years the

1. See below Chapters 7 & 9 for the work of the National Union's Election Fighting Fund Committee in which such organisers were employed
 2. Eva Gore Booth in Villiers (ed) pp.54-5

WSPU was particularly dependent on its links with the ILP, and organised largely among working class women in Lancashire.¹

In its initial development the WSPU had offered socialist women a second channel through which to work for women's suffrage, but from 1906 Christabel's policy was to try to broaden the base of its membership and lose the close association with the socialist movement.² It was decided that the WSPU should no longer work in cooperation with the Labour Party at by-elections, and eventually organisers were required to sign a pledge that they would not involve themselves in Labour election work. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence recalled "It is impossible to realise the almost universal disapproval that met the declaration of this line of action. Many of our members were opposed to it".³

It is clear that this development was, in part, behind the split in the WSPU in 1907, which resulted in the formation of the Women's Freedom League.⁴ Though this was denied at the time by the dissidents who claimed an equal distrust of Labour leaders,⁵ all WFL leaders had close associations with the ILP (i.e. Charlotte Despard, Teresa Billington Grieg, Marion Coates Hanson, Annie Cobden Sanderson and Mrs Morrissey) and were to be found working with the ILP at the Kirkdale by-election which occurred shortly after the split. The WFL continued to keep its close links with the ILP and to seek to organise working class women suffragists. After the split the WFL appears to have gained the support of a significant number of WSPU branches in the provinces.

1. Rosen op cit pp.30f

2. *ibid* p.70

3. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World*, London: Victor Gollancz 1938 p.159

4. *The Labour Leader*, 20 September 1907, editorial.

5. The official cause of the split was Mrs Pankhurst's suspension of the WSPU constitution. See Christine Taylor, *The Women's Freedom League*, University of Sussex MA Thesis

Meanwhile many militants continued their involvement with labour and socialist movement alongside their suffrage activity,¹ though Christabel kept up her fight against socialist influence within the WSPU. She recalled:

Political independence of party was, it may here be said, the cause of a difference of view between Mother and myself, on the one hand, as the leaders of the WSPU who determined its policy, and the two younger daughters (Sylvia and Adela) who would have preferred to associate the WSPU with the Labour Party.²

Christabel was in fact seeking some political alliance with the Conservative Party at this time, through its leader A.J. Balfour. She wrote to him:

It would prevent the threatened alliance of a large section of the women's suffrage party with the Labour party.

It was not only the WSPU she had in mind.

In the older women's suffrage society led by Mrs Fawcett, there is a powerful section who desire to give definite support to Labour candidates at Parliamentary elections. I believe that they will succeed in committing the organisation to that policy ... a favourable declaration from you will be of far greater importance and will have the effect of preventing a Labour-Suffrage alliance.³

The growing middle-class dominance of the London WSPU certainly provoked considerable resentment among working class suffragists. In one incident sellers of *The Woman Worker*, a paper directed at women

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1. This is clearly seen in the careers of Adela and Sylvia Pankhurst, see David Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts*, London: Jonathan Cape 1967 pp.46-47 and Sylvia Pankhurst *The Suffragette Movement*, London: Virago reprint 1977. See also the report of WSPU-ILP cooperation in the 1907 Jarrow by-election, *The Labour Leader*, 5 July 1907 and the claims of a Birmingham WSPU member of continuing election work for Labour candidates in her report of the Women's Labour League conference, *The Labour Leader*, 24 January 1908.
 2. Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled*, London: Hutchinson 1959 p.69
 3. Christabel Pankhurst to A.J. Balfour 26 September 1907, BM Add MSS 49793

trade unionists, appear to have been excluded from a WSPU demonstration. Kathleen Bruce Glasier, a leading member of the ILP, commented "there is growing reason to fear that 'The Society Women's Political Union' would be the honestest interpretation of WS and PU capitals".¹ Nellie Best from Middlesborough wrote to *The Woman Worker* that she had heard that WSPU London meetings were held in evening dress. She asked: "Is it intended to debar servants, laundresses etc?"² A Women's Labour League organiser, commenting on the WSPU's ability to raise large sums of money, suggested "it is certainly not from or *for* the class the WLL is working for".³

Even so, it is clear that the breach between the WSPU and the socialist movement took several years to complete, and was never fully achieved in some local branches.⁴ A WSPU manifesto published at the end of 1906 still argued:

Are you satisfied with the laws your representatives have made? You are not. You know that your children are starving. You know that aged workers have to end their lives in the workhouse. You know that industrious workers, women as well as men, are unemployed. You know that sweated women labour for 1d an hour. You know that women in despair are selling their bodies on the streets. You know that these things are, because women are refused their rights as citizens.⁵

At a major WSPU demonstration in the summer of 1908, an ILP contingent was present and carried the banner "The World for the Workers".⁶ In some branches, the links with the ILP remained particularly close. Manchester WSPU provides one notable example, where the WSPU organiser

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1. *The Labour Leader*, 27 September 1908
 2. *The Woman Worker*, 25 September 1908
 3. Quoted in M. Rendel, *The Contribution of the Women's Labour League to the Winning of the Franchise*, in Lucy Middleton (ed) *Women in the Labour Movement*, London: Croom Helm 1977 p.63
 4. Rosen ignores the evidence of continuing links between the WSPU and the socialist movement in the provinces.
 5. *Jus Suffragii*, 15 November 1906
 6. *The Labour Leader*, 26 June 1908

in 1908, Annot Wilkie, (later to become Annot Robinson, and a National Union organiser) was also a leading member of the local ILP. This branch regularly advertised its activities in the ILP paper, *The Labour Leader*.¹ The WSPU appears to have been continuing to attract working class women even as late as 1911.²

However, involvement of working class women in the suffrage cause was not restricted to the work of the suffrage organisations. Many such women concentrated their suffrage activity within their existing organisations — notably the WCG and the ILP, or its women's section, the Women's Labour League. Here they were challenged by a significant group of socialists who believed they should be working for the adultist demand alone. The course of this controversy and further working class women's attempts to unite the two demands will now be explored.

Socialism and Feminism: Adult Suffrage versus Women's Suffrage

The re-emergence of the women's suffrage issue around the turn of the century posed a considerable problem for British socialists. As the existing franchise was property-based, a large number of working men were still disenfranchised alongside women of all classes.³ The ultimate goal, clearly, should be full adult suffrage, but this involved a far bigger addition to the electorate than any previously undertaken. Many socialists argued that if adult suffrage had to be achieved in several stages, priority must be given to the removal of the sex disability as the first stage. Others, including the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and many trade unionists, pointed to the property base of the existing franchise, and argued that women's suffrage

1. See e.g. *ibid* 21 February, 5 June 1908

2. See the reminiscences of just such a factory worker in Mary Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance*, p.129

3. See Blewett, *The Franchise in the United Kingdom*

would simply multiply the middle class vote while, in its appeal to women of all classes, it threatened to split the class unity necessary for the socialist struggle.¹

Through her position on the NAC of the ILP Mrs Pankhurst had sought to strengthen the commitment of the labour movement to the suffrage cause. While the ILP remained firm in its formal commitment to the women's franchise throughout the pre-war years, the Labour Party from 1904 was under pressure from the SDFers and some trade unions to abandon its previous commitment in favour of the adult suffrage resolution put up by these sections of the party. At one stage this resulted in the threatened resignation of Keir Hardie as Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and the ILP leader was to remain one of the firmest advocates of the need to give priority to the removal of the sex disqualification. The ILP, together with the WCG, undertook the detailed analysis of municipal voters in a variety of constituencies, in order to illustrate that working class women would be a large proportion of those who would be enfranchised by an equal suffrage measure, but they failed to convince its opponents within the Labour Party.²

At the root of many ILPers' commitment to votes for women was the belief that a revolution in the position of women was essential to the achievement of socialism, but British socialism produced no theoretical discussion of the problem, and by the early 1900s such commitment often seemed marred by an unthinking sentimentality about women.³ For example,

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1. e.g. report of debate between the Bradford Men's League for Women's Suffrage and the SDF, Should the Workers support the Women's Suffrage Movement? *Women's Franchise*, 8 August 1907. Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres*, pp.33f, 47 has identified the adultists as one of the main sources of resistance to the women's suffrage demand.
 2. See Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden From History*, London: Pluto 1973, p.83; Liddington & Norris op cit pp.180-1
 3. For a discussion of this problem see Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and The New Life*, London: Pluto 1977 pp.16-23

Charlotte Despard, an active worker for the ILP and SDF, as well as one of the founders of the Women's Freedom League, argued that votes for women would produce a new democracy which would not be expressed in

shouting, gesticulating crowds but assemblies of men and women, grave, earnest and determined, filled with the consciousness that the business on which they are engaged is of profound importance to the nation ... Given such an electorate, given the House of Commons which they would elect, may it not be possible for the country to tackle abuses, to force forward reforms and to create such administration as would change what now seems a chaos of contending forces into a beautiful socialist order?

So at least runs our dream. Utopian it may be called. We care not. It is a dream worth living for, dying for, working for.¹

Tom Johnston, editor of the Glasgow ILP paper *The Forward* was a somewhat erratic and not untypical example of a socialist suffrage supporter. In 1909 he published a pamphlet *Women and the Vote*, and in 1910 contributed a series of articles, "What Will Happen When Women Get the Vote". With the enfranchisement of women he foresaw the regulation of drink selling and public houses, a more adequate old-age pension scheme, payment for maternity leave, the end of prostitution, and a generally healthier community: "While men are watching the football match, women will think of the insanitary house" ... "woman will be the reformer ... she will endeavour to extend the ethics of the home till they include all society".² This view also illustrates another tendency in British socialist thought at this time, previously noted by Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, which was "to stress the positive role of

1. Charlotte Despard, *Woman and the Nation*, loc cit. A similar note was struck by James Allan of the Glasgow ILP, who argued that the women's vote would result in "the spiritualizing of our governing bodies", *The Forward*, 16 July 1910

2. *The Forward*, 5, 12, 19 November 1910

the family as a defence against wage labour and capitalism".¹

Those socialists who rejected the priority women suffragists demanded for their cause did so for a variety of reasons. Some, like Margaret Bondfield, argued that the full emancipation of women could only come with socialism. She believed that sweating, prostitution, landlordism, unemployment and slum housing "proved up to the hilt that the prevailing poverty was the arresting element in the development of women" and had little faith that the enfranchisement of propertied women would effect a solution to these problems.²

Other socialists, like Bruce Glasier, were clearly reacting against the evident middle class ethos of much of the movement. Recording a meeting with Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst, he wrote:

A weary ordeal of chatter about women's suffrage from 10pm to 1.30am — Mrs and Christabel Pankhurst belabouring me as chairman of the party (the ILP) for its neglect of the question. At last get roused — speak with something like scorn of their miserable individualistic sexism, and virtually tell them that the ILP will not stir a finger more than it has done for all the women suffragists in Creation. Really the pair are not seeking democratic freedom, but self-importance ... They want to be ladies, not workers, and lack the humility of real heroism.³

In other instances socialist resistance to the suffrage demand appears to have represented nothing other than plain unthinking prejudice. Such attitudes can be found in extreme form in the attack made

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1. Rowbotham and Weeks, op cit p.19. For another example of this kind of thought see F.F. Mills article, *The Great Divorce; the Mother and the Home*, in the *Labour Leader* 19 March 1909, one of a series seeking to show that the number of married working women was increasing in order to provide a cheap source of labour for capitalism, and arguing that the trend was linked to high infant mortality rates.
 2. *The Labour Leader*, 13 November 1908, report of a debate "That the full development of women is possible only through socialism".
 3. Quoted from Bruce Glasier's diary, in Lawrence Thompson, *The Enthusiasts*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1971, p.136

by Belfort Bax, a prominent member of the SDF, in his book *The Fraud of Feminism*.¹ Malcolm Muggeridge has also recalled the attitudes of his father's circle of friends in the South London SDF:

My father, an early socialist, felt in duty bound to be theoretically in favour of Votes for Women, but in private conversation with his cronies treated the subject with a certain derision. I feel sure that he neither hoped nor expected they would get the vote in his lifetime. The same went for his cronies, who were all fellow-socialists, or socialist sympathisers. They were on the whole a very masculine lot, and spoke with scarcely veiled contempt of male supporters of the suffragists like Pethick Lawrence.²

But the most forceful socialist opposition to the suffrage demand was organised around the call for adult suffrage, and as the cause of women's enfranchisement grew in prominence in the early years of the century, so it attracted ever more vehement opposition from committed adultists. The cries of "blacklegs" and "traitors" which met a demonstration by the West of Scotland Men's League for Women's Suffrage prompted one suffragist to ask: "Is there then in the male sex a kind of instinctive trade unionism" seeking to exclude women from political and economic freedom.³

Keir Hardie insisted that such adultist opposition was unreasonable, for full adult suffrage was not yet in the realm of practical politics: "If the workers were prepared to lay every other reform on the shelf, and begin an agitation for adult suffrage they might, if specially fortunate, be successful and get it about the year 1929". Manhood suffrage could probably be secured at once and for the asking: but the

1. E. Belfort Bax, *The Fraud of Feminism*, London: Grant Richards, 1913
 2. Malcolm Muggeridge, Introduction to Anna Raeburn, *The Suffragette View*, Newton Abbot: David and Charles 1976 p.6
 3. *Women's Franchise*, 17 October 1907. Male suffragists' meetings were particularly liable to these attacks

complete enfranchisement of all men and all women at once would be resisted bitterly by all parties, whereas a limited measure of women's suffrage could prepare the way for complete adult suffrage.¹ Implied in his argument was the fear held by many suffragists, that, for some, adult suffrage meant no more than manhood suffrage. Such a measure could only present "a well-nigh unscalable wall of sex ascendancy".²

On the other hand a few suffragists openly supported the women's demand in order to halt the progress of democracy. Frances Power Cobbe wrote: "in my humble judgment as a Conservative, there has been culpable recklessness on the part of those who, to serve party interests, have, in England, thrown open the gates of our sacred 'polis' to a babble of illiterates". She argued that the enfranchisement of women "will tend to the stability and preservation of the State, and to the maintenance of social order and religion".³ Such a justification for the women's vote was carried into the twentieth century by the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association,⁴ who promoted women's suffrage as a bulwark against the threat of adult suffrage.

Leading suffragist spokeswomen were often uncompromising in their opposition to the adultist claim, notably Mrs Fawcett and Mrs Pankhurst. In a speech which must have offended many socialist and Labour women, Mrs Fawcett declared:

We are not asking that every woman should have the suffrage. That would be an enormous and an unwieldy change in our constitution. It would immediately place about 11 million of persons on the register ... in my opinion adult suffrage is both undesirable and unnecessary at the present time.⁵

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1. James Keir Hardie, *The Citizenship of Women* loc cit
 2. Florence Balgarnie in Villiers (ed) op cit p.41
 3. Cobbe in Stanton (ed) *The Woman Question in Europe*, p.xvi
 4. See Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics*, pp.23-24 for the manifesto of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association. Some individuals in the National Union also shared this position, see Edith Palliser to Lady Frances Balfour 21 January 1907, FAC
 5. Mrs Henry Fawcett, *Wanted, a Statesman*, loc cit

But many suffragists were also adultists who nonetheless felt it essential strategically to first obtain the women's right to vote. They argued that women were the only section within the disenfranchised whose disqualification was absolute. Charlotte Carmichael Stopes was a democrat who argued on these lines "Men have placed all women in one class now. We are all sisters and 'co-parceners' with one another".¹ Certainly, the suffragists' suspicion of the adultist demand was proved correct on a number of occasions, when anti-suffragists showed themselves both willing and able to mobilise support for a democratic franchise *against* the women's demand.²

Moreover, suffragists often pointed to the association of the anti-suffragists with an anti-democratic impulse and with the forces of established wealth.³ The feminist historian, W. Lyon Blease, noted at the time that the majority of the Antis lived "in the Home Counties and the South, the strongholds of landed property and accumulated wealth".⁴

Socialist suffragists, who were also adultists but who accepted the tactical necessity of first securing the removal of the sex disability, remained in a minority, at least in the leadership of the movement. In such a situation many working class women found themselves torn "between a socialist movement which denied feminism, and a feminist movement which dismissed socialism, through to the anti-socialism of Christabel Pankhurst".⁵

In this situation of growing antagonism between women suffragists

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1. Stopes, *The British Freewoman*, p.192. See also Ignota, *Westminster Review*, Vol.148 1897 p.312 and Vol.156 1901 p.74
 2. e.g. see below Chapter 8 for the use of democratic rhetoric against women's suffrage amendments to the manhood suffrage bill. See Chapter 11 for the open adherence to full adult suffrage by many suffragists by 1917
 3. Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres*, pp.49, 206 for a discussion of the anti-democracy sentiments of many anti-suffragists
 4. Blease, *The Emancipation of Women*, p.243
 5. Rowbotham and Weeks, *op cit* p.20

and some adultists, and the Labour Party's apparent lack of commitment to the cause of sexual equality, the Women's Cooperative Guild attempted a compromise solution.

The WCG had a long history of support for the women's suffrage demand. Under the influence of the advance of the adult suffrage demand it passed an adultist resolution at its 1905 conference, but with the significant qualification that it regarded any women's suffrage measure as a step towards this ultimate goal.¹ However, the WCG's membership was largely composed of married working class women, and few of them were likely to qualify for the vote under an equal franchise measure, unless widowed.

At the end of 1906, the WCG's secretary, Margaret Llewellyn Davies, initiated a campaign to change the nature of previous private member suffrage bills, by adding provision for married women to qualify on their husband's possession of a vote. National Union spokeswomen resisted this development, insisting "The franchise law does not distinguish between married and unmarried men, and it must not do so between married and unmarried women". This opposition was linked with their opposition to adultist demands. "It would be fatally bad policy to depart from the simple demand" i.e. equal suffrage. They suggested the best course would be for the WCG to get an amendment to the more limited bill, if and when it reached committee stage.² Margaret Bondfield responded for the Adult Suffrage Society that the law already distinguished between married and unmarried women in the law of coverture, so that some women suffered the *double* disqualification of sex and married status.³

At a Queens Hall suffrage demonstration on 26 March 1907, a reso-

1. Liddington and Norris, op cit pp.140-2, 153-4
 2. *Women's Franchise*, 8 January 1907
 3. *ibid* 15 January 1907

lution on the lines of the WCG proposal received only 20 votes.¹ Nonetheless, W.H. Dickenson, a leading suffragist MP undertook to introduce a private member bill which extended the franchise to the wives of voters also. The women's columnist of *The Labour Leader* commented that the new bill "should sweep away the only valid objection of the adultists" to previous bills.² While supporters of the bill continued to argue that it was the only equitable way to enfranchise women, in that it sought to remove the double disqualification of some women,³ most suffraist leaders continued to resist it. Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, the veteran feminist active in the first campaign in the late 1860s, appealed to the WCG to withdraw its support for the bill, arguing that it would simply alienate one body of support within the House of Commons, and could never expect to attract government support.⁴ In reply, Margaret Llewellyn Davies argued that the bill made sense on the grounds of the existing occupier franchise, in that working women were always joint heads of households with their menfolk, in practice if not in law.⁵

The introduction of the bill went ahead, and at last received the grudging support of the National Union should it reach a second reading, though Mrs Fawcett continued to argue that it would "prove a disintegrating force is next door to certain".⁶

1. *ibid* 15 April 1907

2. *Labour Leader*, 16 August 1907

3. *Women's Franchise*, 5 September 1907. See also *ibid* 10 October 1907

4. *ibid* 5 September 1907, see also *ibid* 22 August 1907. For WSPU opposition see *Votes For Women*, November 1907

5. *Women's Franchise*, 12 September 1907

6. *Jus Suffragii*, 15 November 1907. There was clearly considerable confusion within the councils of the National Union for its report to *Jus Suffragii* 15 September 1907 took the favourable view that the bill would enfranchise "every woman who would be qualified to vote if she were a man".

The nature of some of the suffragist attacks on the Dickenson Bill must have disturbed many working class suffragists. One opponent wrote "there are many of us who, while fully recognising that a Socialistic tendency in Government is necessary to the betterment of the working classes, are yet strongly opposed to a state socialism as shown in the programme of the ILP, the SDF, etc.". She argued that Dickenson's bill would increase the danger of the socialist vote. The vote in her view should first be given to the educated women, then the "better class" of working women, and finally "it may become general".¹

Similarly, another suffragist argued against the bill as "the worst form of class legislation, in no way redeemed by benevolent intention". She insisted "with every increase of the electorate the individual voter becomes of less obvious account ... we have little warrant for believing that adult suffrage .. would be an improvement".²

Even those suffragists who were also adultists frequently opposed the bill on the grounds that it was bad tactics. In Marion Holmes' words "'half a loaf is better than no bread'. The women of this country are in the position of political starvation at the present time".³

Such attacks created considerable resentment among the women of the WCG. Rosalind Nash pointed to working class women's sacrifice of their own interests in the past.

No genuine suffragist wished to create difficulties, and the Guild deferred to the prejudices against asking for adult suffrage so far as to state the claim in a form suitable to a limited bill.⁴

Margaret Llewellyn Davies demanded:

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1. *Women's Franchise*, 12 September 1907
 2. Letter from A.B. Wallis Chapman *ibid* 19 September 1907. See Lilian Harris rebuttal *ibid* 26 September 1907
 3. *ibid* 12 December 1907
 4. In Villiers *op cit* pp.67-8

Is it not time, too, that we should agree to cease the parrot cry of 'Traitor' against any one who dares to speak of adult suffrage...Women should leave out no women from their demand for citizenship. The excluding can quite safely be left to the men.¹

It appears that at this time the WCG also became involved in an attempt to change the election policy of the suffragist organisations. Together with the textile workers' organisation and the Manchester Women's Trade Council they put forward a new method for attacking the Liberal government, by asking the Labour Party to move women's suffrage amendments to the King's Speech. They further suggested that in future the suffrage organisations should require parliamentary candidates to pledge themselves to support such an amendment, before offering them campaign support. Such a policy "would usually result in active support for the Labour Party, whose natural allies we are, but to whom we cannot pledge ourselves until actual proof has been given of their good faith, by giving the Suffrage a prominent place in their parliamentary programme".² Here again working class suffragists were seeking some means of allying the suffrage and labour movements. This initiative foreshadowed the eventual alliance between the National Union and the Labour Party, and was supported by several National Union societies.

The Dickenson Bill met the usual fate of such suffrage bills — a satisfactory majority within the House of Commons, but a refusal by the government to allow it any further facilities — and thereafter private member bills reverted to the more limited form of votes for women on the same basis as the male franchise. Despite these controversies, the WCG continued to work closely with the National Union on occasion, and to discuss women's suffrage and produce propaganda leaf-

1. *Women's Franchise*, 7 November 1907

2. *ibid* 17 October 1907

lets on the issue, alongside its work for adult suffrage.¹ Meanwhile National Union organisers continued to experience opposition from adultist opinion in working class districts.²

During 1907 the ILP women also became involved in a controversy over women's suffrage, at the first International Conference of Socialist Women. The British contingent comprised nine representatives from the ILP and WLL, and five from the SDF and Adult Suffrage Society. The ILP women protested at the inclusion of representatives from the Adult Suffrage Society, and put their case for their support of the equal suffrage demand. Nonetheless they were ignored by the rest of the conference on this issue, and when the German women put an adultist resolution, the ILP's amendment was defeated, partly by the votes of the SDF representatives.³

The argument continued through a debate between Margaret Bondfield for the Adult Suffrage Society and Teresa Billington Grieg, for the WFL. Under the title "Red Tie Socialism" the WFL reporter commented that the content of the discussion "ought to show women clearly how little reliance can be placed upon the honesty or intelligence of present-day socialism with regards to the woman question". She believed Margaret Bondfield's arguments were "masculine" and denied sexual oppression, concluding "We fail to see why it should be so virtuous to fight against class oppression, and so very wicked to fight against sex oppression". She insisted that it remained necessary to fight

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1. e.g. WCG Annual Report 1907-8. Margaret Llewellyn Davies continued to move closer to the adultist position. She resigned as a Vice President of the North of England Society for Women's Suffrage at this time, and eventually became a founding member of the Peoples Suffrage Federation, (see below) though she never ceased to seek an alliance between the two demands.
 2. *Women's Franchise*, 6 August, 31 December 1908
 3. *Labour Leader*, 16 August 1907. For WLL see Rendel op cit p.57f

both.¹

At the Labour Party's conference in January 1908 the ILP's women's suffrage resolution was again defeated in favour of the adultist demand. *The Labour Leader* commented "The Party is not hostile to women's suffrage, but only to the present mode of obtaining it — the only immediately practical mode. The circumstances too that the WSPU has dissociated itself from the Labour movement has tended to arouse prejudice against their claims". Harry Quelch, the SDFer, and Will Thorne, had opposed the limited bill on the grounds that it was based on a property qualification, "regardless of the fact that no man present had any other kind of vote".²

The WLL conference which occurred alongside the Labour Party Conference also testified to division on this issue. Mrs Pethick Lawrence had led a WSPU attempt to win over the League to its policy of attacking the Liberal government whenever the opportunity occurred.³ After considerable discussion it was decided that both the women's suffrage and the adult suffrage resolutions should be withdrawn, and members should be left free to work for whichever cause they felt best "subject to loyalty to the constitution of the League", i.e. they would not follow the WSPU in refusing actively to work for Labour.⁴

In the Spring of 1908 Asquith, the new Liberal Prime Minister, foreshadowed the possibility of a reform bill on manhood suffrage lines. The suffragist response was angry. Mrs Fawcett accused the Prime Minister of "trying to run our barque on the rocks of Adult Suffrage". It had been framed as a concession to "pacify the deep and growing dis-

1. *Women's Franchise*, 12 December 1907, for the text of the debate see WFL pamphlet *Sex Equality Versus Equal Suffrage*, Fawcett Library
 2. *Labour Leader*, 24 January 1908
 3. *ibid*
 4. *ibid*. See also Rendel *loc cit*

content in the ranks of the Women's Liberal Federation", though it had been framed according to Mrs Fawcett, to do as much harm to the women's cause as possible.¹ Suffragists feared that manhood suffrage would erect an insuperable barrier to the early enfranchisement of women.² Margaret Llewellyn Davies joined their protest, and pointed to the large vote for women's suffrage at the recent Cooperative Congress as illustrating the scale of popular support.³

This development advanced the adultist cause considerably and increased attempts to organise adult suffrage forces. The ILP refused to attend a conference organised by the SDF on adult suffrage, the payment of MPs, the payment of election expenses, and proportional representation as "the obvious intention of this proposed 'adult suffrage' campaign is to oppose the policy of the immediate enfranchisement of women". No amendments in favour of women's suffrage were to be in order at the conference.

The real possibility of a future manhood suffrage bill left women adultists in a particularly vulnerable situation. Margaret Bondfield, President of the Adult Suffrage Society, was one of the signatories of a letter to Asquith organised by Margaret Llewellyn Davies, seeking some assurance that the government would take up responsibility for the inclusion of women's suffrage in the bill, and would undertake to withdraw the bill if this provision were defeated in the House of Commons.⁴ Margaret Bondfield found it necessary to write to *The Labour Leader* explaining that she had signed the letter in her capacity as a member of the WLL Executive, not as President of the Adult Suffrage Society,

1. *Women's Franchise*, 4 June 1908

2. Christabel Pankhurst, op cit p.94

3. *Labour Leader*, 19 July 1908, the conference represented two and a half million cooperators

4. See Rendel op cit pp.63-5

which wished to dissociate itself from the letter. "My personal opinion is that it is an excellent letter, and I should have voted in favour of signing it had I been present at the meeting (of the adultists) referred to, on the clear understanding that it did not commit me to proposals short of adult suffrage".¹ Women adultists now had to confront the very real possibility, always predicted by suffragists, that a large section of adultist opinion would in fact settle for manhood suffrage. It was this danger which drove women like Margaret Bondfield and Mary MacArthur into increasingly close cooperation with suffrage organisations during the next few years. As Mary MacArthur put it to a Labour Party conference "she and others had withstood the attempt to enfranchise some women only, it was for men to ensure that the women were enfranchised" alongside themselves.² It was at this Conference in 1910 that the Labour Party acknowledged that any extension of the existing franchise must include some measure of female enfranchisement.³

In late 1909 a new adultist organisation was formed, The Peoples Suffrage Federation (PSF) whose founders included Margaret Bondfield, Mary MacArthur and Margaret MacMillan, as well as Arthur Henderson and Liberal Party adultists. Its demand was for full adult suffrage regardless of sex on a three month residential qualification. The National Federation of Women Workers, the WCG, the Railwaywomen's League, the WLL and ILP branches had soon affiliated to the new body, as well as some individual members of Women's Liberal Associations.⁴ The new organisation clearly represented a further attempt to unite the adultists and the women's suffrage demand, by ensuring that the enfranchisement of women became an integral part of any future extension

1. *Labour Leader*, 28 November 1908
 2. Rendel op cit pp.67
 3. Rover op cit p.153
 4. *The Woman Worker*, 10 November 1909

of the franchise. The PSF described its own origins thus:

It was the outcome of a strong belief on the part of the promoters that the enfranchisement of women — being a part of the movement towards a truly representative and democratic government — could best be carried through in alliance with the progressive forces in politics — and could only be realised in a really effective manner by the reform of the franchise in the sense of ADULT SUFFRAGE.¹

The Woman Worker expressed the view that "One of the pleasant things about this new suffrage Federation is that it makes for the healing of sex antagonism, and invites men and women equally as members."²

Though it aimed at reconciling the two demands, the initial effect of the formation of the PSF was to split further some women suffragists away from their socialist colleagues. When Fred Jowett, the ILP's chairman, and Mary MacArthur, the one woman on the ILP NAC, became founder members of the PSF, Ethel Snowden, a socialist suffragist active in the National Union, resigned from the ILP. She believed that the PSF's manifesto implied opposition to any equal terms measure of women's suffrage, which was still part of the ILP's declared programme.³ In defending its own and its party's record on women's suffrage, *The Labour Leader*, somewhat disingenuously, argued that they had not "boomed" the issue because it was already booming. "In a word, the women's franchise movement is marching along, and the ILP and *The Labour Leader* are now freer to concentrate on objects which demand their special attention, pending the arrival of the psychological moment when their strenuous support of the women's suffrage movement can be given with the most telling effect".⁴

1. *The Suffrage Annual and Who's Who*, London: Stanley Paul 1913

2. *The Woman Worker*, 10 November 1909

3. *The Labour Leader*, 15 October 1909. She was joined in her resignation by Dr Haden Guest

4. *ibid*

In returning to the discussion the following week *The Labour Leader* quoted the PSF's circular letter: "We do not ask those who become members of the Federation to leave other suffrage societies, and we offer a new opportunity for men and women to ask together for complete political freedom". Nonetheless the ILP paper felt the formation of the PSF might well deplete the membership of the suffrage societies. If its demand proved the more popular of the two, this would not be a bad thing, but in the meantime the ILP should remember that it was bound to support a limited measure, and had always argued that it was "a necessary prelude to Adult Suffrage".¹ A conference of the ILP reaffirmed its commitment to women's suffrage, but the adultists continued to argue that, with Asquith's announcement the previous year, "To demand a Limited Bill now is to oppose a wider suffrage". No disloyalty to the ILP was involved in joining the PSF.²

In reply another socialist suffragist, Isabella Ford, warned that any reversal of the ILP's commitment to a women's suffrage bill would result in widespread resignations "on the grounds that we believe in an Adult Suffrage which includes both men and women and not in that which only includes men ... What MPs, I wonder, except Mr Hardie and Mr Snowden, would refuse to accept a Suffrage Bill which did not include women?"³

Margaret Llewellyn Davies explained her thinking behind helping form the PSF. She felt that an adultist measure now offered the best chance to women. She admitted that earlier there had been grounds for fearing that an adult suffrage demand would end only in manhood suffrage, but argued that now a "steadfast adherence to Mr Stanger's Bill (a

1. *ibid* 22 October 1909

2. M.M.A. Ward letter to *Labour Leader*, 29 October 1909. See also letters from Margaret Bondfield and Egerton Wake

3. *ibid* 5 November 1909. Annot Robinson and Charlotte Despard kept up the attack at the 1910 ILP Annual Conference

limited bill) will neither secure its adoption by a Liberal Government, nor will it make manhood suffrage an impossibility. But the build up of such an organisation as the PSF is making the betrayal of women a practical impossibility". The women's cause could only gain because "the argument for Adult Suffrage is comprehensive and inspiring" and could attract the cooperation of many who had previously stood outside the women's suffrage movement, to an organisation which put women's suffrage "first among our objects".¹

For their part the women's suffragists remained deeply suspicious of the adult suffrage demand and universally opposed the adultist measure introduced by Geoffrey Howard in 1909.² The National Union reported to *Jus Suffragii* that the voting had been 159 for the bill and 124 against. Comparing this to previous votes on women's suffrage bills it commented: "It will be seen that the effect of Mr Howard's Bill has been to reduce those standing for women's suffrage by 114 and to increase the voting against it by 32".³

Mrs Fawcett refused to receive a deputation from the PSF, when it was suggested by Marion Phillips, who was at that time the National Union's secretary.

I do not believe there is much genuine demand for universal suffrage. I certainly have not met with it when I have been about the country speaking ... In any case our position is clear. We have nothing to do, and can have nothing to do, with a general alteration of the franchise as it affects men... Any change in the direction of adult manhood suffrage would make our task infinitely more difficult of attainment.⁴

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1. *ibid* 12 November 1909. She believed equal suffrage would only enfranchise one in every seven or eight women, and married women and factory workers would be largely excluded.
 2. Christabel Pankhurst, *op cit* p.125; London Society's Annual Report 1909
 3. *Jus Suffragii*, 15 April 1909
 4. Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Marion Phillips 12 September 1909, MGFP

Marion Phillips was closely associated with the labour and socialist movements through both the WLL and the Women's Trade Union League. Shortly after this correspondence she resigned from her post with the National Union, and her own commitment to adult suffrage was no doubt a factor in her resignation.¹

Nevertheless, suffragist suspicion of the PSF was gradually eroded over the next three years, as the PSF became involved in some limited support for the suffragists' Conciliation Bills, and then worked very closely with the National Union in the campaign for the inclusion of women in the Reform Bill which Asquith announced to a PSF deputation in November 1911. The new primacy of the adultist demand which this announcement signalled, and women adultists' need to defend the principle of votes for women against the possibility of a manhood suffrage bill ensured that constitutional suffragists and adultists eventually came to work together, during the two remaining years before the war.

Further, the final 'torpedoing' of the women's suffrage bills by Asquith's introduction of a manhood suffrage bill in 1912 led the National Union into the alliance with the Labour Party which many working class and socialist suffragists had been seeking. The fate of women's suffrage thus became undeniably tied to that of adult suffrage. It was the combined pressure of the suffragists of the National Union, and the many suffragists in the labour and socialist movements which finally achieved the Labour Party's undertaking to accept no further measure of franchise reform which excluded women.

1. Mrs Fawcett's papers include notes entitled "My Counts against Miss Phillips" with the item "continually trying to push us in the direction of Adult Suffrage". Marion Phillips' political affiliations no doubt played some part in the issue (she eventually went on to become secretary of the Women's Labour League and then Chief Women's Officer of the Labour Party). One of her firmest opponents on the National Union Executive was Mrs Broadley Reid, also a leading member of the WLF Executive. Another member of the Women's Labour League on the National Union Executive, Dr Ethel Bentham, considered resigning over this controversy, see her letter to Walter McLaren 8 March 1910, MPLA M50/2/1/294

The cooperation between the constitutional suffragists and the labour movement, which developed rapidly between 1912 and 1914, marked the suffrage movement's final association between its own cause and that of democracy. Suffragists and adultists were now able to work side by side and working class involvement with the suffrage cause received a considerable boost. A major aspect of National Union activity now became the organisation of working class support, particularly that which could be reached through the organisations of the socialist and labour movements. The participation of working class women and their organisations in the suffrage movement had been critical to this achievement. In this way the conflict of loyalties which had confronted the working class suffragist in the early years of the twentieth century became largely resolved, and the Labour Party's at least temporary adherence to the principle of sexual equality was secured.

CHAPTER 5 : SUFFRAGISTS AND SUFFRAGETTES: THE
POLITICAL STRATEGIES OF THE NATIONAL
UNION AND WSPU

The formation of the WSPU in 1903, and the development of "militant" policies from 1905 as an alternative to the work of the constitutional societies, involved the suffrage movement in further disputes and divisions. The basis and significance of the controversy over militancy is still in need of exploration. It has generally been assumed that militancy represented the formation of a more resolute, even a more radical, feminist initiative, but the exploration of the changing content and significance of WSPU policy offered in this chapter suggests that this understanding needs to be modified.

To begin with constitutional and militant suffragists did not always represent two completely discrete and mutually antagonistic wings of the suffrage movement in Britain,¹ but achieved a significant degree of cooperation in the early years of this century. Nor did militancy represent a single, static policy. Its content was to vary greatly over time, and consequently so did the response of constitutional suffragists to it. What remained fundamentally at issue throughout the evolution of militant policy, however, was the constitutional and militant leaderships' varying assessment of how best to influence the Liberal government to support the principle of women's suffrage.

Initial disagreements between the National Union and the WSPU around 1905-6, developed out of their differing political bases, and were to find expression in different electoral strategies towards the Liberal government. Initially the constitutionalists, though officially non-party, were overwhelmingly pro-Liberal in membership, and sought to work alongside Liberals to strengthen their cause within the Party. The WSPU, by contrast, was still orientated very closely towards the Labour Party and the ILP, and had no commitment to the political success of the

1. see e.g. Edith Hurwitz, Carrie C. Catt's "Suffrage Militancy", *Signs*, Vol.3 1977-8, pp.739-43

Liberal government as such. Hence it was prepared to make the women's suffrage issue an embarrassment to the recently elected government by challenging Liberal candidates at by-elections.

Between 1906 and 1912, the National Union continued its close identification with the Liberal Party, remaining unwilling to attack the integrity of the Liberal government at elections. This political orientation, however, provoked internal challenges within the National Union by those in favour of a more aggressive electoral policy. By 1912 the force of these challenges resulted in the adoption of a policy of electoral support for the Labour Party. But by this stage the WSPU had itself moved away from its earlier links with socialism and now attacked Labour candidates at elections. Thus differences over political strategy continued to be central to divisions between the constitutionalists and militants even after the adoption of violent demonstrations by the WSPU in 1908.

All this is not to deny the eventual importance of the introduction of violent tactics by the WSPU in causing further deterioration in relations between the two suffrage organisations especially after 1912. Militancy had begun as early as 1905 as a tactic to ensure publicity for the WSPU by disturbing the public meetings of leading Liberal figures, and securing consequent imprisonment for the demonstrators involved. After the 1906 election it developed into a concerted attack on the Liberal government, firstly by opposing all Liberal candidates at by-elections; secondly by maintaining the public harassment of leading Liberal spokesmen; and thirdly by organising regular large-scale public demonstrations in support of the demand of votes for women.

Yet it was not until 1908 that it came to include the deliberate use of violence — and then only in symbolic stone-throwing and window-breaking. Such actions were intended partly as a reference back to the

occasionally violent agitation which had preceded the Reform Bills of 1832, 1867 and 1884, partly as a retaliation against the commencement of the forcible feeding of hunger-striking militant prisoners, and partly to ensure quicker and more painless arrest, after demonstrations.

Only in 1912 did the WSPU turn to the large-scale, clandestine destruction of property, including the use of arson and bombs. This was intended as both a protest against the government's introduction of the Cat and Mouse Act whereby a hunger-striking prisoner could be released only to be re-arrested once her health were restored; and to pressure the Liberal government to a new suffrage initiative through fear of costly attacks on valuable property.

Up until this point, there was a considerable degree of sympathy with militancy among constitutionalists and the two wings of the movement continued to cooperate on various occasions until 1912. Undoubtedly the militants' increasing and direct experience of government oppression, particularly from 1912, led them to a more acute perception of sexual oppression. Constitutionalists were not able to endorse the sex-war attitudes which resulted among many militants, and this further difference of opinion only served to confirm the effective breach between constitutional and militant suffragists. Even then many constitutionalists continued to place the blame for this extended form of militancy on the shoulders of the Liberal government.

Early Militancy and the Response of the National Union

The WSPU began as a pressure group within the ILP, initially restricted to a base of socialist and trade union organisations in the North West of England.¹ As such it made little impact on the National Union

1. Rosen, *Rise Up Women*, pp.49f

either at central or branch level at this stage.

This situation was brought to an end by the commencement of "militant" tactics when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney set out to heckle a leading Liberal Minister, Sir Edward Grey, during a general election campaign meeting, in 1905, and contrived to get themselves arrested in the process. At this time militancy was restricted to the public harassment of Liberal spokesmen, for the Liberals were expected to form the next government. This new departure involved considerable embarrassment for certain Liberal Ministers, notoriety for the WSPU and considerably increased press coverage for suffragist activity (Christabel's declared main aim in initiating the new tactic).

At the time this development was received coldly by most "constitutional" suffragists. The Executive of the London Society decided that no mention of the incident should be made at the forthcoming Convention of suffragists organised jointly by the National Union and the London Society. If the Convention were forced to express an opinion on Christabel Pankhurst it was agreed that "her action be condemned". Opinion clearly hardened, and later the Society agreed that one of its representatives to the Convention move a resolution criticising the new departure.¹ Even so, some members had clearly been impressed by the WSPU's initiative, and a few months later the London Society found it necessary to suspend one of its local societies from its activities. This was the Hammersmith Society, whose Secretary, Dora Montefiore, was already working closely with the WSPU.²

1. London Society Minutes 18 October, 25 October 1905

2. *ibid* 15 November, 20 December 1905. Dora Montefiore had recently returned from Australia, where she had been active in campaigns for women's suffrage. She was also a member of the SDF, and soon abandoned women's suffrage work to become secretary of the Adult Suffrage Society, and led the women's section of the SDF. See her autobiography, *From a Victorian to a Modern*, London: E. Archer 1927

By January 1906, in response to pressure within her organisation, Mrs Fawcett sent several letters to the press in an attempt to prevent the growing threat of a split among suffragists.¹ She wrote "Let me counsel all friends of women's suffrage not to denounce the flag-waving women who ask questions about women's suffrage at meetings, even at the risk of rough-handling and jeers". She believed they were proving that women were now in earnest in their demand for the vote.² Lady Frances Balfour, a leading member of the London Society, was also anxious to avoid the public condemnation of the WSPU which many suffragists were pressing for. Similarly, W.T. Stead, another suffragist prominent in the London Society at this time, wrote:

I think you are entirely and absolutely right and we should back up our fighting forwards all we can. Already they have done more to compel the insolent average male to recognise that the question is serious and that the women mean business than all we have been able to do hitherto.³

Local suffrage leaders while feeling the need to dissociate their societies from WSPU activity, were clearly also worried about creating an appearance of disunity in the movement. It is interesting that at this time many of them saw militancy as a specifically working class and labour initiative. Mary Ward, of the Cambridge Society wrote to Mrs Fawcett of the "danger of making disunion in our party, and of setting the 'ladies' in opposition to the 'working women'". Another fore-

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1. For the controversy see Beatrice Brookshanks to Edith Palliser 12 January 1906, C.M. Fullerton to Edith Palliser 19 January 1906, FAC; Caroline Skinner to Millicent Fawcett 10, 14 January 1906 and W.E. Heitland to Millicent Fawcett 13 January 1906, MPLA M50/2/1/214-5,218
 2. *British Journal of Nursing* cutting 20 January 1906; see also Manchester Guardian cutting 15 January 1906, MPLA M50/2/1/20
 3. Lady Frances Balfour to Millicent Fawcett 15 January 1906, FAC; W.T. Stead to Millicent Fawcett 13 January 1906, see also Isabella Ford to Millicent Fawcett 14 January 1906, J.G. Wright to Millicent Fawcett 14 January 1906, Mary Ewart to Millicent Fawcett 16 January 1906, MPLA M50/2/1/219, 221, 222, 226. Nonetheless, WSPU activity continued to create adverse reaction from other sections of National Union membership, e.g. the demonstration outside the House of Commons when Keir Hardie's suffrage bill was talked out. The National Union executive did publicly dissociate itself from this incident, see Glasgow Society Minutes 8 May 1906

saw "unless the Tories and the Liberals bestir themselves they will find women's suffrage brought in by the Labour Party (i.e. into their election programme) and the women of that party voting solid for it".¹ Certainly, some WSPU spokesmen at this time were emphasizing its links with the socialist movement. Dora Montefiore, ousted from the National Union the previous year, spoke for the WSPU at the Conference of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in Copenhagen in 1906, in support of *adult* suffrage. She reported that the WSPU had originally been founded "to facilitate the collection of funds to defray the expenses of labour representation in parliament. The women's cause in England is sure of the support of socialists and the ILP".²

Much of the disapproval of WSPU activity at this time was coming from dedicated Liberal workers within the National Union,³ who no doubt resented both the WSPU's attacks on their own party candidates, and its close association with the ILP. With the Liberal landslide at the general election of January 1906, many suffragists hoped to see a speedy victory for their cause. The WSPU, however, took the opportunity of the spate of by-elections which then followed the appointment of a new Cabinet in order to step up its attack on the new Liberal government. It continued its harassment of leading Liberal Ministers *and* conducted active campaigns against all Liberal candidates, whether pro-suffrage or not, in the belief that it was pressure on the government which was most needed, not pressure on individual MPs.

Mrs Pankhurst explained the new by-election policy thus:

Gentlemen with Liberal principles have talked about those principles for a very long time, but it is

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1. Mary Ward to Millicent Fawcett 14 January 1906, K. Lyttelton to Millicent Fawcett 12 January 1906, MPLA M50/2/1/216, 217
 2. *Jus Suffragii* 15 October 1906. See also report of a speech by Theresa Billington Grieg, WSPU organiser, *Glasgow Herald* 16 October 1906
 3. e.g. B. Brookshanks to Edith Palliser 12 January, FAC

only just lately that women have realised that so far as they are concerned, it began with talk and ended in talk, and that there was absolutely no intention of performance ... People ask us 'Why force it on just now? Why give all this trouble to the Liberals, with their great and splendid programme of reform?' Well, we say, after all, they are just the people to whom we ought to give trouble, and who, if they are sincere, ought to be very glad that we are giving them trouble, and forcing them to put their principles into practice.¹

For its part the National Union maintained its existing policy of working for "the best friend" of women's suffrage in by-elections, or restricting itself to propaganda work only if there were no obviously more favourable candidate. If it did work on behalf of any candidate, then, he was most commonly a Liberal. From 1906 it was differing by-election policies which distinguished a constitutional from a militant suffragist. This new development in WSPU policy was to be a source of further discord within the National Union and individual adherence to, or disillusion with, the Liberal Party was a major factor affecting suffragists' attitudes to the issue.

Within the Glasgow Society, for example, Margaret Irwin expressed considerable admiration for early WSPU work in that city (the WSPU began organising in Glasgow in August 1906). She suggested that the Society's Executive should organise a meeting to be addressed by WSPU organiser, Theresa Billington Greig, but was refused.² The secretary of the Glasgow Society, Mrs J.T. Hunter, was also an active Liberal party worker and she rejected the WSPU's call on local Women's Liberal Associations to refuse to work for anti-suffragist Liberal candidates. She "did not think it would be wise to press the Government to bring in a bill this year, or even next year. They should rather urge them to bring in a

1. Mrs Pankhurst, *The Importance of the Vote* loc cit

2. Glasgow Society Minutes 17 October 1906

measure before they demitted office. If they moved in the matter now it would mean sounding their own death knell" (in that franchise reform was customarily followed by a general election). Cooperation with the WSPU was eventually refused on the grounds of their election policy.¹ Nonetheless, a number of leading members continued to express considerable sympathy with the militants — Janie Allan, Grace Paterson, Marion Gilchrist and Mrs David Grieg — as did several among the National Union's national leadership at this time, including Lady Frances Balfour and Mrs Fawcett.

At the International Women's Suffrage Alliance conference in August 1906, Mrs Fawcett even went so far as to offer a justification for militant tactics (and illustrated once more how constitutionalists often saw them as a specifically working class initiative).

There should be no disunion between factions of women who work for women's suffrage. Examples from history showed how every extension of the suffrage had been obtained not only by philosophical and scientific argument, but by revolution, and breaking of palings as well. This motion for progress was now being put into force by the women of the working classes in England.²

A few months later Mrs Fawcett was reporting to the editor of *Jus Suffragii*, the journal of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance:

"During the last fortnight the suffrage had been advancing by leaps and

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1. *Glasgow Herald* 8 November 1906; Glasgow Society minutes 11 December 1906. Joint meetings did eventually take place with the Glasgow Society Executive, but the WSPU request to address a general meeting of the Society was refused
 2. *Jus Suffragii* 15 November 1906. For a defence of militancy by the National Union's Lady Frances Balfour see *Glasgow Herald* 28 January 1907. Ethel Snowden, Christal Macmillan, and Isabella Ford were also working very closely with the WSPU at this time. Similarly Helena Swanwick, one of the strongest opponents of later militancy recalled "Their challenge had this effect on me ... that, believing in the enfranchisement of women, I could not keep out of this struggle at this time. It did not attract me, it bludgeoned my conscience", Helena Swanwick, *I Have Been Young*, p.183

bounds", following the arrest of Richard Cobden's daughter, Annie Cobden Sanderson, during a WSPU demonstration. "The newspapers were most extraordinarily violent and abusive, but since that time there has been a 'boom' in women's suffrage. New members are pouring into the societies, demands for literature come by every post and cheques and banknotes flow into the treasury". Mrs Fawcett was able to report the recent conversion to the cause of Beatrice Webb, and Mrs Creighton a leading figure in the National Union of Women Workers and wife of the Bishop of London.¹

At the time of the House of Commons demonstration which had led to the arrest, Mrs Fawcett had written to *The Times* defending the militants' action. She received considerable support from others in the National Union's leadership. Walter McLaren wrote:

I feel quite as you do. I think the old suffrage societies should support these plucky women, and I will gladly support you in trying to have a demonstration in their favour. They have done more to make the suffrage a real live question by going to prison than all the work of years has been able to do.

A Savoy banquet was organised by the National Union for the WSPU prisoners on their release.²

Sympathetic constitutionalists placed the blame for militancy squarely on the shoulders of the Liberal Party and its government. In her autobiography Mrs Fawcett wrote:

I did not hear, neither do I find in their writings any trace of intentional violence or non-constitutional action at the beginning of their activity...At the

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1. *Jus Suffragii* 15 November 1906. To Mrs Fawcett's embarrassment the letter was published, and in her later report on the Savoy Banquet, organised by the National Union to greet the WSPU prisoners on their release, she made a point of re-affirming the value of constitutional methods, while stressing "the unity of women of all classes...from peeresses to millhands", *Jus Suffragii* 15 December 1906 and 15 January 1907
 2. Walter McLaren to Mrs Fawcett 25 October 1906. See also W.T. Stead to Mrs Fawcett 27 October 1906, and for membership response Emily Hill 28 October 1906 and Celia Wray 28 October 1906 to Mrs Fawcett. Mrs Fawcett's ideas on the Savoy Banquet can be found in her correspondence with J. Cobden Sanderson between 28 October 1906 and 11 November 1906, all located MPLA M50/2/1/231, 233, 237, 238, 239.41

outset they adopted the strictly orthodox and time-honoured method of asking questions of Ministers at public meetings. This, however, owing to the mishandling of the whole matter by the Liberal leaders and organisers soon produced scenes of violence and disorder... I would point out...that for the first five years of their existence, while they suffered extraordinary acts of physical violence, they used none.¹

Many militants responded warmly to the indications of support from the older organisation. Elizabeth Robins wrote "all this long work of yours in quietly educating opinion has not failed to bear fruit. But the women who work on 'constitutional' lines cannot always reach and stir the larger public", though most militants recognized "quite well they would stand a poor chance indeed, but for the past influence and present championship of yourself and others like you".²

The strong sympathy of the constitutionalists for the militants at this time makes it a complete oversimplification to present the two wings of the British movement as quite distinct and antagonistic. This point is further reinforced by evidence of considerable collaboration between militant and constitutional societies.

In October 1907 the National Union, WSPU and WCG cooperated on a plan to put pressure on the Labour Party to bring in an amendment to the King's Speech, on the women's suffrage issue.³ The following year the National Union cooperated with the WFL (the breakaway from the WSPU) on preparations for a forthcoming suffrage procession. In Leicester there was a joint WSPU-National Union demonstration.⁴ The WSPU were consulted by the National Union on the preparation of a leaflet comparing the

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1. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *What I remember*, London: Fisher Union 1924 pp.176-181
 2. Elizabeth Robins to Millicent Fawcett 27 October 1906; see also Beatrice Harradin to Millicent Fawcett 27 October 1906, MPLA M50/2/1/232, 235-6. The Pankhursts and the Pethick Lawrences however never seem to have established any kind of relationship with National Union leaders.
 3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 October 1907
 4. *ibid* 2 April, 7 May 1908; *Labour Leader*, 13 March, 12 June 1908

election policies of the two bodies, while a former WSPU organiser, Helen Fraser, was appointed as a National Union organiser, on the recommendation of the WSPU.¹ A letter from Isabella Ford to Mrs Fawcett from the South Leeds by-election further illustrates both how closely the two organisations could work in by-elections, (despite the different election policies) and the impact of the WSPU on some National Union activists:

The WSPU behaved splendidly — and there were no rows. I see more and more their policy is far more workable than ours: but we never clashed.

We only did propaganda work — I longed to 'go for' the Liberal and had to hold myself down. A man in his party (many Liberal men and women helped the WSPU) told me Middlebrook had not put us in his address...till at the very last moment a wire from London headquarters came saying 'put the women in your address' ... The Liberal women in some parts of Leeds wouldn't work for their member — because of Asquith's speech — a few canvassed ... Mrs Pankhurst's procession was fine and we cheered and waved as they passed our rooms — and they did too.

On the Liberal victory she added:

We are so low — he will betray us.²

Outside by-election activity there was frequently even closer co-operation between National Union and WSPU branches. Edinburgh provides a notable example. Here on at least two occasions WSPU meetings in 1908 were sponsored by leading "constitutionalists", Lady Frances Balfour and Chrystal Macmillan, while a meeting of the Constitutional Edinburgh Society was chaired by the husband of a leading Edinburgh militant, Mrs Dobbie and addressed by two other WSPU members Mrs James Ivory and Lady Steel. The National Union and WSPU organisations in Edinburgh at this time seem virtually indistinguishable. *Votes for Women* reported in July 1908 on the Edin-

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 23 July, 10 October 1908. Copy of NUWSS Leaflet *By-Election Policies Compared*, October 1908, CMP
 2. Isabella Ford to Millicent Fawcett 14 February 1908, MGFP

burgh Society's annual meeting: "As most of our members still belong to the National, we thought it best to help them in their meetings in every way we could — advertising, stewarding, etc. etc.". In 1907 a joint suffrage procession had been staged through the streets of Edinburgh, and both constitutionalists and militants sat on the platform of the meeting which followed.¹ Mrs Fawcett herself appeared on a WSPU platform in Glasgow in May 1908.² Similar examples of cooperation between local WSPU and National Union branches throughout 1907-8 can be found in the records of the Manchester and London Societies.³

By the summer of 1908 many had hopes of finally uniting the two wings of the movement. Mrs Fawcett recalled that at one point she thought of joining the WSPU, while the Men's League for Women's Suffrage attempted a union between the constitutionalists and the WFL.⁴ The one stumbling block to unity was not the WSPU's involvement in less sedate public demonstration, but its continuing attacks on the Liberal government. When a leading member of the London Society, Mrs Hylton Dale, pressed the London Society to work for unity with the militants, Mrs Fawcett replied that their election policy made this impossible.⁵ (The London Society had cancelled plans to invite the WSPU to join the National Union's first major London demonstration in March 1907 under pressure from the Women's Liberal Federation.)⁶ In the spring of 1907 the National Union felt it necessary to issue a manifesto on its election policy:

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1. *Glasgow Herald* 7 October 1907
 2. *Glasgow Herald* 23 May 1908
 3. NESWS Annual Report 1907-8; MPLA M50/1/4/23-48. London Society Minutes 1 May, 16 October 1907
 4. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *What I Remember* p.185; Lady Frances Balfour to Millicent Fawcett 6 November 1908, FAC
 5. Mrs Hylton Dale to Edith Palliser, 8 March 1907, FAC
 6. London Society Minutes 16 January 1907

The Union does not adopt the policy of opposing Liberal candidates because the Government has so far refused to bring in a measure for women's suffrage. It believes that by the election of Members pledged sincerely to women's suffrage, the government will come to see that the country is ripe for legislation on the subject, and it supports such candidates irrespective of party. It cordially recognizes the value of the support given to the movement by the Prime Minister and other leading members of the Government.¹

Nonetheless pressure for unity continued to grow. Beatrice Harraden, a leading militant, believed this should be possible "whether we are so called suffragists or so called suffragettes what does it matter? Hundreds of us are both", and pointed out that all the suffrage bodies were to some extent already interdependent through overlapping membership. It is clear that Mrs Fawcett had thought seriously about this possibility, and in the summer of 1908 she was being pressed by her niece Louisa Garrett Anderson on the need for unity, particularly with regard to election policies.²

Ever-increasing disillusion with the Liberal government, and consequently with the election policy for the National Union, became a major reason for members leaving the National Union for the WSPU. In this way some National Union branches were left even more firmly under the influence of committed women Liberals. This occurred in the Glasgow Society where several leading members resigned from the society because of its adherence to the National Union's unaggressive election policy. They included Mrs David Grieg, Helen Waddell (both formerly active in the Scottish Women's Liberal Federation), Margaret Irwin, Janie Allan, Dr

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1. *Jus Suffragii* 15 April 1907. (Campbell Bannerman was still Prime Minister at this time). The National Union made one of its rare interventions on behalf of a Conservative candidate, at the Hexham by-election during this period.
 2. Beatrice Harraden in *The Women's Franchise* 23 July 1908; Louisa Garrett Anderson to Mrs Fawcett 22, 24, 25 June 1908, FAC

Marion Gilchrist, Grace Paterson. All were already active in one or both of the two militant branches in Glasgow before their resignations. The society then fell fully under the control of its chairman, Andrew Ballantyne, and its secretary, Mrs Hunter, who remained staunch Liberals. The Glasgow Society was to become one of the most persistent and active opponents of the National Union's eventual alliance with the Labour Party.¹

As the National Union leadership resisted all efforts to change its election policies so allegations of undue party political influence proliferated. In two successive years, members of the London Society sympathetic to the WSPU policy sought to win over the general meeting of the branch. Flora Murray's resolution to the 1907 annual meeting called on the Executive not to put party interest before those of suffrage.² When Mrs Fawcett placed amendments to this resolution, she received a letter of protest from one member outlining her grounds for suspecting undue party political bias within the National Union. This cited the use of the National Union's offices earlier in the year for a Women's Liberal Federation meeting, and insisted it was no answer to tell those out of sympathy with the National Union's election work to resign. "Are those of us who agree with the Society and Union so far as its constitution and legal activities is concerned but object to its Party bias to resign?"

The WLF meeting had been called by Marie Corbett, wife of a Liberal MP and mother of the National Union's secretary at that time, Marjory Corbett. Winifred Ball went on to discuss the National Union's campaign at the recent Haggerston by-election. "Was there any suffrage reasons

1. Glasgow Society Minutes 11 April, 25 April, 30 May, 30 November 1907; *The Glasgow Herald* 16 December 1907, 21 October 1908
 2. London Society Annual Reports 1907 and 1908. Flora Murray was supported by Mrs Fawcett's niece Louisa Garrett Anderson, Mrs Hylton Dale, Margaret Nevinson and Evelyn Sharp

on Suffrage grounds for supporting Mr Warren? If his opponent had not been allied to the brewing interest should we have been so keen in opposing him?" She concluded "I should feel I was not acting fairly in asking anyone save a *strong* adherent of the Liberal Party to join the London Society".¹

The following year, 1909, Ethel Snowden tackled Mrs Fawcett on a similar problem in the Birmingham Society, where she had attended a meeting to protest at the exclusion of women from the audience of one of Asquith's meetings:

The awfully dispiriting thing about it was this. I found that the President of our Society there and some of the members were actually occupying seats on Mr Asquith's platform.

You will see what this means — party before their own cause. This is what makes disloyal members of the National Union and no wonder.

She suggested it should become necessary for members of the National Union Executives to withdraw from their party organisations.

It is no use those of us who belong to another Party declining to help and support it though with much more reason and justification, if Liberal women intended to let us down again and again in this appallingly undignified way.²

The event referred to also brought public protests from two leading Lancashire women Liberals, prominent in the National Union, Margaret Ashton and Bertha Mason. Mrs Osler, President of the Birmingham Society subsequently resigned from her position in the local WLF.

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1. Correspondence between Winifred Ball and Millicent Fawcett 12-16 November 1908, MPLA M50/2/1/254-256
 2. Ethel Snowden to Millicent Fawcett 18 Sept. 1909, MPLA M50/2/1/283. *The Labour Leader* 3 December 1909 made similar observations about the party bias evident in the operation of the National Union's supposedly "non-party" election policy during the Portsmouth by-election, where a Liberal candidate was supported despite his very restricted pledge on women's suffrage, and despite the Labour candidate's much firmer pledge to vote for a private member women's suffrage bill

In 1910 the National Union rules were changed so that National Union officers and executives had to pledge themselves to "put the interests of suffrage before party considerations". The following year it became necessary for candidates to provide societies with information on their occupation or special social work interests and any official position in the political party to which they belonged. This resulted in the resignation of several women active in both Liberal and Labour politics.¹ It is doubtful whether this development significantly weakened the influence of women Liberals within the National Union, however. Much more important was the increasing disillusion evidenced among many women Liberals over Asquith's persistent hostility to their cause. Mrs Osler, of the Birmingham Society, had been joined in her resignation by three other officers of the women's auxiliary Liberal association shortly after the controversy and reports of similar resignations are frequent in the columns of *The Common Cause*.²

Constitutional suffragists, anxious to pursue more "militant" policies but unable yet to involve themselves in active attacks on a Liberal government, evolved various other tactics, notably tax resistance and the running of suffrage candidates in by-elections. National Union leaders remained wary of tax resistance as a national policy, doubting that it could be carried through in sufficient numbers to be effective, and they fought the adoption of this policy on a number of occasions, while giving tentative support to individual tax resisters.³

The idea of women's suffrage parliamentary candidates had been initiated by the textile workers, in Wigan, in the general election of

1. National Union Executive Minutes 27 February 1911, CMP

2. *The Common Cause* 19 August, 7 October 1909, 4 August 1910, 27 April 1911

3. The policy was taken up by other suffrage groups, notably the WFL and the Tax Resistance League.

1906. Other suffragist candidates followed — Bertrand Russell in the Wimbledon by-election of 1907, and another textile workers candidate was to be run in Rossendale in 1910.¹ The policy was popular among the rank-and-file of the National Union, and pressure from below finally overwhelmed the opposition of the National Union leadership, when the National Union's Council voted to make the running of suffrage candidates official election policy in 1909. The operation of the new policy in the general election of 1910 was overall a disaster, in that all the suffrage candidates polled a very insignificant number of votes.² It did appear to have succeeded in the South Salford by-election shortly after. Here the anti-suffragist Liberal candidate, Hilaire Belloc, was soon persuaded to stand down in favour of a pro-suffrage Liberal, Charles Russell, after the National Union began an active campaign on behalf of the radical journalist, Henry Brailsford, who was running as the women's suffrage candidate. With the adoption of a pro-suffrage Liberal, Brailsford withdrew from the contest.³

More significant for the future were the early attempts of the Newcastle Society to evolve a radically new election policy for the National Union. In 1907 it decided to support Pete Curran, the Labour candidate in the Jarrow by-election. The National Executive had decided that both the Liberal and the Labour candidate were satisfactory on the suffrage issue, and consequently that only propaganda work need be undertaken, but in the event they were not prepared to resist the local

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1. See Fulford, *Votes For Women*, p.164 for details of the Wimbledon by-election, and Liddington and Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us*, pp.197-200 and pp.243-6 for Wigan and Rossendale campaigns. The President of the WLF, Rosalind Countess of Carlisle, resigned from the National Union over its support for such candidates
 2. The candidate in Camlachie polled 35 votes that in St Pancras East 22, Fulford op cit p.233
 3. Catherine Marshall's account of South Salford campaign in her papers for November 1910

society.¹ *The Labour Leader* recorded that Ethel Bentham, a leading member of both the National Union and the Women's Labour League had been one of Curran's speakers, while canvassing had been undertaken jointly by local ILP women and the North Eastern Society of the National Union, concluding "the movement has deep reason to be grateful to the women suffragists for their help in canvassing and lending motor cars".²

The suffrage and labour movement in this area appear to have worked increasingly closely together from this time. In the Newcastle by-election of 1908 the National Union decided that none of the candidates was satisfactory on the suffrage issue, and undertook a propaganda campaign. Despite the late intervention of an SDF candidate (who refused to promise to vote against a *manhood* suffrage bill) the ILP women and men continued to work closely with the suffragists, rather than support the socialist candidate. It was a suggestion from engineering union branches which initiated the collection of a Voters' Petition for women's suffrage during the campaign. The Newcastle Society's secretary, Frances Hardcastle, reported that the women Liberals also remained firm in giving prime commitment to the suffrage issue, under the leadership of Dr Ethel Williams, who was also prominent in the Newcastle Society. The local Liberal organisation complained of a "want of discipline among the Liberal women; 500 canvassed last election — where are they on this occasion?".³

From 1907 the North Eastern Society had begun to press for a change of National Union election policy to one of support for Labour candi-

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1. See London Society Minutes 11 June 1907 and National Union Quarterly Council Reports, 9 July 1907, Fawcett Library
 2. *The Labour Leader* 5 July 1907. See also *Women's Franchise* 25 July, 5 September, 17 October 1907 for further reports of the campaign
 3. *Women's Franchise* reports 17 September, 24 September, 8 October, 15 October 1908. The suffragists in the area had clearly been organising among labour supporters before this time, see reports of its activities during a local strike that Spring, *Women's Franchise* 2 April 1908

dates. At the National Union's quarterly Council meeting following the Jarrow by-election, Ethel Bentham put the resolution:

In the event of one political party distinguishing itself from the others by officially adopting as one of its principle objects, the immediate abolition of the sex disqualification, in parliamentary elections the NUWSS would give active electoral support in by-elections to candidates belonging to that party.

Ethel Bentham argued that the support of a small party acting together to press the government on the issue would be more effective than the 420 "mythical supporters" of all parties at that time claimed by the National Union. The resolution was withdrawn when Emily Davis, for the London Society, refused to support it. However, at the next quarterly Council Meeting of the National Union it was agreed that the North Eastern Society might explore the possibility of running a Labour-Suffrage candidate in South Shields, in the next election.¹

Meanwhile attacks on the election policy continued during 1908, though on slightly different lines. Mrs Atkinson, for the Edinburgh Society, argued that the National Union should only offer electoral support to those candidates prepared to put a women's suffrage amendment to the King's Speech — a scheme initiated by the Women's Cooperative Guild. At the next quarterly Council Meeting, in July 1908, Newcastle, Manchester and Edinburgh Societies joined forces to press once more for some alteration to election policy, though again they were defeated for the time being.²

The general elections of 1910 revealed the inadequacy of National Union election policy even further. Henry Brailsford, who had stood as

1. National Union Quarterly Council Reports 9 July 1907, 25 October 1907
 2. Quarterly Council reports 29 January, 1 May 1908, 14 July 1908. See also Newcastle Society reports in *Women's Franchise* 2 April, 17 September, 8 October, 15 October 1908

women's suffrage candidate in South Salford, offered the following analysis to readers of *The Common Cause*:

It is true...that I have been impressed by the success of the National Union in dealing with private MPs. Your policy is well adapted to secure their adherence as individuals. You can get them to vote pretty steadily year after year for the second reading of a Suffrage Bill, or even to sign memorials in its favour. But there I am afraid the zeal of most of them ends. With some notable exceptions, they do not work resolutely for your Bills, or force the Government to give them a real opportunity of becoming law. And why should they? Your policy leaves them perfectly comfortable so long as they have once performed their duty of going into the right lobby during an academic debate... The root of the matter may be put in a sentence. At present you make candidates suffer for failing to pledge themselves; you have to make members suffer for failing to pass your Bill. In other words, they must be made to suffer for the sins of the Government they support.

While the editor of *The Common Cause* admitted the case had been put in "the most masterly way", she added that the National Union "are still unconvinced of the advantage of putting in a Conservative Candidate".¹ Events during 1912-13 were to remove such remaining doubts in the minds of National Union leaders, and National Union election policy was eventually redrawn along the lines pre-figured in the work of the North Eastern Society.

What was to continually divide constitutional and militant suffragists, then, was not simply the more aggressive public action of the WSPU, but the party political base of the two organisations, and its effect on their respective election policies. The WSPU had grown out of the Manchester ILP, and consequently was more easily able to take up a policy of opposition to Liberal candidates during elections. Christabel Pankhurst began to dissociate the WSPU from Labour politics in 1906, but by this time the militants were beginning to attract suffragists dis-

1. *The Common Cause* 15 September 1910

illusioned by the National Union's refusal to open an attack on the Liberal government. The National Union, at both a local and national level, was dominated by women Liberals. While their influence undoubtedly held back the National Union from a more militant election policy for several years, the advent of the WSPU and the increasing disillusion among women Liberals meant that eventually the National Union had to seek out a more aggressive election policy. Some early initiatives by the North Eastern Society pointed the way to the eventual electoral alliance with Labour in 1912. In the meantime many constitutional suffragists showed themselves to be increasingly sympathetic to militant activity during the period 1906-9, and a considerable degree of co-operation between the WSPU and National Union was possible. This situation was to be changed by the increasing use of violence by militants from 1908.

The Escalation of Militancy

Up to 1908 all violence occurring during their demonstrations was suffered by the militants, and not initiated by them, and members of the older societies could only be impressed by the courage involved. Mrs Fawcett wrote:

The physical courage of it all is intensely moving. It stirs people as nothing else can. I don't feel it is the right thing, and yet the spectacle of so much self-sacrifice moves people who would otherwise sit still and do nothing.¹

Many suffragists were particularly angered by the varying treatment handed out by the authorities to middle class and working class women. It soon became clear in early WSPU demonstrations that the police sought

1. Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Lady Frances Balfour quoted Ray Strachey, *Millicent Garrett Fawcett* p.223

out working class women for arrest — this was one of Annie Cobden Sanderson's reasons for securing arrest in 1906, and may well explain the apparent absence of working class women from later demonstrations. Mrs Fawcett had personal experience of similar discrimination. When it was known that her elderly sister, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, intended participating in a WSPU march, family and friends were seriously concerned that she might be injured in the scuffles that demonstrators frequently were subjected to. Lady Frances Balfour consulted with the Home Secretary, Herbert Gladstone, who promised that no attempt would be made to arrest Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. Ray Strachey, Mrs Fawcett's biographer, recorded her reaction thus: "If privilege and influence, and age, and social standing could secure immunity, surely there was something wrong with British justice! And Mrs Fawcett hated the whole business even more than before".¹

After the WSPU's most successful demonstration in Hyde Park in June 1908, frustration at the complete lack of response from the government, and resentment at the increasing violence being suffered by militant demonstrators, led militants on their own initiative, to begin the use of window-breaking, to ensure quick and relatively painless arrest. WSPU leaders were slow at first to endorse this practice, but eventually it became a deliberate policy during demonstrations. In October, Christabel issued her controversial pamphlet calling on supporters to "Rush the House of Commons", whilst WFL members embarked on a series of sensational exploits, including on one occasion chaining themselves to the Grille of the Ladies Gallery in the House of Commons.²

These developments aroused serious doubts in the minds of constitutional suffragists. Mrs Fawcett wrote to an American suffragist "I

1. *ibid* p.219. See copy of letter from Herbert Gladstone to Lady Frances Balfour 29 June 1908, MGFP

2. Fulford *op cit* p.186

have felt great anxiety and perturbation about the increasing violence of the 'militant' societies ever since the 30th June". She particularly disliked what she saw as Christabel's use of other disgruntled groups, and did not want women's suffrage demonstrators involved with other social protest crowds. She noted "handbills were distributed broadcast amongst the lowest classes of London roughs and the dangerous hordes of the unemployed".¹

Still Mrs Fawcett hesitated to publicly protest against these developments, and declined to join the Men's League in a letter of censure because "disinclined to encourage one set of suffragists to denounce another set", though she foresaw that "It may be necessary sometime soon to formulate our views on this subject. I feel that law and order are essential to all that makes life worth living and that they are especially and peculiarly vital to women".² To a friend she wrote "It seems to me that there is only a slight distinction between their recent actions and positive crime".³

National Union leaders were even more irritated with the smaller body of militants, the WFL, than with the WSPU, at this time. In November they issued a letter to the press dissociating the National Union from the recent demonstration in the Ladies Gallery, and issued an embargo on any further joint membership between militant and constitutional societies.⁴ It was also a desire to dissociate itself from WFL which caused the National Union to withdraw its support from *Women's Franchise*. The editor refused to exclude WFL reports whereupon the National Union proceeded with plans to set up its own weekly, *The Common*

1. Mrs Fawcett to Alice Blackwell 22 February 1909, MPLA M50/2/1/270

2. Mrs Fawcett to Phillipa Strachey, 12 October 1908, FAC

3. Ray Strachey *Fawcett* op cit p.224

4. See NUWSS Quarterly Council Report 7 October 1909. Several leading members of the London Society dissociated themselves from this letter — Beatrice Harraden, Louisa Garrett Anderson, Flora Murray, see *Women's Franchise* 19 November 1908

Cause. Even so for the first few months the new journal carried reports of the activities of both the WSPU and WFL.

As the use of violence in militant demonstrations was stepped up in 1909, *The Common Cause* issued the National Union's condemnation of both government and militant attitudes, in an article "Violence and Reaction: Two Faces of Disorder". The unofficial attack by two WFL members on a polling booth in the Bermondsey by-election brought a National Union Council condemnation of the use of violence, and moves to eliminate any remaining militant influence within National Union branches.¹

Nonetheless, it is clear that sympathy with militancy continued among a considerable section of the National Union's rank and file. One member wrote to the *Women's Franchise* to protest against National Union criticism of the WSPU in 1908.² When the National Union returned to the attack in 1909, Helena Dowson of the Nottingham Society wrote to Mrs Fawcett that her branch did not feel able to send a condemnation of militancy to their local press. They found the recent National Union Council resolution wanting in tact, for it could "force the country societies to disintegrate themselves". The Nottingham Society would not be able to carry on with the resignations that would follow the publication of such a letter. Even those members who did not also belong to the WSPU made a distinction between wholly disapproving of its tactics and advertising their difference of opinion.

Helena Dowson argued that militant sympathies were not always a weakness to the cause, for many women were in the process of transition

1. *The Common Cause* 16 September 1909. See also *Jus Suffragii* 15 October 15 November 1909 for the text of the National Union's statement, and quarterly council report in the *Common Cause* 7 October 1909

2. *Women's Franchise* 15 October 1908

to constitutional methods, having first been brought into the movement by militancy:

Meanwhile they give their work and money to *us* and before long I feel sure, will leave the S&PU altogether. Is it wise to hurry them too much? and for something that is not of vital importance... above all the militants are disliking and apologising for their tactics, and *by degree* leaving the SPU for *us*

— two of her Executive had only recently left the militant organisation.¹

Mrs Fawcett replied that she was inclined to turn a blind eye to those societies which were ignoring the Council's resolution, though she insisted that recent developments in militancy represented more than just a few individuals taking matters into their own hands. She believed the violence was now "definitely premeditated and arranged beforehand. And the worst of a policy of revolutionary violence is that it is bound to go on and become more and more violent". She too believed that more and more suffragists would leave the WSPU as a consequence. In the meantime she commented, "The ineptitude of the Government is beyond all words. They prosecute the unknown and friendless and release Lady Constance Lytton and Mrs Brailsford because their relations are influential people".²

The growing division between the two wings of the movement did have a disruptive effect on some National Union branches during 1909, notably the London Society. Those who had earlier been working for unity between the two bodies, and who had disagreed with the public condemnation of the WSPU in 1908, made a final attempt at the society's 1909 conference to win it over to militant election policy, and to exclude Liberal women from its Executive. They were defeated on both counts,

1. Helena Dowson to Mrs Fawcett 10 October 1909, MPLA M50/2/1/284

2. Mrs Fawcett to Helena Dowson 15 October 1909, MPLA M50/2/1/286

and the society decided in future to exact a pledge from all new members on their opposition to militant tactics and policy. The National Union Executive ensured that in future it had majority representation on the London Society's Executive.¹

Mrs Fawcett noted the recruitment by the London Society of 293 new members in the three months following these events, compared to 133 resignations, and declared "I think there is no doubt that it will very greatly strengthen us to finally get rid of the militants within our gates".² Certainly National Union support in terms of membership and funds had begun to grow rapidly at this time, and continued to do so up to the outbreak of war, whereas the indications are that WSPU recruitment now began to decline, though it continued to be able to raise the large funds of previous years.³ Membership of the WSPU now not only involved the endorsement of violent tactics, but a preparedness to seek imprisonment, and possibly to undergo a hunger-strike and the forcible feeding which the prison authorities were now resorting to. It was inevitable that the leadership should increasingly come to concentrate its attentions on the formation of a small, highly dedicated cadre, as opposed to the mass movement of earlier years.

This process was to be reinforced by the introduction of arson and bombing to WSPU activities in 1912. This development marked a complete split between militants and constitutionalists. The resort to violence by the WSPU was associated with a new development in its ideological stance. From 1912 WSPU propaganda became markedly anti-male — as evidenced in Christabel Pankhurst's publication of *The Great Scourge*.

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1. See National Union Executive's circular letter on Special General Meeting of London Society, MGFP and Clara Collet to Mrs Fawcett 3 December 1909. MPLA M50/2/1/289. Similar events occurred within the Newcastle and Scarborough Societies
 2. Mrs Fawcett's notes on the circular letter, and her letter to Lady Frances Balfour 18 December 1909, MGFP
 3. Rosen op cit pp.242-245 for indications of the WSPU's declining membership

Rosen has noted the millenarian aspect of WSPU campaigning at this time.¹

These tendencies were only reinforced when the Liberal government stepped up its attempts to destroy the militants' organisation, through the arrest of its leaders, and the introduction of the Cat and Mouse Act, which facilitated the repeated re-arrest and imprisonment of hunger-strikers after short respites to recover their health; through the raiding of WSPU offices and the repeated censoring of *The Suffragette*; and finally by threatening conspiracy charges on those who financially contributed to maintaining the WSPU.

Such very immediate experiences of male oppression appear to have created an increasing suspicion of male supporters close to the leadership, and those women activists who associated with them. Henry Nevinson found himself — and his friends like Evelyn Sharp — gradually edged out of the inner councils of the WSPU.² The wealthy WSPU supporter, Henry Harben, and the socialist leader, George Lansbury, were also given to understand that their support and advice was no longer required. By 1913 WSPU headquarters were in the hands of a few inexperienced young women, dedicated to the service of Christabel Pankhurst.

The rift between the two wings of the movement was deepened by changes in the election policy of both the National Union and the WSPU during 1912. In May of that year National Union policy changed to one of active electoral support on behalf of Labour Party candidates. Meanwhile the constitutionalist leadership was also in close consultation with leading Liberal suffragists within the Cabinet. From October 1912, the WSPU extended its electoral attacks from the Liberal Party to include Labour Party representatives, on the grounds that the Labour Party was effectively in coalition with the Liberal government. One of

1. Rosen op cit p.196

2. See Henry Nevinson's Diaries for this period, Bodleian Library Ms Eng Misc e617/3-4

the consequences of this development was that National Union meetings being addressed by leading Labour or Liberal suffragists were subject to attacks by WSPU demonstrators. Cooperation between militants and constitutionalists thus became impossible.

However, constitutionalists continued to differ in the degree and nature of their antipathy to militancy. While Mrs Fawcett felt it a tactical error, she continued to lay the larger part of the blame with the government. "I do say most deliberately and with the utmost conviction that what is called militancy is political unrest caused by mishandling and misunderstanding by politicians of one of the greatest movements in the history of the world".¹

Other constitutionalist spokeswomen like Helena Swanwick, the founding editor of *The Common Cause*, became increasingly outspoken in their criticism of the WSPU from 1912. The basis of Helena Swanwick's disagreement was more than a tactical one. In the militant campaign, she argued, "one has seen a vast amount of femininity using the old weapons, which one hopes will be gradually laid aside". In the WSPU's leadership's use of violence she detected an attitude of defiance alternating with one of injured innocence which she found hypocritical. "To become a spiritual martyr as soon as you can't get your own way is a form of spiritual bullying". Like many suffragists, she was also a committed pacifist and felt that it was "inexcusably wrong, on the part of women, whose experience of life ought to have proved to them that for women to invite physical force against themselves is to provoke all the forces of reaction against which their movement is, in reality, directed". In

1. Mrs Fawcett to Lady Cavendish Bentinck in Ray Strachey *Fawcett* p.241. For an expansion of Mrs Fawcett's views on militancy see her introduction in Helena Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement*, pp.xiiiif. Even at this stage the National Union eschewed open antagonism with the militants. Contrary to Edith Hurwitz's interpretation, op cit, the position of the President of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, Mrs Chapman Catt, only echoed these views. Militancy was not *endorsed* by the American suffrage leader, as Edith Hurwitz has claimed, only *explained*.

this way they only "revived the ape in men".¹ Elsewhere she expressed scant sympathy for the sufferings of some militants, which was "dishonest, because it is 'faked' martyrdom; cynical because it attempts to base reform not upon right reason but upon ballyhoo".²

A reassessment of militancy by a former militant sympathiser expressed similar doubts. Henry Nevinson, recalling WSPU meetings, wrote:

For many among the comfortable audience that crowded those afternoons reminded me of the spectators at a bull-fight. It was for the thrill of danger that most of them came — the thrill of vicarious danger, implying no risk whatever to themselves. The more violent and dangerous for others the proposals the more vehemently they applauded, just as Spanish spectators applaud most when a horse is disembowelled and man or bull drips with blood. If the Liberal Government had burnt one of the leaders alive on stage, they would have shrieked with indignant delight and gone home to tea.³

By 1912, the continuing growth and expanding influence of the National Union, compared with the WSPU's organisational decline and growing unpopularity, signified the success of a political strategy which encouraged the formation of mass support for women's suffrage. By contrast the logic of the WSPU's non-democratic political strategy encouraged an isolation which in turn reinforced a dependence on violence and strident sex-war politics. Not only had the WSPU lost its earlier political base and alienated popular support, but it was forced underground and came to rely on a small dedicated cadre of activists, who could only make their presence felt by increasingly violent acts.

The National Union's electoral alliance with the Labour Party

1. Helena Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement* p.187-8, 190
 2. Helena Swanwick, *I Have Been Young* p.189
 3. Henry Nevinson, *More Changes More Chances*, London: Nisbet, 1925 p.318

from 1912 was to be the centre point of a new political strategy. It is necessary now to explore how this alliance came into being and how it had served to strengthen the position of the women's suffrage demand by the outbreak of war.

PART THREE: THE WINNING OF THE WOMEN'S VOTE
IN ENGLAND

CHAPTER 6 : THE CONCILIATION BILLS 1910-12

^{NS} The years 1910, 1911 and 1912 each saw the introduction of a private member's Conciliation Bill designed to provide a measure of women's suffrage. These bills were drawn up by the Conciliation Committee — a committee of all parties — which sought to devise a compromise measure, acceptable to all shades of suffrage opinion within the House of Commons. The committee was headed by Lord Lytton, brother of Constance Lytton of the WSPU, and the radical journalist Henry Brailsford, whose wife, Jane, was another prominent militant.¹

Although ultimately unsuccessful in getting women's suffrage on to the statute book, the campaigns around the various Conciliation Bills were important for several reasons. In the first place they were effective in pressuring the Cabinet into giving greater consideration to the question of votes for women. This has been recognised by a number of writers, including David Morgan² and Constance Rover.³ Nonetheless, such accounts end by concentrating on the failure of these three bills, and stressing the disintegrating effect of this experience on the suffrage movement as a whole. The account offered here will seek to modify this view in two ways.

Firstly, though the influence of the Conciliation Bill campaigns on the Liberal Cabinet has been recognized, their significance in encouraging government consultation with suffragists has never yet been fully documented or analysed. Such consultation led directly to the part played by suffragist leaders in the negotiations surrounding the proposal for a government Reform Bill.

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1. For details of the setting up of the Conciliation Committee see Henry Brailsford's letters to Mrs Fawcett 18 January, 25 January, 28 February, 21 March, 27 March 1910. For details of its membership and an explanation of its policy see leaflet "Conciliation Committee for Women's Suffrage", all MPLA **M50/2/1/291-293; 300-303**
 2. Morgan, *Suffragists and Liberals* p.101
 3. Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics* p.194

Secondly, the experience of the Conciliation Bill Campaigns was central to re-orientations in the policies of both the National Union and WSPU. It led directly to the National Union's abandoning its former faith in private member bills, and to its recognition that the fate of women's suffrage was now inextricably woven with that of general franchise reform. The recognition of these factors brought the National Union leadership to evolve a new election policy, involving it in an active attack on the Liberal government through electoral support for the Labour Party. The WSPU by contrast withdrew from all involvement in political negotiations in favour of attempts at physical intimidation of the Liberal government.

Shackleton's Conciliation Bill of 1910

The first important effect of the introduction of Shackleton's Bill was that it led to a temporary truce from militant agitation on the part of the WSPU. This encouraged the Cabinet to enter into negotiations with the leaders of the Conciliation Committee. However, the WSPU was never to be very happy about the nature and progress of the Conciliation Bills,¹ and tension grew between militant leaders and Henry Brailsford. In his turn, Brailsford became increasingly disillusioned with Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, so that the WSPU was not always fully aware of developments in the negotiations between the Cabinet and the Conciliation Committee. Militant anger and resentment at what were seen as Brailsford's intrigues were to become an important factor in the WSPU's increasing antipathy to male involvement with the suffrage issue during these campaigns.

Nonetheless, the WSPU's truce did enable a large number of peaceful

1. Henry Woodd Nevinson Diaries, 14 April 1910, in the Bodleian Library MS Eng Misc e615-620

demonstrations to take place in the summer of 1910, in support of further facilities for the first Conciliation Bill. The National Union was invited to join a WSPU procession on 18th June. Though it decided against official participation, National Union members were encouraged to join the march, and *Common Cause* paper sellers were organised along the route. Plans for a joint demonstration later in the summer had to be abandoned when the WSPU refused to give an undertaking to maintain the truce until afterwards.¹ Outside London, however, joint demonstrations did go ahead. In Newcastle, on 16th July the National Union, WSPU, WFL, Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (CUWFA), the Men's League for Women's Suffrage, the ILP and local temperance societies joined in a demonstration that attracted a crowd of 10,000. A similar conjunction of organisations arranged another such demonstration in Edinburgh.²

As pressure built up for the demand that the government provide time for full facilities for the bill in the forthcoming session Asquith agreed to receive deputations from both suffragists, and anti-suffragists, on this "most repulsive subject". He sought instructions from his Cabinet. Grey "urged that all Cabinets were split on the subject, and even though a large majority of representatives supported it no effective opportunity could be given without Government help to the majority". Asquith admitted this point, but insisted there was no time for "controversial subjects that session. He feared this response to the suffragists might reproduce violent agitation, but he wanted to say something mollifying the enthusiasts of the non-militant section". On Grey's suggestion it was first agreed to offer facilities the following year, assuming both that the government were still in power, and a

1. M.G. Fawcett circular letter to National Union societies 29 June 1910, MGFP

2. *The Common Cause* 14, 21, 28 July 1910

majority of MPs declared for the principle once more. Such a measure must "not be fettered by restricted title from a free decision (of the House — the Speaker had ruled that Shackleton's bill was not open to widening amendments) so that an undemocratic measure should not be forced on the House under a limited title".¹

However opinion seems to have hardened against this proposal by the following week. Asquith reported back to the Cabinet on his reception of the deputation. "Mrs Fawcett made it clear that she would not be satisfied with a barren second reading and asked for facilities for all stages". Brailsford had secured a memorandum in support of the bill from 94 Liberal MPs, 22 Unionists, 22 Labour, 16 Irish Nationalists — a total of 154. Pease again recommended, with Grey in support, that facilities for the bill should be offered for the next session. Loreburn and Lloyd George stood out for no such commitment, but suggested the offer of facilities for a second reading now. In this way Shackleton's bill passed its second reading, but was then referred to a Committee of the whole House, which effectively killed it.²

Cabinet discussed the matter again on the last day of the summer session, but stuck by the decision to make no promises about possible future facilities for a Conciliation Bill.³ Nevinson recorded that Brailsford was "quite overwhelmed as well he may be... And so in a few days the whole terrible strife will begin again".⁴ However, the truce did continue through the summer and suffragists continued to hope that further facilities for the bill would be offered in the autumn.

The National Union's largest London demonstration in 1910 was held in Trafalgar Square on 9th July, with the cooperation of the Industrial

1. J.A. Pease Diaries 15 June 1910, Gainford Papers 38, Nuffield College Library

2. *ibid* 23 June 1919

3. *ibid* 29 July 1910

4. Nevinson Diaries 23 June 1910

and Professional Women's Society for Women's Suffrage, the Men's League, the Women's Liberal Federation, the WCG, the National Union of Women Workers, the Fabian Women's Group, the CUWFA, the Artists Suffrage League, the Suffrage Atelier, the Younger Suffragists, and temperance societies. In the autumn a Suffrage Week was held from 5-12 November, to precede the re-opening of Parliament, and culminated in a large meeting at the Albert Hall.¹

By this time relations between the WSPU and Conciliation Committee's Secretary, Henry Brailsford were worsening. Mrs Pankhurst was planning another "deputation" to the House of Commons, though all depended on the "manner and terms of the Government promise for next year" — an indication that some government initiative was expected at this time by suffragists. Brailsford reported having "trouble with the Pankhursts; accuses them of having no means but threats and flattery; says they are wrecking all his diplomacy and refused to go on the platform (presumably at a WSPU meeting). Almost incredible but both sides are difficult".²

The re-opening of Parliament in November 1910 brought no announcement of government time for a Conciliation Bill, and there ensued the most violent WSPU demonstration to date. Police brutality, and a failure in communication between the Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, and the police authorities, resulted in considerable suffering and ill-treatment for many of the suffrage demonstrators, and the occasion became remembered as "Black Friday".³

While Brailsford was to give considerable time and energy to collecting evidence of police brutality and pushing for a full investigation he was unsympathetic to this renewed militancy. Nevinson reported that

1. NUWSS Annual Report 1910; *The Common Cause* 7 July 1910 for full details of the various platforms and speeches at the Trafalgar Square demonstrations. For other National Union demonstrations see *The Common Cause* 8 June 1910
 2. Nevinson Diaries 3, 7, 8 November 1910
 3. For a further account see Rosen, *Rise Up Women*, pp.138-142

Brailsford was "much dissatisfied at the WSPU distrust of him and this action against his advice. They have even refused his letter to *Votes* on behalf of the Conciliation Committee and this sudden first raid (by the WSPU) entirely wrecked his diplomacy with Asquith. He also regards the assaults on Ministers as a tactical mistake. He is afraid the WSPU think he is out for ambition. Was much cast down by the whole situation".¹

A few days later Nevinson and Evelyn Sharp, a leading WSPU activist, "discussed the HNB (Brailsford) danger", a conversation he repeated with Mrs Pankhurst and Mrs Clayton. "It is more serious even than I thought ...stayed in at night reading *Votes* and Christabel's answer to Conciliation Committee telling them this is a woman's movement and can only be conducted by women. Unhappily the vote can only be won through men". Later Nevinson found Brailsford "more placable though still denouncing mistake of first raid and deception practiced on Conciliation Committee".²

For its part the National Union was evidently having problems with some of the more dedicated Liberals among its members. A number of Liberal MPs who favoured a more democratic franchise had refused to support the Conciliation Bill, as favouring more wealthy women. One of these R.D. Denman, MP for Carlisle, agreed to receive a National Union deputation, and indicated that he would be prepared to support the planned second Conciliation Bill which was to be capable of widening amendments.

Nonetheless some suffragists from Women's Liberal Associations in his constituency were unwilling to join the deputation. One wrote to

1. Nevinson Diaries, 29 November 1910. See also Lord Lytton to Mrs Fawcett 17 November 1910, FAC

2. Nevinson Diaries 1 December 1910. This appears to be one of the earliest expressions of Christabel Pankhurst's growing antipathy to male involvement in the suffrage movement

the National Union explaining that it was felt they should not advise pro-suffragist MPs on the best policy to pursue in the House. Catherine Marshall, the National Union's Parliamentary Secretary, replied that she believed that the two local Liberal MPs, Denman and Howard, had "done more than anything to damage the chances of any women's suffrage being passed into law" by their raising the adult suffrage issue whenever possible. It was particularly important to win over adultist Liberals to the Conciliation Bill, at least for the time being. She herself remained a staunch Liberal but believed suffrage work among women Liberals needed much better organisation. Their associations should work to get women's suffrage into the election addresses of all Liberal candidates, and get the candidate to pledge his support of a non-party bill on women's suffrage, if it did not become a government measure.¹

The issue of Liberal MPs reaction to the Conciliation Bills was to have a significant effect on Liberal women suffragists. During a canvass of candidates which the National Union undertook as part of its general election work during December 1910, it had been found that a common response among Liberal MPs was that they would only support some wider measure of women's suffrage than the Conciliation Bill, and wanted something "thoroughly democratic". In consequence the National Union's Annual Conference, early in 1911, passed a resolution urging

1. R.D. Denman to Catherine Marshall 3 November, 7 November, 15 November 1910; Beatrix Morton to Catherine Marshall 10, 13 November 1910. In her reply to Denman on 10 November Catherine Marshall explained that the narrow basis of the bill and its limiting title had been decided on partly because of the time factor in getting private member bills read in the House of Commons. If the Conciliation Committee were provided with more time they would be quite prepared to alter the bill. CMP. Finally Denman himself persuaded the local women Liberals to take part in the deputation though in the event it had to be cancelled with the announcement of a general election. Geoffrey Howard had been the Liberal MP responsible for the private member adult suffrage bill in 1909

local societies to "put before their members the grave impropriety of supporting any candidate who is not in favour of women's suffrage". Opposition to the Conciliation Bill, on whatever grounds, was seen as anti-suffragist.¹

Walter McLaren, a leading Liberal suffragist, had foreseen just such conflicts when writing to the Liberal Chief Whip, the Master of Elibank, in November 1910:

I can estimate the gravity of the crisis in the women's movement better probably than any other man, and I beg of you as a loyal supporter to do your utmost to avert the impending disaster of driving the women's movement into open hostility.

I am not merely speaking of Mrs Pankhurst's Militant Society, but also of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and to a considerable extent even the Women's Liberal Federation.

He asked that the Liberal Cabinet consider the compromise of offering a private member bill full facilities next session, and claimed that Birrell and Runciman had already urged this.

You must realise that, with the enormously and rapidly growing agitation in the country, among men as well as among women, you cannot afford, on the eve of a General Election, to drive the whole women's movement into the most bitter opposition, nor to weaken the sympathy and in many cases alienate the supporters of the most active Liberal women workers.²

Such assertions of mass disillusion among Liberal party workers, particularly women, over the suffrage issue was a theme which was to recur frequently during the next couple of years.

Nonetheless, the criticism of Liberal MPs like Denman, that the Conciliation Bill was "undemocratic", remained a major source of opposition to Shackleton's Bill. The argument was carefully analysed and

1. For example see Catherine Marshall's list of candidates' answers to National Union questions in the Westmoreland constituencies, December 1910, CMP
 2. Walter McLaren to Elibank 11 November 1910, NLS MSS Elibank 8802

repudiated by Kathleen Courtney, in *The Common Cause*. She insisted the measure was democratic both in its aim of assisting equal rights and privileges — it was estimated that about one million women would be enfranchised by the bill — and in the composition of the women it would enfranchise. She asserted that the large majority of women occupiers were either possessors of small incomes, or working women. She insisted that the National Union, during its work for the Voters' Petitions, had found that support for the cause of women's suffrage outstripped any demand for adult suffrage. Nevertheless, Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, supposed suffragists, continued to oppose the bill, and the Parliamentary Labour Party (32 of whom had voted for the bill, and only two against) was not prepared to push for full facilities for such a bill.¹

To counter the detrimental effect of this criticism the National Union undertook an enquiry into the status of women on the Municipal Register in Keswick, Dundee, Bangor and Carnarvon, which sought to show that a large proportion of women occupiers were in fact working women.²

Despite such protestations from the supporters of the Conciliation Bill, when a second such bill was introduced by Sir George Kemp in 1911, its title had been changed to allow widening amendments, and there were several other small changes designed to placate the critics of the earlier bill, most notably the removal of the £10 occupier qualification which some had feared would result in "faggot" voting,³ i.e. large property owners might parcel up their land among female relatives, to give them a vote.

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1. *The Common Cause* 7 July 1910 for Kathleen Courtney's article. See also *The Conciliation Bill Explained*, in *The Common Cause* 11 August 1910, which includes the full text of the bill,
 2. See *The Common Cause*, 23 February 1911
 3. See National Union Leaflet *Votes for Women Householders*, n.d. (Spring 1911). The title of the Bill had been changed from a Bill to Extend the Parliamentary Franchise to Women Occupiers to a Bill to Confer the Parliamentary Franchise on Women.

Kemp's Bill 1911

By the time of the introduction of the second Conciliation Bill C.P. Scott had become active in negotiations between the government and the two wings of the suffrage movement, and he persuaded Sir Edward Grey to speak on the second reading of Kemp's bill in the House of Commons.¹

This second Conciliation Bill passed with a good majority of 167 in March 1911. Although the suffragist Ministers failed to secure further facilities for it that session, Asquith did promise that if a further Conciliation Bill was again passed the following year, the government would set aside a week for it to complete all its stages.²

The WSPU had undertaken a further truce during the introduction of the new bill, though relations with Brailsford had clearly remained strained for many months.³ But despite the truce there were developments within the WSPU which augured ill for its continuation. Nevinson remarked of a WSPU reception he attended early in 1911 "they begin to think more of the means than of the end. E.S. (Evelyn Sharp) in terrible pain". Nevinson detected that "a sense of growing wrath, a cruel rage, has arisen lately. In me at least it is growing".⁴ Black Friday

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1. Scott kept notes on his various meetings, which add up to a kind of diary. See C.P. Scott Diaries 16 March 1911, BM Add 50901. This is the most specific account of the state of play between suffragist and anti-suffragist Ministers to be found in the personal papers of the period. According to his biographer, at this period Scott generally only wrote the *The Manchester Guardian* leaders on his three main interests; House of Lords reform, women's suffrage and Ireland, J.L. Hammond, *C.P. Scott of the Manchester Guardian*, London: G. Bell & Son 1934, p.98
 2. Asquith's Cabinet reports to the King 17 May 1911, 24 May 1911, MSS Asquith 6, Bodleian Library
 3. In January Nevinson was recording that Brailsford was "still bitter about the Friday raid as preventing Lytton's meeting with Asquith and a gathering of Liberal members". A few weeks later Brailsford was still "desperate about the militancy that chokes his bill". However, by February Christabel was beginning to make conciliatory moves towards Brailsford, Nevinson Diaries 2, 20, January 1911, 8 February 1911
 4. *ibid* 21 January, 16 February, 7, 16 March 1911

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and the growing number of women being forcibly fed were clearly the immediate cause of such developments. One militant recalled "Black Friday had the effect of oil poured on a smouldering fire".¹ Outside immediate suffrage circles, too, feelings were running high. Disagreement over the Conciliation Bills had become so bitter that both Nevins-son and Brailsford stayed away from the weekly lunches of their employ-er, *The Nation*, during this time.

Also, there now appeared an increasing desire on the part of some male suffragists to begin militant agitation. Joseph Clayton, a leading member of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage, sent a threatening letter to Churchill. Brailsford, also a member of the Men's League, argued against all use of violence at the present time. Against the decision of the League's Executive, Clayton publicly announced a male deputation to the House of Commons in order to test police treatment.²

The government's promise of facilities for a Conciliation Bill during the next session did little to dampen this anger. Nevinson re-corded greeting the announcement with "much joy, but I fear — I fear. Spoke to Christabel over telephone; she also fears and suspects". On reflection Nevinson believed it "to be a mere trap and snare in vain hope of securing peace for this year", a view which Brailsford apparent-ly shared. The coronation of George V was to take place that summer, and the government therefore had an added reason for wishing to maintain the truce. Nevinson again had to intervene to prevent violent demon-strations by some of the Men's League.³ Suffragist anxieties were finally quietened by a letter to Lord Lytton from Asquith promising that the government intended to keep to its pledge in both the letter and the spirit.⁴

1. Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance*, p.10

2. Nevinson Diaries, 14, 21 March, 13 April 1911

3. *ibid* 16, 29, 30 May 1911

4. *ibid* 18 June 1911

Whatever the conflicts among militant supporters at this time, the relationship between the National Union and the WSPU remained amicable during the renewed truce of the summer and autumn of 1911. The National Union agreed to participate in the WSPU's planned coronation procession in London in June. In the event the National Union provided the largest contingent within the procession.¹

During this period C.P. Scott remained in close touch with the various suffrage leaders, and with leading members of the government. At a meeting with Lloyd George, Scott "put it to him point blank that the thing (women's suffrage) had got to be done and how would he do it". Lloyd George now told Scott that what he wanted was a bill which would enfranchise joint householders, whether men or women, making a measure that would be well on the way to adult suffrage. Scott doubted whether it was possible to attain a majority for such a measure, but Lloyd George was optimistic — "even the Prime Minister was prepared for it". For this reason Lloyd George preferred to deal with women's suffrage through a government franchise bill in the near future. If then his planned amendment to such a bill to admit women on their husband's qualification was rejected "he inclined to think he should have to vote against the Bill".²

Scott reported this conversation to Brailsford and Lytton who were "both eager to have a sop to throw to the militants who threaten foolishness again". It appeared Brailsford would not regard it as fatal to be beaten on the Conciliation Bill by a combination of anti-suffragists

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1. NUWSS Annual Report 1911. Similar joint processions also took place in other localities, see *The Common Cause* 29 June 1911. Earlier in the year the Leicester National Union society had been refused permission to cooperate with the local WSPU, NUWSS Executive Minutes 5 January 1911. The National Union's decision to join the WSPU's coronation procession brought a protest from the London Society, NUWSS Executive Minutes 27 April 1911
 2. Scott diaries 15 June 1911

and adultists. Like most of the progressive suffragists Brailsford was clearly also an adultist. "That would merely show that the smaller measure was impracticable and the whole suffrage force would have to swing round to the Lloyd George solution in the franchise measure of the following session".¹

However, as Lloyd George began to sound out suffragists and talk of widening amendments to the next Conciliation Bill, he met with an increasingly hostile reaction from the WSPU.

Throughout the summer Lloyd George consolidated his moves against the Conciliation Bill, writing to Elibank in early September:

As you know I proposed to the Cabinet...to drop the idea of introducing a mere Plural Voting Bill and to immediately press forward a measure for the simplification and extension of the Franchise. To this they agreed. Unless it is introduced and sent up to the Lords next year it will not be available for the next General Election.

He continued,

I am very concerned about our pledge on the Female Suffrage Question. We seem to be playing straight into the hands of the enemy. The Conciliation Bill would on balance add hundreds of thousands of votes throughout the country to the strength of the Tory Party. We would then loose more than we could possibly gain out of a Registration Bill.

We have never faced the situation manfully and courageously. I think the Liberal Party ought to make up its mind as a whole that it will either have an extended franchise which would put the working men's wives in the register as well as spinsters and widows, or that it will have no female franchise at all... It looks to me that through sheer drift, vacillation and something which looks like cowardice we are likely to find ourselves in the position of putting this wretched Conciliation Bill through the House of Commons, sending it to the Lords and eventually getting it through. Say what you will that spells disaster to Liberalism and unless you take it in hand and take it at once, this catastrophe is inevitable.²

1. *ibid*

2. Lloyd George to Elibank 5 September 1911, NLS MSS Elibank 8802. See also Swanwick, *I Have Been Young* p.211 for her account of Lloyd George's views on the Conciliation Bills.

Morgan, in his account of this time, stresses Lloyd George's fear of "piecemeal electoral reform", and his belief that the Liberal government should not become entangled with a property-based bill, as an important factor in the government's introduction of a franchise bill. Morgan also states that the suffragists themselves had no idea that these plans were afoot. Yet from Scott's notes it is clear that both he and Brailsford knew of the proposals long before the Cabinet Office began work on the matter, or before Asquith informed the King. Constitutional suffragist leaders knew of the plan before its public announcement in November.¹

Before Asquith's announcement of the new bill to a deputation from the People's Suffrage Federation on 7th November 1911, Lloyd George confidently approached Scott and suffrage leaders on the possibilities that such a bill offered. He told Scott that the bill was planned for next session and that "He expected that the Bill would be virtually manhood suffrage. He suggested that an amendment should be introduced providing that 'men' should include 'women' — i.e. convert the Bill at a stroke to an Adult Suffrage Bill". Lloyd George would give it his utmost support, and indicated that so would the Whip's office. He and Elibank alone in the Cabinet had voted for Geoffrey Howard's adult suffrage bill in 1909, which had planned to enfranchise women on the qualification of their husbands.

Lloyd George repeated:

To the Conciliation Bill, on its merits and so long as a larger measure had not been proved to be impracticable he was vehemently opposed and would defeat by every means in his power... (But if all attempts through a wider measure failed) his attitude would be greatly changed and he should not oppose it. Both bills would be read a second time early in the session, and the Government Bill would be taken first in Committee. But the Conciliation Bill would be kept alive and would be in reserve (providing the Conciliation Committee had first given their full support to his amendment to the

1. Morgan op cit p.83; Pease Diaries 24 October 1911; Asquith to the King 25 October 1911, Bodleian Library MSS, Asquith 6

Franchise Bill). He allowed me to communicate this proposal in strict confidence to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and to the Conciliation Committee and let him know their views.¹

Scott immediately consulted with Helena Swanwick and Kathleen Courtney, the Secretary of the National Union "and they both hailed the proposal as opening up a new and far better prospect of success. They were confident that Mrs Fawcett (on whose opposition on political grounds Lloyd George had counted) would be favourable, her principle being 'the more suffrage for women the better'". Brailsford was less optimistic. He foresaw difficulty with the 70-odd Unionists who supported the Conciliation Committee and believed:

It might jeopardize the support for the Conciliation Bill if there had previously been an attempt by members of the Committee to carry the larger measure. He anticipated great difficulties with the WSPU. There was the deepest suspicion of Lloyd George and Christabel Pankhurst...envisaged the whole suffrage movement in its present phase as a gigantic duel between herself and Lloyd George who she designed to destroy. She had lost all sense of proportion and honestly believed she could force the Government to yield.

Brailsford advised that to fend off such antagonism Lloyd George should no longer oppose the Conciliation Bill and must let it be known that he would support it if his own measure failed.²

The Government Reform Bill

When news of Asquith's announcement of the forthcoming franchise bill on November 7th reached the Men's League offices, Brailsford ad-

1. Scott Diaries 26 October 1911 (my parentheses)

2. *ibid.* Nevinson's Diaries provide ample evidence of Brailsford's increasing disillusion with the WSPU leadership, particularly Christabel Pankhurst, at this time, whose services to the movement he thought were about at an end. It is clear he had not forewarned the WSPU leaders of the forthcoming Franchise Bill, Nevinson Diaries 24 October, 31 October, 1 November 1911

mitted to Nevinson that "it had been a secret for a few weeks and there was still another secret, some negotiations with Lloyd George. But he was startled at the publication".¹ This new development laid the ground for the growing disintegration which the WSPU experienced in the remaining period before the outbreak of war, as militants failed to agree on how best to respond to the government's Reform Bill initiative.

When Brailsford had visited the WSPU offices after Asquith's announcement he "found them livid with rage and deaf to reason". He himself was convinced of Lloyd George's sincerity and believed he would use all his influence for the Conciliation Bill if the women's amendment to the Franchise Bill failed. Brailsford regarded "the whole situation as much more favourable, chiefly because the adultist danger will be got rid of. Bar militancy he regards victory as certain". He had told WSPU leaders of Lloyd George's promise. Nevinson foresaw "A very unhappy time of disagreements and division is coming". Brailsford cancelled all his speaking engagements with the WSPU and asked Nevinson to join him in a letter "stating our views and deprecating the militancy. I refused at present because I don't want to break with friends, but wrote to Mrs Tuke (the WSPU's secretary) saying I thought they would not wish me on their platform as I didn't agree with their line".²

The WSPU had replied to Asquith's announcement with its first organised, large-scale window-smashing demonstration, and with the demand that the government should introduce a full adult suffrage bill. It now abandoned the Conciliation Bill as a danger to the cause. Confusion among its supporters was widespread. Nevinson reported that Evelyn

1. Nevinson Diaries 7 November 1911

2. *ibid* 8 November 1911. Brailsford had one worry — if the Conciliation Bill should be read before the Franchise Bill he feared Unionists would oppose it because of where it might lead, while Liberal supporters would be slack in view of the forthcoming larger measure. His fears were to prove justified.

Sharp had waited over an hour to see Christabel and "had been called 'my good woman' for her pains. Lansbury had come in supporting 'war'... All is very bitter". A Men's League meeting had come out largely for the adult suffrage demand. While Brailsford was quite confident about a half-way measure in a women's suffrage amendment to the Franchise Bill, he wanted the Conciliation Bill campaign kept alive "as a spur to Liberals, who fear it".¹

Nevinson backed Scott's calls in the *Manchester Guardian* for the inclusion of women in the Franchise Bill from the very outset. He 'tried to be happy, but the cloud is too dark and the division over the adult-ist question too deep". The next day he continued in "intense depression about the situation" Lloyd George had apparently been trying to contact the WSPU leaders by telephone, but they refused to answer his calls. At a WSPU meeting Evelyn Sharp's speech finally convinced Nevinson that Lloyd George's plan only raised a "new sex barrier"... "For the first time I fully realised the new position, the impossibility of accepting a second best. But it means no victory in this life".²

1. Nevinson Diaries 9, 10 November 1911

2. *ibid* 14, 16 November 1911. When Asquith offered to see a deputation of all suffrage groups Nevinson did not think that the WSPU would participate, and would continue to reject Lloyd George's proposed women's suffrage amendment. He believed the new situation meant "we shall win, but all pleasure will be gone if the victory is not genuine or is rejected by the bill". He accepted the sense of Brailsford's pragmatic approach as opposed to Jane Brailsford's and other leading WSPU activists' insistence on a stand on the principle of full equality. "My reason in practice agreed with him. My spirit is all on the other side". The tensions in his own mind are clear in a description he wrote of a WSPU meeting at this time, referring to Christabel's "strong lapses into cheap gallery appeal", and Pethick Lawrence's presentation of a £1000 donation "in rather a theatrical style". Other supporters were worried about the new turn to deliberate violence in WSPU demonstrations, including Joseph Clayton who himself was prepared to use violence on occasion. He asked Nevinson "if a certain woman took drugs and a horrible suspicion came over me", Nevinson Diaries 19 November 1911

Lloyd George appears to have traded his own support for the Conciliation Bill in return for suffragist support for the government bill. Hammond quotes C.P. Scott's notes for 22nd November:

Mr Lloyd George has hitherto strenuously opposed the Conciliation Bill. He has done so on the ground that a large measure is needed and could be carried. If it is proved to him that it cannot be carried he will oppose no longer... The adhesion of Mr Lloyd George, whose opposition has hitherto alone stood in the way of the Conciliation Bill, would at once make its passing — or rather the passing of an amendment to the Reform Bill on similar terms — a certainty.¹

Yet Lloyd George then delivered a major speech in which he referred to the Government's "torpedoeing" of the Conciliation Bill through the introduction of its own Reform Bill. Brailsford telegraphed Scott that "George's reference Conciliation Bill involved a total repudiation our bargain shall denounce his treachery publicly unless assurance of his support for publication received by Thursday". Scott attempted to heal the breach, replying "Don't at all think George meant any change of substance but rhetoric misleading and desirable to get statement of position for publication". Brailsford insisted that unless he received a "written signed assurance" by 27th November "I shall do some torpedoeing myself please tell George".

Lloyd George's response did not satisfy the leader of the Conciliation Committee. "Long shifty reply from George says his support for Conciliation amendments will depend on our getting him Tory votes. This wholly new condition. We are doing our best but told him from the first it was impossible. Shall launch my torpedo". On Scott's intervention Brailsford held his hand, and the matter eventually appears to have been settled.²

1. Hammond op cit pp.105-6

2. Brailsford telegrams to Scott 25, 26, 27 November 1911, Scott's reply 25 November 1911, Kathleen Courtney Papers, Fawcett Library, as yet unsorted and uncatalogued. See also Henry Brailsford to Mrs Fawcett 26 November 1911, M50/2/1/341 MPLA

In a letter to Kathleen Courtney a few days later Scott said he thought Lloyd George had been,

awfully reckless in his attack on the Conciliation Bill and it is impossible completely to reconcile it with his private and personal pledges. It may amuse you to have the enclosed bundle of telegrams from Brailsford. It was touch and go whether there would be a complete bust up.

He believed his own letter to Lloyd George had more or less caused him to climb down,

and may have turned the scale. He could see from it that I regarded him as honourably committed to support the Conciliation Bill in the last resort and not merely not to oppose it and I told him I regarded the knowledge beforehand of this as essential to our success in winning over the Liberal indifferents and Antis.

He believed correspondence published that day between Lord Lytton and Lloyd George represented "the final concordat" (29th November 1911). Nonetheless he warned "you need to be on your guard in commerce with him".¹

The WSPU leadership did not alter its position on the new situation though dissent among WSPU activists on the issue continued. Elizabeth Robins told Nevinson she was "much distressed at situation; has refused deputation (presumably another WSPU demonstration outside the House of Commons). Had long talks with Grey who is thoroughly in earnest, only not quite alive to the urgency. She had explained her view to Christabel but quite in vain. Had been told the members (of the WSPU) were obviously sick of holding their hand under the Conciliation Bill and the Central must stir now". Nevinson commented "What a reason, if true".²

The WSPU's increasing violence brought strong counter-reactions.

Lloyd George wrote to Scott:

1. Scott to Kathleen Courtney 29 November 1911, Kathleen Courtney Papers
 2. Nevinson Diaries 20 November 1911, see also entries 25, 26, 30 November 1911 for the continuing lack of unanimity in the WSPU

The action of the Militants is ruinous. The feeling amongst sympathisers of the cause in the House is one of panic. Whilst not being despondent, I am frankly not very hopeful of success if these tactics are persisted in. I enclose a letter which I have just written to Mrs Fawcett. It looks to me as if they were deliberately bent upon preventing our carrying our amendment. They would regard its incorporation in the Government Bill as a real defeat for themselves and they mean to thwart our purposes. What do you suggest should be done? I feel certain that prompt action is urgently called for.¹

Mrs Fawcett's response was to throw the ball back in the government's court. She wrote:

I regret and deplore, condemn also, if the word must be used, the disgusting scenes of November 21st and 29th (WSPU window-smashing raids) as much as you do. The National Union has always condemned methods of violence. My suffrage friends are constantly asking me, can nothing be done to stop them? In my opinion nothing can be done by direct or indirect appeal to the leaders of the Women's Social and Political Union. That has been tried again and again on other occasions by other Suffragists; and always without result.

She appealed to Lloyd George and the other suffragist Ministers to approach the problem in the same spirit in which the government had dealt with the recent unrest in India, by recognising its cause. "The disorders of November 21st and November 29th are specimens, are symptoms of a social and political disease. You may punish the offender, but mere punishment does not affect the causes of the disease. Force is no remedy. You must seek the causes and endeavour to remove them". The suffragist Ministers should make an open declaration of intent on the Franchise Bill, and present an amendment which united suffragist opinion in the House of Commons. As their good intentions became clearer, militancy might not die away but it would become increasingly isolated. She ended with a quotation from Morley "No re-

1. Lloyd George to C.P. Scott 30 November 1911, Lloyd George Papers C/8/1/1, House of Lords Record Office

former is fit for his task who suffers himself to be frightened off by the excesses of an extreme wing".¹

Scott received further evidence of the detrimental effect of the renewed militancy at a meeting with Lloyd George the following day, when the Minister stressed that what really mattered was the effect it was having on public opinion. Elibank had joined them, and reported that one member of the Conciliation Committee was now collecting signatures from other members to oppose any future Conciliation Bill if militancy did not stop. So far he had obtained 20 or so signatures. Lloyd George added that he had "been in communication with a body of about 60 headed by Henderson (the Labour leader) who were all prepared to take part in a suffrage campaign in the country and that after the outrages the whole thing came to a dead stop".²

Meanwhile turmoil continued within the inner councils of the WSPU. Brailsford's wife, Jane, was holding "to the WSPU as the advanced guard standing for principle and the maximum. Also as the only body she can work with. But she meditates asking them to establish an extended committee in place of the original".³ Dr Louisa Garrett Anderson told Nevinson that her mother, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson "had resigned the WSPU under the influence of Mrs Fawcett preaching HNB (Brailsford). She herself is now very doubtful about the wisdom of the tactics (of the

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1. M.G. Fawcett to Lloyd George 2 December 1911, MGFP. Scott had been disturbed too by Grey's refusal to speak for suffrage after WSPU demonstrators had howled down Asquith at a recent meeting. Nevinson suggested to Scott that they should push a view of the bill which stressed it as simply extending the present qualification, rather than as a manhood suffrage bill. Scott agreed this would be helpful, Nevinson Diaries 1 December 1911
 2. Scott Diaries 2 December 1911
 3. Nevinson Diaries 4 December 1911. The WSPU's Executive Committee had been appointed by Mrs Pankhurst in 1907 after the split which led to the formation of the WFL, on the issue of a democratic constitution. Apparently it only met once — to be told of the expulsion of the PethickLawrences in 1912

WSPU). She says they take too much explanation which is time".¹ Other militants like Annie Kenney also had doubts about the new policy, but "would go through fire for Christabel. I said that was no reason, though I would too, I demanded reason; and she agreed but doesn't understand".²

Meanwhile, the other men's suffrage society, in which Nevinson was active, the Men's Political Union, was also in some disarray. One of its members had assaulted Lloyd George. Nevinson reported that Brailsford "was very much vexed at Mr Douglas's silly assault" but did not intend to protest "for fear of losing all his friends". Nevinson now raised the issue of democratically electing an Executive Committee for the Men's Political Union, but met with strong opposition and began to doubt his own motives. "My disagreements may be due entirely to cowardice".³

In contrast, the National Union had had the advantage of knowing about the Franchise Bill in advance, and its leaders had clearly welcomed it as a good chance for the women's demand to be answered. They had taken part in the suffrage deputation to Asquith in November, and clearly felt this to have been relatively successful. Asquith had assured them that if the House of Commons passed a women's suffrage amendment to the bill, it would thereafter be regarded as an integral part of the bill and would have the backing of the government through the support of its Whips.

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1. *ibid* 6 December 1911. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was Mrs Fawcett's sister, and the first woman doctor to qualify in Britain. Louisa Garrett Anderson's criticism of WSPU policy is interesting, in that it echoes that of the Pethick Lawrences at the time of the split in October 1912. They maintained that large, open, legal demonstrations should be kept up, in preference to illegal, secret activities, whose rationale was difficult to explain to the public
 2. *ibid* 7 December 1911
 3. *ibid* 21 December 1911, 3 January 1912

1911 had also been a good year for the National Union in terms of its own growth. Membership had risen from 21,571 to 30,408, and the number of its branch societies from 207 to 311. Its organisation now covered every area of the country except Herefordshire and Dorsetshire.¹ While earlier in the year it had been able to cooperate with the WSPU on a number of activities (for example an enquiry into the status of women house-holders), the renewed militancy at the end of the year had re-opened the breach. Following the window-smashing raids the National Union issued a manifesto to the press against militant tactics.²

Meanwhile it kept up its work among suffrage supporters in the House of Commons. The National Union leaders met with Brailsford and Lytton and the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association (CUWFA) to discuss the best methods of concerted action on a women's suffrage amendment, and the possibilities for ensuring the support of Unionist suffragist MPs for such.

Grey, despite his distress at the resumption of militancy, continued to be in touch with the National Union, and promised to take on the responsibility for introducing one of the planned women's suffrage amendments to the Franchise Bill. Mrs Fawcett reported:

I asked him if he or other women suffragists in the Cabinet had faced the practical question of how to form an amendment on the Norway lines (whereby a woman could be enfranchised through her husband's qualification). He answered in the negative. I urged that in drafting the amendment and also in speaking in support of it either in the House of Commons or on the platform stress should be put on the fact that it was an extension of the principle of household suffrage; the single woman and widow householder of course, with the addition of the hausfrau, the housemother or whatever it was convenient to call her, the female head of the household.

1. NUWSS Annual Report 1911

2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 8 September, 2, 16, 30 November 1911

She believed this would have two advantages. Firstly that the country was already familiar with the principle of household suffrage. Secondly,

I mentioned that many of our Members disliked the idea of marriage in itself for a woman being made a qualification but this could be got over if the married woman could be enfranchised as householders. Most married women do regard themselves as their husbands' partners in the upkeep of the house and among the poor they do at least as much as the man to keep the house together; the National and Economic value of Women's work in the home was more and more recognized and this amendment would therefore be in harmony with this growing conviction.¹

The disarray in the militants' ranks in the closing weeks of 1911 seems to have been echoed in the Cabinet. Elibank had received a report of Liberal agents on the women's suffrage bill, and though some areas showed sympathy with the cause, it was the almost unanimous opinion of the agents that women's suffrage, on the lines of the Conciliation Bill would be against Liberal Party interests.²

Meanwhile the Cabinet was moving very slowly in the matter of its own franchise bill. It was not until over a month after the public announcement of the bill that it was suggested that Pease should draw up a memorandum on the matter for Cabinet to discuss.³ No further discussion took place until late April, and then apparently only on Pease's urging.⁴ Lloyd George does not appear to have pressed for the introduction of such a bill before the second reading of the third

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1. M.G. Fawcett's confidential memorandum on a meeting with Sir Edward Grey 11 December 1911. See also M.G. Fawcett to Grey 16 December 1911, MGFP. The memorandum also indicated that some headway was being made with unionist suffragists, six of whom had agreed to vote for the women's suffrage amendment on the Norwegian lines, i.e. for the wife sharing her husband's qualification to vote
 2. Elibank's account of the report of Mr Seager, Head of the Registration Department at the Liberal Party's headquarters 16 November 1911, Gainford Papers 112
 3. J.A. Pease Diaries 13 December 1911
 4. *ibid* 16, 25 April 1912. Asquith to King 25 April 1912, MSS Asquith 6 Bodleian Library

Conciliation Bill which occurred in March 1912 — an important aspect of his original plan. In consequence the plans for a Conciliation Bill as a safety net for the women's suffrage demand, should it be excluded from the Franchise Bill, foundered.

The cause for the delay appears to have been the controversy Winston Churchill stirred up around the subject with his suggestion that any women's suffrage measure should be put to a referendum. At the end of 1911 he had written to Elibank:

We are getting into very great peril over Female Suffrage.

Be quite sure of this: the Franchise Bill will not get through without a dissolution if it contains a clause adding 8 million women to the electorate. Nor ought it to get through.

How can the Prime Minister honourably use the Parliament Act to force it upon the King, when he has himself declared it to be a 'disastrous mistake'... Votes for women is so unpopular that by-elections will be unfavourable.

The King would have to dismiss the Ministry and elect a new government on the old plural voting register.

We shall be in confusion ourselves. With us will go down the Irish cause. The situation which is developing is very like the Free Trade split in the Tory Party in 1903. I do not understand Lloyd George at all. Our one hope was the referendum which alone gave a reasonable and honourable outlet. He knows my view — And yet he has gone out of his way to rule it out at the very beginning... What a ridiculous tragedy it would be if this strong Government and party which has made its mark in history was to go down on Petticoat politics! And the last chance of Ireland — our loyal friends — squandered too! It is damnable!!¹

He maintained Lloyd George and Grey were working themselves into a position where they would have to resign if women were left out of

1. Quoted in Morgan op cit pp.87-8. See also a report of the dissension in the Cabinet at this time in Lady Frances Balfour's letter to Mrs Fawcett 7 March 1912, FAC

the bill, while Asquith would have to resign if a women's suffrage amendment were passed. Churchill proposed first a referendum of women to see if they wanted the vote, and then a referendum for the male electorate to see if they were prepared to give it.

The smoothness of National Union negotiations with government spokesmen was ruffled when Grey took up Churchill's suggestion of attaching a referendum to any women's suffrage clause. Lloyd George at this point appears to have felt the suggestion had a strong chance of passing as part of a women's suffrage amendment. Kathleen Courtney and Mrs Fawcett consulted with Scott and Brailsford before meeting with Lloyd George to discuss the matter.

They all "agreed that this (the referendum) would be fatal. The women are not in a position to fight a referendum with all the powers of wealth, prejudice, tradition and ignorance and of every corrupt influence against them on a scale so gigantic". Scott was fairly confident, despite Grey's speech, that Asquith would rule it out as inadmissible and impracticable. When he met with Lloyd George, however, he found the Chancellor suggesting that a compromise should be made with the anti-suffragists in the Cabinet, on the basis of a referendum provision to a women's suffrage amendment as he believed this would secure a united Cabinet on the issue.¹

Scott reported back to Helena Swanwick and Kathleen Courtney and "After discussion it was decided that the Referendum proposal in any form whatever could not be entertained". Firstly, it went back on Asquith's promise that a women's suffrage amendment, if passed, would become part and parcel of the whole bill; secondly, it would involve the acceptance of the principle of a referendum on the women's suffrage issue. Thirdly, women would be at a hopeless disadvantage when it came

1. Scott Diaries 22-24 January 1912

to working a referendum. "It was felt that if the proposal were carried the National Union must change its whole policy and probably ally itself with the Labour Party". Kathleen Courtney and Helena Swanwick also met with Lloyd George but with little result.¹

When Scott consulted Brailsford the latter "felt that if the Referendum proposal were not disavowed by Asquith he himself would have been completely trapped and deluded and what seemed the extravagant suspicions of the WSPU completely justified — I felt the same in regard to the *Manchester Guardian* and the hard controversy carried on in it with the WSPU". They both agreed Lloyd George should have to "not only drop all thought of Referendum but to offer it whole-hearted and uncompromising opposition and second that the Prime Minister must be induced to declare it inadmissible".

Scott also tackled Churchill. "I discussed the general question with him of the need of a big change affecting the whole position of women and shook him a bit — a queer, emotional creature. He practically admitted that his present wrecking tactics are the outcome of resentment at the treatment he has received from the WSPU. He is not to be despaired of if tackled".²

Under these pressures Lloyd George withdrew his compromise proposals on a referendum "though he refused to go as far as promising to resign on the issue". He would consult with Grey, and make a public pronouncement against the plan. Further he took up Brailsford's suggestion that the Bill should also be used to extend the female municipal franchise, on the same lines as it was intended to confer the Parliamentary franchise. In this way concerted action by the National Union and leading male suffragists put an end to the referendum scheme.

1. *ibid*

2. *ibid*

But the result was the serious likelihood of the government's bill being withdrawn. It was rumoured the Reform Bill would be replaced with a simple Plural Voting measure. Scott wrote to Kathleen Courtney that at least then Lloyd George "could not be very fierce in his opposition (to the third Conciliation Bill) provided the Bill were balanced (from the party point of view by the abolition of the Plural vote)".
 first parentheses mine.¹

A week or so later there is evidence of continuing anxiety in suffrage ranks. Scott had received a letter from Brailsford "rather desperate", and intended to see Lloyd George the next day if possible. There seems to have been some talk of dropping the Conciliation Bill, but Scott opposed this unless Brailsford felt its support had dissipated. In that case the government's planned action — the withdrawal of the Reform Bill? — "would be equivalent to that of the most calculated treachery".

Hammond confirms that the rumours of the withdrawal of the Reform Bill caused considerable unease among suffragists at the time. Although in the end it was only postponed, "the effect of the postponement was that the Conciliation Bill came before the House of Commons first". Lloyd George held by his commitment on the Conciliation Bill, appearing on a platform with Mrs Fawcett shortly before its introduction when he declared that "failing his own solution of the Suffrage question by a wide amendment of the Government Reform Bill, he would feel bound to support the Conciliation Bill in spite of his dislike of it". He voted for the Bill in the House of Commons, but by this time his support was to no avail.²

Lloyd George now suggested the wisdom of forming a Council "to

1. Scott to Kathleen Courtney 31 January 1912, Kathleen Courtney Papers
 2. Scott to Kathleen Courtney 9 February 1912, Kathleen Courtney Papers;
 Hammond op cit p.110

prevent inconvenient isolated actions such as that of Grey and to secure the consideration and continuity which could not be given by very busy men like himself acting alone".¹

Brailsford had been thinking along the same lines, particularly as a way of dealing with the problem of securing Unionist suffragist support. It seems likely that these discussions played some part in establishing the Joint Board of suffrage societies to co-ordinate the campaign around the suffrage issue among MPs. The societies involved included the WFL, the Men's League, CUWFA, the Forward Union, the Fabian Women, the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation and the PSF. Their initial work was around the second reading of the Final Conciliation Bill in March 1912.

The ILP and the WLF had declined to join, the ILP on the grounds of maintaining the appearance of independent action. The WFL on the other hand clearly felt that some of this work was poaching on its territory, and its refusal to join the Joint Board was the first sign of a growing breach between the National Union and the WLF.²

As the date for the second reading of the Conciliation Bill came nearer, the WSPU continued the mass window-breaking raids in London's shopping centres. The militants were by now encountering quite serious counter-violence. Meanwhile the controversy over whether or not its male supporters should engage in violent demonstrations was growing, as

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1. Scott Diaries 22-24 January 1912
 2. See Catherine Marshall's Papers for 1912 for the file on the Joint Board for co-ordinating MPs, which later developed into the Joint Campaign for Women's Suffrage, see Ch.7. See also Catherine Marshall's notes 29 February 1912 of a meeting with Eleanor Acland, a National Union sympathiser who was on the WLF Executive, CMP. The WLF Executive experienced considerable internal conflict over the Conciliation Bills and enthusiasm waned markedly after the government's announcement of its own Reform Bill. See WLF Minutes 10 June, 15 July, 4 October 1910; 16 March, 11 April, 18 July, 10 October, 27 October 1911; 16 January, 12 March, 2 July 1912, Bristol University Library Archives

was a feeling among sections of the WSPU that there was no place for men in the movement.¹

The National Union's members appear to have met with considerable resistance in their own work because of this renewed militancy. A member in Appleby wrote "the last militant outbreak is making the work here terribly difficult it really *is* sad", while a former WSPU activist wrote "How disheartening this last raid is". Another suffrage worker recorded "the men round here are very angry at the conduct of the Militant party and not inclined to sign (a memorandum from voters in support of the Conciliation Bill)... I am afraid the Suffragettes are not far removed from the 'stone-age'".²

The National Union issued a circular letter against the renewed violence. One correspondent insisted "it is imperative that the main body of suffragists should utterly repudiate lawless methods, and show

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1. WSPU leaders appear to have tried to discourage male involvement in violent demonstrations. Nevinson reported, however that by early March feeling was very high among the male suffragists. He found Joseph Clayton "was suddenly cantankerous and insane, accusing me of having no feeling for the women because I have seen so many horrors (Nevinson was one of the leading war correspondents of the time). He wanted to get together a party of men to threaten to thrash McKenna if forcible feeding begins again". Disruption in the Men's Political Union appears to have continued, both over the use of violence and Nevinson's attempts to introduce a democratic constitution to the organisation (this was opposed by WSPU leaders). Alongside all this there was developing a discussion on how far men could usefully be involved in militant suffrage activities. For example Nevinson's involvement with the production of *Votes for Women*, and later *The Suffragette*, while the leaders and editors were in prison became suspect. There had been considerable anger when Jessie Kenney had found Scott present at a discussion among some leading WSPU activists in November 1911. Mrs Pethick Lawrence went so far as to say "Men in prison only embarrass us". See Nevinson's Diaries for January to April 1912. He also records the increasing retaliatory violence being suffered by WSPU workers, see his Diaries 4, 7, 10 March 1912
 2. M. Norma Smith to Catherine Marshall n.d. (March 1912), Beatrice Kemp to Catherine Marshall 9 March 1912, Lucy A. Stirling to Catherine Marshall 10 March 1912, CMP

how numerically insignificant are those people responsible for the outrages". Another demanded proof of Mrs Fawcett's assertion that the women involved represented "a small and decreasing minority among suffragists". In reply Mrs Fawcett claimed that financial support was being re-directed to the National Union from the WSPU, while the WSPU leaders had had to search the whole country for volunteers for the most recent raids.¹

The raids were followed with the arrest on the WSPU's leadership, and Christabel's flight to France. One National Union member wrote "One can only hope the WSPU may be crippled by the retired position of its leaders, including Christabel. The position makes me sick at heart."²

The Dickenson Bill 1912

The Third Conciliation Bill, introduced by W.H. Dickenson, was defeated by only 14 votes in March 1912, and it is not unlikely that it would have passed if the WSPU had continued to support it and maintained its "truce". In this event the government's hands would have been tied even more strongly on the suffrage issue. The poor chances of any such bill in the House of Lords is often stressed by historians,³ but this misses the significance of its defeat for the suffrage cause. The Conciliation Bills had always been aimed at proving to the government that it was possible to secure a majority behind a specific suffrage measure, and that the government should undertake to introduce

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1. Theobald C. Taylor to Mrs Fawcett 9 March 1912, M.G. Fawcett to Alfred Lyttelton 12 March 1912, MGFP. Alfred Lyttelton was the Liberal Unionist MP involved in introducing the most limited women's suffrage amendment to the Franchise Bill
 2. Amy Sharp to Catherine Marshall 21 March 1912, CMP. See Rosen op cit pp.156-172 for a full account of WSPU activity during this period
 3. e.g. Rover op cit p.97-98

such a measure itself. The defeat of the third Conciliation Bill eased the pressure which the passage of the second reading of the previous two had been exerting on anti-suffrage opinion within the government.

The defeat provoked an interesting response from the National Union's leading supporter in the WLF Executive, Eleanor Acland:

This gives us furiously to think, doesn't it? I am rather afraid we are five or ten years from success, and I am blowed if I know what way we ought to work now.

She questioned the course of simply renewing the spadework in the constituencies, building up bands of active workers to collect petitions and so on and suggested a new strategy. She wrote to Catherine Marshall:

You won't I know agree with me when I say "Adult Suffrage" with an age limit for women. But I am more and more convinced that our movement has got to be linked on to democracy rather than pure feminism. People are *bored* with feminism and the militants have given it a bad name....We should get much more keenness if one party really liked the Bill. (In this way the suffragists would add 15 Labour MPs and about ten other adultists to their side). At any rate we are never going back to the Conciliation Bill, because this summer, we have got to fight for the Lloyd George amendment....Why can't we go one step further and go for womanhood suffrage with the age limitation. (It would not really matter what age was settled on) only we want all classes of women.... This whole Conciliation Bill scheme has been so dishonest — we have been trying perpetually to get men of different parties to vote for it for different reasons. Result: when it comes to a tussle many people don't care enough to be faithful. Do let us plump for the Liberal party (even if it means manhood suffrage has to be passed first).¹

Though the National Union leaders came to a similar conclusion — the women's demand now had to be linked to the demand for adult suffrage — it resulted in a different political alignment to that recommended by Eleanor Acland. The National Union took due note of the voting

1. Eleanor Acland to Catherine Marshall, postmark 1 April 1912, CMP

on the 1912 Conciliation Bill. Many felt they had been let down by the Liberal suffragists, including Lloyd George.¹ In a circular letter sent to National Union Federation Secretaries the National Union Executive advised the purchase of the Division List on Dickenson's Bill. The circular stressed that those who abstained or voted against "Can never be trusted to support any bill which appears, however slightly, to prejudice the interests of their party". The many Unionists who had abstained or opposed the bill did so on the grounds that it was too wide a measure, while other Unionist suffragists, like Balfour and Lyttelton, abstained for fear the Parliament Act might have to be used if it passed the House of Commons. However the most significant voting was that of the Irish Nationalists, (the majority of whom had completely reversed their earlier support of the Conciliation Bills), and the renegeing of some Liberal suffragists — both for fear of embarrassing Asquith if the bill passed. On the other hand the Labour Party had put up a strong vote for the bill, though a number of its MPs were absent because of the widespread industrial unrest at the time. Out of this reversal, and this analysis of its cause within the House of Commons, came the National Union's policy of electoral support for the Labour Party through its Election Fighting Fund.²

The ability of the National Union to inaugurate the Election Fighting Fund policy was in itself an indication of the growing disillusion among some Liberals with their own government, and the history of the National Union provides ample evidence of women leaving active work on behalf of the Liberal Party.

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1. Kathleen Courtney to Mrs Fawcett 8 April 1912, MPLA M50/2/1/357
 2. Whereas the Irish Nationalists had voted 31 for and nine against the 1911 Conciliation Bill, in 1912 they voted three for and 35 against. The Liberal vote for the bill had also fallen from 145 in 1911 to 117 in 1912, while those Liberals voting against had risen from 36 to 73, see Appendix 3. Party Voting on Women's Suffrage 1911-17 in Martin Pugh, *Electoral Reform in War and Peace 1906-18*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul 1978, p.188

After the final defeat of the Conciliation Bill in the Spring of 1912, a correspondent to *The Common Cause*, Madeline Grubb, called on Liberal party women to resign and concentrate on suffrage work: "Signs are not wanting that the already numerous defections of Liberal women are causing anxiety at headquarters. No party woman likes to withdraw; in fact it must always be a most painful duty. But must not non-militants use *every* means in their power at the present extreme crisis in suffrage affairs".¹ Many of these women welcomed the new election policy of the National Union. Another woman, on resigning from her local WLA, wrote "I am throwing my whole energies and substance into the support of the new development of the NUWSS policy — viz, the providing of a Labour candidate in all constituencies where either Liberal or Unionist has not proved himself a supporter of our cause not only in name but in deed".²

The Common Cause pursued this theme of the bankruptcy of certain elements in current Liberalism, centering many of its attacks on the journalist Harold Spender, and his paper the *Daily News*. It reported one of his articles in which he wrote:

...very gravely of 'the growing misunderstanding between the Liberal and Labour wings' and continued 'Labour does not keep the Government in power, but it can soon bring its existence to a close'. If the Liberal Party has nothing better to do than to keep up what one party correspondent (a reference to Mr Arnold, MP for Holmfirth) complacently called 'Liberal tradition', and if this means, as it clearly does with some, that they are content to rest on what their fathers achieved and absolve themselves from the need of progressive thinking, there is no question whatever that power will pass from them. We express no opinion as to the merits of parties as parties, but for Liberalism to become 'traditional' is to cease to be Liberal. No better example of the dangers of 'traditional' thinking could be given than the hopeless bog into which anti-suffragist Liberals have wandered

1. *The Common Cause* 11 April 1912
 2. *ibid* 4 July 1912

so that they are gradually enticed into a practical denial of every truly Liberal principle while loudly proclaiming the same with their lips. It is the business of the Master of Elibank to keep his forces together; he will find this canker destroy them unless he meets it.¹

The Common Cause's editor, Helena Swanwick, at one time an active Liberal, was clearly already moving towards the socialist commitment of her later years. A similar process can be seen occurring in the thought of Catherine Marshall, again a former Liberal activist, who took charge of the National Union's Election Fighting Fund policy. Her notes for an article on "The Entente Cordiale between the Labour Party and the Women's Suffrage Movement" for the *Labour Leader* and *Daily Citizen* include the following observations: the entente represented,

a cooperation of two bodies which find their aims in many respects the same ... Labour Party has broken down the fence of class. Suffrage movement has broken down the fence of sex ... *Ought to be no need* for Labour unrest and women's movement. The need arises (for asserting claim of particular section of community as against other sections) because claims of the workers have been ignored and their interests neglected and ditto for women ... Capitalism has not fully considered rights of workers. Men have not fully considered rights of women ... There will always be need for a Socialist Movement but when Socialism is successful the need for Labour and Women's movement will vanish ... *fear of Libs.* Reason of fear. Hundreds of women going over to Labour Party. Libs always afraid of overweighting the ship — 1884 Irish Home Rule Bill, Scotch Home Rule Bill. Trust the People. (her emphases).²

It was the National Union which had taken full advantage of the agitational opportunities afforded by the Conciliation Bill campaigns and had seen its organisation grow and strengthen during this period.

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1. *ibid* 27 June 1912 (reference to *The Daily News* 20 June 1912). See also *ibid* 11 July, 1 August 1912 for further attacks on these lines
 2. Catherine Marshall's notes headed Entente Cordiale between the Labour Party and the Women's Suffrage Movement n.d. circa January 1913, CMP

Moreover, the bills occasioned the negotiations which had brought constitutional suffragist leaders into close contact with suffragist Ministers, and provoked Lloyd George's initiative on a government reform bill. Most importantly, the progress of the Conciliation Bills had convinced constitutional suffragists that their cause was now inextricably tied to that of general franchise reform, and that the call for women's suffrage stood the greatest chance of success within the framework of a democratic demand.

It was this realisation which led directly to the National Union's adoption of a new election policy based on an alliance with the Labour Party. In order to ensure that women's suffrage would form part of any future government reform bill, the National Union sought to secure the support of the Labour Party, both within the House of Commons, and amongst the rank-and-file supporters in the country. This was the purpose of the Election Fighting Fund policy, adopted at a Special Council meeting of the National Union in May 1912.

In contrast the period 1910 to 1912 had seen increasing disarray within the militant wing of the movement. With the imprisonment of WSPU leaders on charges of conspiracy, feeling among them became ever more intransigent and isolationist. Brailsford in particular seems to have become a demon figure to Mrs Pankhurst.¹

Moreover WSPU leaders rejected the constitutionalists' policy development outright, and Nevinson felt "the Union is becoming too suspicious and sectarian".² The WSPU also rejected outright the opportunity presented by a government manhood suffrage bill, and no truce accompanied the early stages of the bill in mid 1912. While initially

1. Nevinson Diaries 15, 17 April 1912. The anger with Brailsford gradually extended to all male supporters — Nevinson and Pethick Lawrence both believed their friendship with Brailsford was at the root of their eventual exclusion from the WSPU

2. *ibid* 4 March 1912

the WSPU had taken up the call for full adult suffrage, in response to this bill, it soon retreated to the demand for a government equal suffrage bill for women, pure and simple. From the autumn of 1912 it sought to achieve this goal through intimidation, and dialogue with politicians and government spokesmen was abandoned.

Responsibility for all future political activity on behalf of votes for women now fell to the constitutional suffragists alone. Success depended on how effectively the National Union could secure an alliance between the women's suffrage and the Labour and socialist movements.

CHAPTER 7 : THE FORMATION OF THE ELECTION FIGHTING
FUND POLICY

After the January 1910 general election, Marion Phillips, at that time National Union Secretary, had emphasised that the main lesson learnt had been that "the working class elector, especially in the smallish industrial towns, is on the whole far the quickest to see the justice of our demand. Here at least is some indication of how to plan our next campaign".¹ Thereafter, between 1910 and 1912 the National Union experienced growing success in its attempts to organise working class support, and in some constituencies also gained the support of local labour and socialist organisations. Margaret Robertson's work in the South Salford constituency was particularly impressive in this respect, concentrating on working class districts. A Suffrage Club was established, where weekly meetings had begun with four or five people "dragged in", but soon grew to 40 or 50 enthusiastic members.² Of one meeting addressed by the socialist suffragist Ethel Snowden, Margaret Robertson reported "scarcely a man but was of the working class".³

The increased importance many National Union leaders were by now putting on working class support is clear in Margaret Ashton's complaint about the state of the Irish Women's Suffrage Society: "the meetings addressed by her had been largely composed of the middle and upper classes, and ... it appeared that the industrial women had not been drawn into the movement in any appreciable extent". The National Union Executive decided to offer one of its own organisers to the society.⁴

In two further by-elections between 1910 and 1912 National Union organisers worked in support of the Labour candidate, as the "best friend" to the cause — in Kirkdale in July 1910, and in Kilmarnock

1. *The Common Cause* 3 February 1910

2. Catherine Marshall's account n.d. November 1910, CMP; report of South Salford Suffrage Club, *The Common Cause* 1 September 1910

3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 15 September, 6 October 1910

4. *ibid* 4 May 1911

Burghs in September 1911.¹ A similar alliance between socialists and constitutional suffragists operated in the Middleton by-election in August 1911. Sir Ryland Adkins, the Liberal, had refused to promise to vote for a third reading of a Conciliation Bill. Local socialists decided to support the National Union's decision that neither the Liberal nor Conservative candidate should receive election support. Margaret Robertson reported: "The socialists, many of whom were prepared to vote for the suffragist candidate whichever he was are now abstaining and are helping us in every possible way".² In these ways the ground was being prepared for the National Union's eventual alliance with the Labour Party.

At a national level the National Union's rapprochement with the Labour Party began with Asquith's announcement of a forthcoming manhood suffrage bill in November 1911. The constitutional suffragists had soon re-formed their ranks and by December 1911 had created a new committee within the House of Commons to work for women's suffrage amendments to the forthcoming bill. This committee took an office at the People's Suffrage Federation headquarters, and worked closely with it on this campaign.³ At the same time, Catherine Marshall was in communication with James Mylles, the ILP's organiser, on the direction of the ILP's Political Equality Campaign, again aimed at a women's suffrage amendment to the Reform Bill.⁴

At its annual conference in January 1912 the Labour Party made a firm commitment to votes for women despite opposition from the miners' unions, and declared that it would find unacceptable any measure of franchise reform which excluded women. Mrs Fawcett responded with a

1. *ibid* 14 September, 2 November 1911; *The Common Cause* 21 July 1910, 21 September 1911

2. *The Common Cause* 3 August 1911

3. See further discussion of the work of this committee in Ch.8

4. James Mylles to Catherine Marshall 8 February 1912, CMP

letter to James Ramsay Macdonald which declared: "I wish you were double your present strength in the House of Commons".¹

By 1912 the Liberal government depended for its majority within the House of Commons on the votes of the Irish Nationalists and the Labour Party. When one element in this unofficial coalition, the Irish Nationalists, changed its vote to ensure the defeat of the third Conciliation Bill, pressure within the National Union for a change of election policy which would facilitate a working agreement with the Labour Party was stepped up. A move was led by the Manchester and Newcastle Societies to call a Special Council of the National Union to consider such a proposal.² Henry Brailsford acted as mediator between the National Union and Labour Party Head Office.³ By the end of April 1912, the National Union leadership had decided to go ahead and open formal negotiations between its secretary, Kathleen Courtney, and Arthur Henderson, secretary of the Labour Party.⁴

The new policy was to be a refinement of that of the WSPU in that it would attack the Liberal Party by actively supporting and encouraging Labour candidates to create more three-cornered fights during elections. Rivalry between the Liberal and Labour Parties, particularly for industrial seats, was beginning to develop rapidly at this time, and the agreement reached by Liberal Party manager Herbert Gladstone, and Ramsay Macdonald in 1903, to avoid three-cornered contests, was becoming less

1. Mrs Fawcett to J.R. Macdonald, 28 January 1912, James Ramsay Macdonald Papers (henceforth JRMP). PRO 30/69/5. When miners' leader Robert Smillie had announced the miners' 600,000 votes would go against the women's suffrage resolution, Mary MacArthur responded "We have often been told that we women adult suffragists were being misled. We have replied that we trusted our labour men, and yet the miners now say they will take manhood suffrage and leave the women out. *Labour Leader* 2 February 1912

2. Letter from the Newcastle Society headed "Proposed Cooperation with the Labour Party", n.d. (circa 23 April 1912), CMP

3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 29 March 1912

4. Kathleen Courtney to Arthur Henderson 23 April 1912, Labour Party Archives (henceforth LPA) LP/WOM/12/4. The idea had been floated in *The Common Cause* 18 April 1912. See also "Mr Brailsford on a Practical Policy", *The Common Cause* 9 May 1912

and less workable.¹

It was hoped the new policy would achieve several ends: firstly, the strengthening of the Labour Party's commitment to women's suffrage within the context of general franchise reform; secondly, harassment of the Liberal government by encouraging more three-cornered contests, with a stronger Labour organisation threatening the Liberals; finally the convincing of the Irish Nationalist MPs that the women's suffrage issue represented a real threat to the security of the Liberal government, on which their hopes of Home Rule depended, and that the women's claim should not be dismissed so easily in future.

When writing to Arthur Henderson to outline the proposed scheme, Kathleen Courtney stressed:

From our point of view it is important that this proposal should not prejudice the non-party character of the National Union. In general terms our suggestion is that we should raise a fund for the support of Labour Candidates whom we should of course support by vigorous work in the selected constituencies. The administration of this fund would remain in our hands and, to safeguard the non-party character of the Union, it would not be available for the support of candidates in constituencies represented by a sincere supporter of women's suffrage; nor would the National Union work in support of Labour candidates in such a constituency. In constituencies where no Labour candidate was standing the National Union would work as heretofore in support of the strongest supporter of women's suffrage.²

Ramsay Macdonald had serious reservations about the scheme. His fear was that his party might be seen merely as the tool of the suffragists. Brailsford tried to argue away such fears:

In practice it will of course mean that our support, if as considerable as I expect it will be, must put some premium on your choice of Liberal anti's as your opponents. But this will not be put in any crude way which could expose you to legitimate

1. Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910-1924*, London: Oxford University Press 1974 pp.48f
 2. Kathleen Courtney to Arthur Henderson 23 April 1912 LP/WOM/12/4 i-iv

criticism. The suffrage movement is going to support Labour in recognition of its past attitude. That is the general idea ... I talked rather too much about money the other day. I am sure we can raise £10,000 or even £20,000. But I believe the zealous, intelligent, well-organised work which would be done, will be worth as much as the money.

Socialist organisers would be engaged for work on the scheme so that it "may run from the first on harmonious lines".

However, Brailsford believed the scheme offered even more than organisational and financial aid for the infant Labour Party:

Further I think you will see that women who come into touch with the Labour Party in this way can, with good generalship, be retained. Tens of thousands who are nothing very definite today, or who think they are Liberals can be won for Socialism almost insensibly. The idea is appearing spontaneously in one form or another in every section of the suffrage movement. If we can get it rapidly into form it will excite more enthusiasm than any previous policy. I understand your caution at the start but once your special objections are met, I hope you will be able to welcome the idea wholeheartedly.¹

Though clearly hesitant, the Labour Party Executive arranged that a sub-Committee consisting of George Roberts, Macdonald, Keir Hardie and Henderson should meet with the National Union officers on 30th April.²

The National Union sought elucidation on points of Labour Party policy, and it was confirmed that women's suffrage was part of that policy, and that the Labour Party was also pledged to Adult suffrage. The Labour leaders were not ready to give any specific pledge on their party's action with regard to any bill which removed the sex-disability, while coming far short of adult suffrage, except to say that the party was willing to accept some limited form of women's suffrage if an adult suffrage measure were defeated. There could be no pledge that the

1. Henry Brailsford to James Ramsay Macdonald 23 April 1912, JRMP
PRO/30/69/5

2. Arthur Henderson to Kathleen Courtney 25 April 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/5

Labour Party would vote against the third reading of a Reform Bill which did not include women, though Keir Hardie made this commitment on his own behalf. The National Union do not appear to have pushed their planned question about what scheme the Labour Party had "for dealing with the Irish" on the issue of women's suffrage, or what steps it planned to take to insist on the introduction of a Reform Bill that session.¹

The Labour leaders for their part:

Made it clear that while welcoming the support both financial and personal of the National Union they were opposed to the raising of a fund for the special object of supporting the Labour Party, their objections being that this would lay them open to the accusation of having been bought by the suffragists. After considerable discussion as to ways and means, it appeared that the objections of the Labour Party could be met and the purpose of the National Union gained, by the raising of a fund for the support of *individual Labour candidates* in any constituency in which the National Union thought this advisable.

National Union leaders agreed to this:

In point of fact this proposal is *practically* the same as the other, but it involves a different formula, and one which the Labour Party believe will safeguard their position, and on the whole we are inclined to the opinion that it also safeguards the non-party character of the National Union.²

Even so, the Labour Party was not happy with the National Union's proposed resolution for its Special Council meeting, which would clear the way for election support of Labour candidates. This read:

That the National Union raise a sum of money for the specific object of supporting individual candidates standing in the interests of Labour in any constituency where Liberal Anti-Suffragists may successfully be

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1. List of Suggested Questions for Tuesday n.d. circa 30 April 1912, CMP
 2. Circular report of NUWSS meeting with the Labour Party signed by M.G. Fawcett, Mrs Auerbach, Edith Palliser, Kathleen Courtney n.d. circa 1 May 1912, CMP

opposed, and that the Union also support such candidates by the organisation of a vigorous campaign on their behalf.

Henderson requested the removal of the underlined phrase.¹

This brought an angry letter from Brailsford:

I have no status in the matter except as the person who originated the idea, but I should like to tell you how things strike me. The suppression of any reference to Labour candidates in the formal definition of the scheme is to all our minds totally impossible. If you must insist on that then the whole plan falls to the ground. A vague resolution talking of support for 'individual candidates' would mean nothing or anything, and would bring in no money. It would be generally interpreted to mean the pursuit of the hopeless plan of suffrage candidatures — which everyone knows is a futility. Then people would ask if the money was to be used to back Tories, who are always well able to finance themselves. In short no money would be got, because no enthusiasm would be aroused ... You will not be surprised to hear that there is a good deal of doubt and opposition to the scheme inside the National Union. Some say the Labour Party does not really mean to do anything. Others fear the loss of moderate support all round when it is said that "suffragists are all socialists". I leave you to guess the effect on these critics of the news that the Labour Party while apparently quite glad to take women's money refuses to accept their support publicly. If the officers of the Union have to convey that message to the Council, the plan is killed and incidentally all who have been urging that the Labour Party scheme should be trusted and helped are made to look ridiculous. Personally, unless I have misunderstood the position, I am disposed to think it futile to pursue the idea of any special cooperation between the Labour and suffrage movements further. But indeed I had been under a misapprehension all along. I supposed that the Party was pledged to oppose the Reform Bill on third reading if no women were included. If as I now learn this is a mistake there seems to be no special case for promoting an alliance.

Again he foresaw great long term gains for Labour if the policy were implemented.

I hardly think you have realised the potentialities of this scheme. The Liberal women are in the midst of a split, and all the more active of them are

1. Arthur Henderson to Edith Palliser 3 May 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/11

preparing to back our plan. Indeed I am sure that the whole suffrage movement, excluding the inner ring of the WSPU, would have come into it, if the Labour Party had cared to take it ... I believe that in the course of a fighting alliance most of them would end by becoming decided and permanent adherents of the Labour Party. But that certainly will not happen if at this crucial juncture women realise that you do not care to avow any cooperation with them, and in effect reject a plan which involves from most of them sacrifices of party ties. A rebuff of this sort is not readily forgotten. Personally I am deeply disappointed and surprised, because when I saw you at Victoria St you seemed to welcome the idea.¹

The National Union replied to Henderson more temperately, explaining that this amendment had not been received in time to alter the Special Council agenda, and that it was felt his version "would convey a false impression". There was also a veiled threat: "It is of course by no means certain that it will be carried, nor indeed do I know whether, in view of your attitude, the Executive will wish to press the matter".²

Friendly relations seem to have been restored a week later after Mrs Fawcett and Kathleen Courtney had met with Macdonald. A report of this interview indicated Macdonald's complex reservations about the scheme, as expressed in the National Union Conference resolution:

He criticised our proposal from the point of view that it would expose his party to the charge of being bought for an object — however worthy in itself — which was outside Labour interests, and would thereby weaken in the eyes of the public the independence of his party ... He criticised the working of our Resolution as being too precise and defined besides being liable to the disadvantage mentioned ... Political circumstances change so quickly and if we had tied ourselves down to use the Fund we raise for Labour Candidates only, we might find ourselves much hampered. In the event of the Reform Bill coming in and a Women's Suffrage Resolution being carried, the object of all the Suffrage Societies should then be to keep the Government in long enough

1. Henry Brailsford to Arthur Henderson 4 May 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/14 i-ii
 2. Edith Palliser and Kathleen Courtney to Arthur Henderson 6 May 1912

for the Bill to pass in three successive Sessions. He urged the desirability of using more general language in the resolution and accompanying it by an explanatory memorandum.

Macdonald seems also to have refined his position about Labour Party voting on a Reform Bill which excluded women:

He did not draw back from, or weaken his former declaration that the Labour Party would vote against the 3rd Reading of the Reform Bill if women were not included. He said, however that the Organisation and discipline of the party was not very strict and there might be a few men who would refuse to act on these lines: the Miners' vote at the Birmingham Conference was referred to as an example.

What seemed to be a continual wavering on this point by Macdonald and other Labour leaders may be explained in that:

He moreover pointed out that to make a formal and positive assertion now that the Labour Party would vote against the Reform Bill if women were not included would be a tactical error. It would almost certainly prevent the Reform Bill from being proceeded with and certainly would strengthen the section in the Cabinet who were opposed to it. He believed the Reform Bill would be proceeded with this Session, but it might mean sitting till February. Another disadvantage arises from the Labour Party emphasising their intention now. The Conservatives who are opposed to a wider franchise, even those who are favourable to Women's Suffrage might vote against a Women's Suffrage Amendment in the expectation that the exclusion of women from the Reform Bill would lead to the defeat of the Bill on 3rd Reading.¹

The National Union leadership seemed satisfied with these explanations and it was suggested the Special Conference Resolution should be re-worded to emphasise:

That in development of the policy of the National Union of supporting those who have shown themselves the best friends of Women's Suffrage account be taken not only of the personal views of the Candidate but also of the official attitude towards Women's En-

1. Report of the interview between Mrs Fawcett and Kathleen Courtney and J.R. Macdonald 13 May 1912, CMP

franchisement of the Party to which he belongs.

The policy would be directed particularly against Liberal Anti-Suffragists, but, on the other hand, it would not be implemented against Liberal MPs whose individual record on women's suffrage was satisfactory.¹

After this meeting Kathleen Courtney wrote to Henderson hoping both parties were now agreed on the formulation of the policy. Henderson writing after the new policy had been accepted at the National Union Special Council was equally conciliatory:

I was very pleased to learn the results of your Conference. I am inclined to agree with you that there is not much difference in the objects which both you and we have in view. It is rather a difference of method, not easily stated in an acceptable formula. You and your friends will doubtless understand that my personal position might be somewhat nearer than my official position in the matter.²

In explaining the new policy to the National Union's membership Catherine Marshall stressed:

Our purpose is not to gain the individual votes of Members of the Labour Party (these we should probably have in any case) but by cooperation with the Labour Party to enable it to run Candidates in a large number of Constituencies and so seriously to threaten the Liberal majority. The word "alliance" should not be used; the Labour Party is by its Constitution precluded from forming an alliance with any other Association and we do not wish to enter into an alliance with the Labour Party as such ... (the new policy) ... would really mean that we should support Labour Candidates in the Constituencies of Liberal Anti-Suffragists or "wobblers" and would be a very slight modification of our present election policy.

Possible objections were foreseen and answered thus:

1. *ibid*

2. Kathleen Courtney to Arthur Henderson 13 May 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/16; Arthur Henderson to Courtney 15 May 1912, CMP

Why should we lose votes by this policy? Whose votes? The Conservatives would like it as it would give them the chance of getting in by three-cornered contests. If it were effectively carried out, Liberals in industrial constituencies would be afraid to vote against us lest they should become an object of attack. The Labour Party we should naturally have with us, and this policy offers some chance of securing the Irish Vote or part of it.

It is of course very uncertain whether even if we wished we would persuade the Labour Party to vote against Home Rule unless the Irish Party promised to support an Amendment to the Reform Bill, and probably we ought not to count upon this. From their own point of view the Labour Party are anxious to get rid of the Irish at Westminster and on general grounds to strike such a bargain might be regarded as sinking to the level of the Irish as regards their action on the Second Reading of the Conciliation Bill.

No doubt Anti-Suffragists would make every effort to represent this policy as an additional proof of Suffragist leanings to Socialism. They have however, already run this argument for all it is worth and the fact that in constituencies where no Labour Candidate was standing (a very large number) we were pursuing our original election policy if an answer were needed.

The special fund for this policy was to be kept quite separate from other National Union income, so those that did not wish to need not subscribe. Also:

The special fund for the support of Labour Candidates would in all probability attract money of a considerable number of people who want to give to what they regard as a fighting policy and are not at present entirely satisfied either with the National Union or the WSPU.¹

The adoption of the new election policy by the National Union was possible only because of the significant degree of disaffection which was developing among women Liberals. This anti-government opinion was often being organised by those same suffragists who had promoted the alliance between the Labour Party and the National Union. In April 1912, *The Common Cause* reported that Dr Ethel Williams of the Newcastle Society had recently led the local Women's Liberal Association at Elswick,

1. Memorandum n.d. circa 1 May 1912 and circular letter to NUWSS societies on the new policy 2 May 1912, CMP

of which she was President, to pass a resolution that at the next election it would not work for any party which did not include women's suffrage in its programme. She achieved a similar commitment from the Gateshead WLA.¹

Yet, as foreseen in Catherine Marshall's memorandum, the negotiations leading up to the formulation of the new election policy were accompanied by controversy within the National Union, and considerable reservations in the minds of some of its leaders. The most notable of these opponents, Eleanor Rathbone, remained uncertain about the Election Fighting Fund policy, as it became known, right up to the outbreak of war. In a letter to Mrs Fawcett in late April she outlined some of her reasons for this opposition. Reporting a conversation with Francis Acland (husband of Eleanor and a junior Liberal Minister with a strong commitment to women's suffrage) and Ethel Snowden, she stressed that Acland believed a Reform Bill to be certain that year and that it would be carried even with a women's suffrage amendment. Eleanor Rathbone believed the Labour Party could best help the women by threatening to withdraw its vote for Home Rule unless the Irish agreed to support the amendment to the Reform Bill. Ethel Snowden had agreed to sound out Labour MPs on the practicality of this. She had also given it as Philip Snowden's opinion that,

We should not promise anything to the Labour Party unless they gave us definite promises to do something for us and she implied that he favoured the idea of a Labour Party alliance rather as a future move than one to be adopted immediately and that he thought that the threat that women's suffrage funds would be available for running Labour candidates would considerably frighten the Liberals in constituencies

1. *The Common Cause* 25 April, 20 June 1912

where the majority is narrow.¹

Other National Union activists expressed doubts about the strength of certain Labour MPs on the issue, particularly Stephen Walsh, a miners' MP — "the miners representatives are usually a little shaky".²

As the likelihood of an agreement with the Labour Party had grown so the opposition hardened. Eleanor Rathbone passed on to Mrs Fawcett "several questions which all the more intelligent of my Committee (North Lancashire, North Cheshire and North Wales Federation) keep asking me". These concerned the effect of the policy on Liberal rank and file opinion, and on the attitudes of long-time friends of the cause in the Liberal and Conservative parties, and the size of the number of Liberal Anti-suffragists with a small enough majority to be threatened. Finally she asked if the division on the Home Rule Bill the previous day indicated that Brailsford had had any success in obtaining Labour abstentions from the second reading.³

When Cardiff Society made moves to postpone the holding of the Special Council to discuss the new policy a circular letter from National Union officers to the membership stressed that the National Union was not to be "sacrificed". They argued that the scheme represented "the best means of achieving the enfranchisement of women for which the National Union exists", and denied there was any "proposal to identify the National Union with the Labour Party".⁴

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1. Eleanor Rathbone to Mrs Fawcett 27 April 1912, CMP. Brailsford was also pushing for some such move from the Labour Party. See his letter to Henderson LPA, LP/WOM/12/13: "I feel that unless we can show Redmond that there are dangers in the course he has followed the disaster of March 28th (the defeat of the Conciliation Bill) will be repeated when the Reform Bill comes up" (my parentheses)
 2. Maude Royden to Kathleen Courtney 22 April 1912, Margaret Ashton to Kathleen Courtney 23 April 1912; Letters from the secretaries of the Sheffield and Huddersfield branches to Catherine Marshall n.d. (May 1912), CMP
 3. Eleanor Rathbone to Mrs Fawcett 10 May 1912, CMP (my parentheses)
 4. Circular letter signed by Mrs Fawcett, Kathleen Courtney, Edith Palliser, Mrs Auerbach 10 May 1912, CMP

Similarly, the National Union's press statement, issued after the Special Council had voted in support of the new policy, emphasized:

It would not be a departure from the non-party attitude of the Union; moreover it would not be an alliance between the National Union and the Labour Party. Such an alliance would be objected to on both sides; in recommending that preference be given at elections to candidates who were not only themselves in favour of women's suffrage, but belonged to a party which also identified with it, they were acting simply in the interests of women's suffrage, and they were perfectly ready to extend the same principle to other political parties which might in the future offer similar conditions.

In this way the National Union claimed to retain its "non-party" stance, and hoped to allay the Labour leadership's reservations on the subject. Kathleen Courtney wrote to Henderson the next day, enclosing a copy of the press release and hoping "you will find it satisfactory". She was also able to announce that £1000 had been raised by the delegates that day "almost without being asked".¹

The urgency which the National Union attached to the new policy is evidenced in her regret that they were not to begin at once with the current by-election in N.W. Norfolk, which Labour had decided not to fight. The list of possible constituencies where the policy might be employed, supplied by the Labour Party a few days later must also have been something of a disappointment to the National Union. It was a short list, and clearly none of the constituencies held much interest for the National Union as none was ever taken up by the Election Fighting Fund (EFF).²

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1. Courtney to Henderson 16 May 1912, LPA, LP/WOM/12/18; press release 16 May, LPA, LP/WOM/12/19 i-ii. See also NUWSS leaflet "Our Policy", May 1912, CMP. For report of the Special Council Meeting see *The Common Cause* 23 May 1912
 2. Henderson to Palliser, LPA, LP/WOM/12/21. The constituencies were Newton, Lancs; Jarrow; Wigan; W. Wolverhampton; St Helens; Leigh.

Shortly after the inauguration of the new policy, the WFL, the smaller of the two militant organisations, announced that in future it too would support Labour candidates in three-cornered fights.¹ Its associated group, The Men's League for Women's Suffrage, had declared a similar change of policy a month before.²

The early months of the Election Fighting Fund (EFF)

The appointment of the members of the Committee, which administered the fund raised for the new policy, was controlled by the Executive of the National Union, and responsible to it. A large majority of the early committee were National Union members, eight of them members of the National Union Executive. As had been hoped it also secured the support of some who had previously worked more with the WSPU.³

The records of the EFF committee exist only for the first six months of its operation, and any picture of its work after 1912 can only be gained through the columns of *The Common Cause*, the Minutes of the National Union Executive Committee to which it reported regularly, and material among the papers of Catherine Marshall, who was to act as its secretary.

By the time of the foundation of the EFF Committee, the National Union leadership contained a group who were not only dedicated to the success of the new policy, but who were proving exceptionally able policy administrators. Margaret Robertson, formerly organiser for the

1. Cutting from *The Standard* 31 May 1912 LP/WOM/12/22

2. J. Malcolm Mitchell to Henderson LPA LP/WOM/12/9

3. The early EFF Committee consisted of Mrs Anstruther, Margaret Ashton, Mrs Auerbach, Mrs Cavendish Bentinck, Mrs Stanton Coit, Henry Brailsford, Kathleen Courtney, Lady de la Warr, Mrs Fawcett, Isabella Ford, Mrs Homan, Laurence Housman, Miss M. Lees, Lord Lytton, Catherine Marshall, Lady Meyer, Edith Palliser, Julia Reckitt, Ethel Snowden, Mrs Stanbury, Mr G.E.S. Streatfield. There were further additions, and some resignations over the next two years. Report to Provincial Council 11 July 1912, CMP. Brailsford, Laurence Housman and Lady de la Warr had been previously more closely associated with the WSPU

Manchester Society, became chief EFF organiser. She was evidently a brilliant political activist, and Fenner Brockway, who claims responsibility for her conversion to socialism at this time, believes she would have gone on to become one of the leaders of the ILP if she had not left national politics on marriage.¹ Margaret Robertson's skills were matched by Catherine Marshall, the National Union's recently elected Parliamentary Secretary, who now also took over the secretaryship of the EFF Committee.² Finally, they were supported in their EFF activities by the Secretary of the National Union, Kathleen Courtney,³ who had also begun her career with the Manchester Society. These three directed and consolidated the EFF policy, with the support of the progressive suffragists among the National Union's Executive — notably Helena Swanwick, Margaret Ashton, and Maude Royden. They were eventually to be joined by Alice Clark, who assisted Catherine Marshall with the running of the EFF Committee.⁴

Two months after its formation the EFF had reached £3629.⁵ Enthusiasm for the new policy was clearly running high at this time — £1115 was collected in the three weeks between 3-24 July — but it had died down by late summer. Only £255 were collected between 2 August and 20 September, bringing the total for the fund for its first four months to £4394.⁶ The EFF had hoped to reach £10,000 by the re-opening of Parlia-

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1. See Fenner Brockway *Inside the Left*, London, Allen and Unwin 1942 p.33 and his autobiography, *Towards Tomorrow*, London: Hart Davis 1977 p.31
 2. Catherine Marshall's most notable achievements were probably as secretary of the No Conscription Fellowship. See Brockway, *Inside the Left* p.68, and Jo Vellacott Newberry, *Anti-War Suffragists, History* Vol.62 1977 pp.411-425
 3. Kathleen Courtney became a prominent figure in the League of Nations movement after the war, see her papers in the Fawcett Library
 4. Alice Clark had previously been involved in the management of her family's shoe business in Somerset. She went on to write the historical study, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, reprinted New York: Augustus Kelly, 1968. See also the privately published *Alice Clark of C. & J. Clark Ltd, Street, Somerset*, M.C. Gillett, n.d. in the Fawcett Library
 5. EFF Minutes 19 July 1912
 6. EFF Minutes 20 September 1912

ment in October, and a large demonstration was held at the Albert Hall to encourage further support.

The Special Council which had ratified the EFF policy had also agreed to the establishment of the friends of Women's Suffrage Scheme, which was to become an increasingly important accompaniment to EFF activity. The scheme was aimed largely at organising working class support for women's suffrage. Existing National Union members undertook responsibility for organising a specific district. Whole streets would be canvassed, and as supporters of women's suffrage were located they were asked to sign a Friends of Women's Suffrage card. They were then kept informed of all suffrage activities in the district, and encouraged to participate. They were also kept supplied with suffrage literature, including the Friends of Women's Suffrage News^Ssheet, which stressed working class interest in, and support for, votes for women. The scheme was also operated at National Union public meetings, particularly works and factory gate meetings. No membership fee was involved. In the two and a half years between its inception and the outbreak of war, 39,500 Friends of Women's Suffrage were enrolled.

Northern suffragists were soon involved in some of the earliest EFF activity undertaken by the National Union, in the by-elections at Holmfirth, Hanley, Crewe and Midlothian. All ~~three~~^{four} by-elections reflected the current disagreement between the Labour Party and the Liberal government over which party should represent industrial seats, and Labour MPs withdrew from the House of Commons during these contests.

The National Union always employed Labour sympathisers for such work, under Margaret Robertson, who had become chief organiser for the EFF. At Holmfirth for example the campaign was worked by Annot Robinson, Selina Cooper and Ada Neild Chew, all women with a background in trade union or socialist organising. They undertook speaking, canvassing and

the distribution of literature in cooperation with the Labour organiser. Isabella Ford, who had a long experience in women's trade unionism, and was a founder member of the ILP, also went down to speak for the National Union. It was claimed that "Party meetings have been completely deserted when the suffragists appeared". At a National Union meeting at Skelmanthorpe, Annot Robinson held a crowd of over 1000, despite the arrival of the Liberal candidate. The constituency was a Liberal stronghold, and the result was the expected Liberal victory, though with the former majority halved and the Labour vote almost doubled from 1643 to 3195.¹ The EFF campaign had succeeded in making women's suffrage an issue in the election, and created enough interest to support the formation of three new suffrage societies. The National Union claimed "Our workers were valuable chiefly because they brought with them the habits and experience of skilled organisers".²

In Hanley the suffragists found the Labour organisation in an even poorer state, for the seat had previously been held by a Lib-Lab member who had relied entirely on the Liberal Party for his election machinery. The Labour poll was disappointing — 1694 votes. *The Common Cause* asked:

What is the moral of Hanley? The 'machine' was a Liberal machine, and there was no independent Labour organisation. The plain moral which we have always tried to drive home is 'organise and organise now'. The spirit and fire of the Labour Party is wonderful, but you can't mobilise forces without the machine of mobilisation ... We should now like to see Labour and Suffragists sit down in the Hanley division and plot it patiently out.³

Such hopes were not realised and the EFF work was not continued in this constituency.

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1. *The Common Cause* 13 June, 20 June 1912
 2. *ibid* 27 June 1912. For background on this election see McKibbin *op cit* pp.23, 26
 3. *ibid* 18 July 1912. For a discussion of this election see McKibbin *op cit* pp.54-56

The Crewe by-election was altogether more successful for the suffragists, leading to the defeat of the Liberal candidate and the establishment of longer-term working relationship between local suffragists and labour organisations. The National Union had made £1000 available for the conduct of the campaign. The previous Liberal majority of 1704 was converted to a Unionist majority of 966, while the Labour vote nearly doubled to 2485. Afterwards *The Common Cause* foresaw the formation of "a great working class suffrage society".¹ Catherine Marshall approached Arthur Henderson with the suggestion that the EFF should continue to be used to support Labour Party organisation in this constituency. Henderson was agreeable. Though he pointed out that James Holmes had proved a very good candidate and might be moved elsewhere, he hinted "If by any chance we had some new machinery for securing an extensive vote" in Crewe, this would not be so. The EFF made a grant to Holmes of £125 per annum provided he remain the candidate in Crewe.²

The last EFF by-election campaign of 1912, at Midlothian, was seen as a similar success for the new policy. The Labour Party candidate, Robert Brown, was instructed by Labour Party Head Office to issue a stronger statement in support of women's suffrage. A grant of £250 was made available by the EFF, and a campaign was organised by Margaret Robertson and Annot Robinson. The Edinburgh Society also took an active part, supplying two more organisers very sympathetic to EFF policy, Alice Low and Lisa Gordon. Two cars were provided for the campaign by Countess de la Warr and Margaret Ashton. Again a former Liberal majority of 3157 was converted to a Unionist majority of 32, with Labour recording 2413 votes in its first contest in the seat. One member of

1. *ibid* 1 August 1912

2. Correspondence between Catherine Marshall and Arthur Henderson 6 August 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/33 and CMP; EFF Minutes 20 September, 18 October, 8 November, 22 November 1912. For a discussion of this election see McKibbin *op cit* pp.55-56

the Labour Party estimated that EFF intervention had been worth a thousand votes to the Labour candidate.¹

The National Union's experiences during these by-elections highlighted the as yet rudimentary nature of Labour Party election machinery, and the frustrations it brought suffragist organisers. Moreover, the limited return to be expected, compared to the work and money invested in such occasional and unpredictable contests, became clear, and by-elections soon ceased to be the centre of EFF activity. In the light of Labour's generally poor preparedness, and the desire to concentrate more on seats represented by leading Liberal anti-suffragists, the EFF was increasingly concentrated on the more routine and long-term organisation of Labour support in specially picked constituencies.

Nor was Labour's poor election machinery the only problem which confronted EFF workers at this time. The EFF organisers had gone to great lengths to master the elaborate procedures which preceded the adoption of a Labour Party or an ILP parliamentary candidate.² Nevertheless, very soon after its establishment the EFF inadvertently became involved in a 'renegade' Labour candidacy at the Ilkeston by-election, which almost led to a complete breach with Labour Party Head Office. When the Ilkeston Labour Representation Committee had adopted J.T. White, the EFF had offered a grant of up to £500 and an added loan of £200, before he had been officially endorsed by Labour Party Head Office. The Labour leadership had decided that the "organisation and general situation are certainly not of a kind to justify a candidate being entertained at present", though the fact that White would be opposing the re-election of a Liberal Minister was no doubt a greater factor in this

1. EFF Minutes 14 August, 20 August, 20 September 1912; NUWSS Executive Minutes 19 September 1912; *The Common Cause* 15 August, 19 September 1912; Catherine Marshall's draft article on the EFF n.d. (circa 26 November 1913), CMP. For an assessment of the result see McKibbin op cit pp.83-4

2. Catherine Marshall's circular letter to the EFF Committee 1 July 1912, CMP

decision. In the meantime news of the National Union's offer had leaked to the press causing considerable embarrassment to National Union leaders, and ever greater irritation to the Labour leadership. The ILP decided to continue with White's candidacy on their own, but the EFF's offer of help was withdrawn, and the Labour Party leaders mollified.¹

If National Union activity could sometimes embarrass the Labour Party, Ramsay Macdonald became a considerable thorn in the flesh of National Union leadership. He had become increasingly alienated from the suffrage demand by the WSPU's growing resort to violence, and frequently made their exploits the occasion for derogatory comments on the suffrage movement in general. In early July 1912 he published another statement critical of suffragists, and Catherine Marshall prepared to hold up the flow of funds into the EFF until he publicly recanted. Some of her notes read "R.M. must make unequivocal declaration that party will vote against third reading" (of the Reform Bill, should women be excluded). She pressed Arthur Henderson for some such statement from Macdonald, with some success. She was able to report to the National Union's Provincial Council on 11 July 1912 that the Labour leader had made a strong women's suffrage speech during the Crewe by-election, and had invited Margaret Robertson to join his platform.²

October 1912 saw a new threat to the Labour-Suffrage understanding when the WSPU announced that in future it would attack Labour Party

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1. EFF Minutes 14 June, 20 June 1912; Labour Party Executive Minutes 11 June 1912; EFF circular 18 June 1912, Frank Marshall to Catherine Marshall 19 June 1912, Mrs Cowmeadow to Catherine Marshall 23 June 1912, Catherine Marshall telegram to Mrs Cowmeadow 24 June 1912, Catherine Marshall to Arthur Henderson 25 June 1912, all CMP.
 2. Catherine Marshall's notes for the Provincial Council Meeting 5 July 19 July 1912, CMP; Catherine Marshall to Arthur Henderson 5 July 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/31. At this time Macdonald told Bruce Glasier that he no longer felt committed to oppose a third reading of the Reform Bill which excluded women, because of the WSPU's "foolish game", Thompson, *The Enthusiasts*, p.175

candidates and leaders as forming part of the Liberal government's "coalition". To avoid such attacks the WSPU demanded that the Labour Party should make votes for women the priority in its parliamentary programme.¹ George Lansbury's attempt to achieve such a position had been defeated a few weeks earlier, at a meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party. At this point the WSPU leadership also split over the issue of the continued use of violence in demonstrations. This development brought a reported statement from the Labour chief whip, George Roberts, that the Parliamentary Labour Party did not favour limited women's suffrage. Further, there were re-current rumours that Ramsay Macdonald had reached a new election alliance with the Liberal chief whip, Percy Illingworth, which would completely undermine the EFF policy of promoting more three-cornered elections.² Another rumour was that the Parliamentary Labour Party had refused to stand by Ramsay Macdonald's pledge to oppose the third reading of the Reform Bill, should women be excluded from it.³ Arthur Henderson allayed some of these fears by sending Catherine Marshall a copy of the resolutions passed by the Parliamentary Labour Party to "resolutely press" for women's suffrage amendment.⁴ Meanwhile Ramsay Macdonald continued to cause disquiet by returning to an attack on the WSPU, and asserting a middle class basis for the women's suffrage movement.⁵ He had also refused EFF help to improve the election organisation in his own constituency of Leicester.

Catherine Marshall wrote to him stressing the sacrifice which many contributions to the EFF represented: "most of this was made up of the savings of business and professional and working women". She claimed

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1. See *The Daily Herald* 19 October 1912 for Mrs Pankhurst's explanation of this decision
 2. Henry Brailsford to J.R. Macdonald 14 October 1912, JRMP PRO 30/69/5
 3. *Daily Herald* cutting 17 October 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/43
 4. NUWSS Executive Minutes 17 October 1912
 5. *Manchester Guardian* cutting 21 October 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/45

many were going without holidays, medical treatment, food and new clothing in order to contribute to the work.¹

Marshall detected class antagonism at the roots of Macdonald's lack of commitment to women's suffrage yet, she stressed, many middle class suffragists shared similar aims with himself, wishing,

To concentrate on breaking down this big monopoly of political power which stands in the way of all progress. If you think I am exaggerating ask Miss I.O. Ford. She can tell you something of what this struggle means to the middle class women for whom you have so little kindly feeling. Why do you hate us so? I have been reading your book on Socialism again to try to discover. Your accusation of class-feeling on our side, against the working women, wounds — and shows that you have missed much of the significance of the Women's Movement.

Together with the peace movement it had done a great deal,

To break down the business of class between one group of human beings and another. And I believe the spirit of solidarity it has created among the women of all classes is going to be one of the most important and beneficial factors in the social development of the future ... these are things on which I feel very deeply, and the attitude I have been vaguely conscious of when talking to you, and which appears in your letter today (in the *Daily Citizen*) really *hurts*.²

A correspondence between Ramsay Macdonald and Kathleen Bruce Glasier provides some further insights into the antagonism some Labour Leaders still felt towards suffragists. Kathleen Bruce Glasier also urged more tolerance from Ramsay Macdonald towards the middle class speakers and organisers they encountered among suffragists:

We are a *stage army* everywhere and can't help being till this suffrage business is out of the way ... the suffrage muddle will right itself too — and we mustn't be jealous. *It makes us look so ugly*. I am a poor plain sparrow myself and feel a bit queer with Birds of Paradise queening it beside me in an election where the Labour fight is real and earnest — but skilful handling, such as Peters is capable of

1. Catherine Marshall to J.R. Macdonald 19 October 1912, JRMP PRO 30/69/5
2. *ibid* (my parentheses)

and eager for, will use the plumage for the real work — perhaps put some soul inside it too.

After a recent election campaign, she herself "rejoiced in all the United Suffrage work I saw — M. Robertson was splendid".¹

In another letter she criticised another of Macdonald's recurring attacks on the WSPU. "I grieved a little over your 'Suffragette' diagnosis = 'physiological'" fearing it "would irritate the earnest women like Miss Ford and not instruct the thoughtless". She pointed out that they both had daughters and should give some thought to how they would see their parents' reactions to the women's suffrage issue in the future.²

In his reply Macdonald made explicit some of his deeper reservations concerning feminism.

I said there was much physiology at the root of the suffragette movement. The stories I hear of some of these women only confirm my own feelings ... in view of what is happening — of the fact, for instance, that our beloved WLL has passed a resolution declaring that when a husband and a wife feel they are not getting on so well as they expected and would like a change, they ought to be able to get a divorce — must we not say some plain things in the Labour Party? This development of the Women's movement and this capturing of our own by prepared resolutions, is a very great menace. By and by we shall not be safe unless we too protect ourselves by wire-pulling and night marches; and it is all very hateful and unclean. If we had but one member in each branch who thought critically we should be perfectly safe. But our people feel and do not think.

There is an interesting tussle going on behind the scenes just now. If our matriarchy friends ever succeed they must get babies classified with drains as they see it. So they are at the Local Government Boards to take over Schools for Mothers and Baby Clinics, and not the Education Department ... We must try and put things on common sense lines ... Keep the WLL straight.³

1. Kathleen Bruce Glasier/J.R. Macdonald correspondence 13 March, 1 April, 4 April 1914 JRMP PR030/69/5 (her emphases)

2. *ibid*

3. *ibid*

It would appear then that Macdonald's antagonism towards the suffrage movement reflected both resentment at its impact on socialist organisations, particularly the WLL, and a rejection of certain feminist concerns, notably those challenging existing ideas about the family.

Anti-suffragist outbursts from Macdonald did not help to remove the doubts about the new policy held by some societies within the National Union. In the East Carmarthen by-election in August 1912, for example, the recalcitrance of the local suffrage branch and the muddle surrounding the adoption of the ILP candidate, Dr Williams, caused the EFF committee to abandon its hope of fighting the election. Instead the National Union supported the ILP candidate as "the best friend" to the cause.¹ Similarly, in the North Monmouth constituency, although the South Wales Federation declared itself anxious to fight the anti-suffragist Minister, Reginald McKenna, at the next opportunity, it resisted the introduction of EFF organisers to the constituency. A compromise was reached whereby the National Union began preliminary organising without bringing in the EFF committee. The South Wales Federation agreed, in return, to reconsider its opposition to the EFF when it had seen how the Labour Party voted on the third reading of the Reform Bill.²

The local National Union branch in the constituency of another anti-Suffragist Minister, Charles Hobhouse, in East Bristol, also resisted the introduction of EFF organisers. It appears that a new branch of the National Union, the East Bristol Society, was created with local

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1. EFF Minutes 9 August, 14 August 1912; Catherine Marshall to W.C. Anderson 14 August 1912, Catherine Marshall's notes on the selection conference n.d. (August 1912), L.F. Waring to Catherine Marshall 4 August 1912, all CMP; *The Common Cause* 29 August 1912
 2. EFF Minutes 18 October, 20 December 1912; M. McKenzie to J. Middleton 9 December 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/46

sympathisers for the new policy, to ease this problem.¹

Despite such controversies, the National Union leadership was satisfied with the effect of its new policy, and recommended the Council meeting in July 1912 to consolidate its operation by encouraging the formation of local EFF committees within the Federations. Throughout the summer and autumn, Catherine Marshall was reporting the impact of the new policy on the Labour Party leadership, to the Executive of the National Union.² At the October Council meeting, the National Union's leadership was sufficiently impressed with the results of the first six months of the EFF activity to recommend that the policy be extended. EFF activity now involved the continued organisation of election machinery in constituencies where Labour candidates had already been supported, and campaigns in the constituencies of sitting Labour MPs who were themselves strong suffragists and who were under possible threat of attack from a Liberal candidacy. Further, once EFF work had begun in a constituency, it would not be abandoned simply because the Liberal Party decided to put up a strong suffragist candidate thereafter.³

Catherine Marshall wrote to Arthur Henderson outlining a new plan of work.⁴ Each National Union Federation which contained an existing Labour seat was to be asked to enrol volunteers to prepare for the next election. Only those with Labour sympathies would be employed as canvassers and speakers, while the National Union's own organisers would be put through a course of reading to familiarise themselves with the main lines of Labour Party policy. Other volunteers would be used for more routine work like tracing removals, organising cars for polling day etc. Catherine Marshall recommended that a preliminary Suffrage-

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1. EFF Minutes 19 July, 2 August, 20 December 1912; NUWSS Executive Minutes 31 October, 7 November 1912
 2. EFF Minutes 2 August, 2 September, 19 September 1912; NUWSS Executive Minutes 19 September 1912
 3. Catherine Marshall to Arthur Henderson 5 October 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/39
 4. Catherine Marshall to Arthur Henderson 14 October 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/42

Labour Week be organised in each such constituency during the coming winter as "a sort of test mobilisation of forces".

The EFF would now be available for the maintenance of Labour agents both for defensive work in existing Labour constituencies, and to attack other seats which the National Union hoped to persuade the Labour Party to fight. These were the seats of leading Liberal anti-suffragists, and Rossendale, Accrington, East Bristol, Rotherham, North Monmouth, Ilkeston, Glasgow Bridgeton, East Bradford and North Leeds were mentioned specifically. The EFF's secretary stressed that while it had raised £4500 since its inception, a continuation on this scale very much depended on the Parliamentary Labour Party's attitude to the Women's Suffrage amendments to the Reform Bill.¹ In the meantime National Union societies and federations were advised to concentrate all election preparation on Labour-held constituencies "so as to counteract the harmful effect of the Militants' policy on the Labour Party".² While Ramsay Macdonald felt able to turn down the EFF's offer of help in constituency organisation, other Labour MPs including Philip Snowden and Arthur Henderson took immediate advantage of it.

The National Union ensured that Liberal politicians became aware of the success of such activity by arranging for them to meet some of their leading organisers for the EFF, like Margaret Robertson, at informal dinners arranged by sympathetic Liberal hostesses.³

Such activity strengthened the National Union's hand with the Labour Party and eventually secured the running of Labour candidates in five of the constituencies which the suffragists were anxious to fight — in East Bristol, North Monmouth, Accrington, Rossendale and Rotherham.⁴

1. *ibid*

2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 17 October 1912

3. Catherine Marshall draft letter to Lloyd George 22 February 1912 CMP

4. For more details see below Chapter 9

The National Union's success in achieving Labour Party pressure on the Irish Nationalists was less satisfactory. In October 1912, the Parliamentary Labour Party sent a deputation to the Irish Nationalist leader, Redmond, to press him to withdraw his opposition to the women's suffrage amendment to the Reform Bill.¹ In November, Philip Snowden introduced a women's suffrage amendment to the Irish Home Rule Bill. While it did not receive official Labour Party backing, Macdonald made his maiden speech on women's suffrage on this occasion. The large majority of Labour MPs voted in favour of the amendment, but the National Union was clearly disappointed by the eight Labour abstentions, and five Labour votes against.²

At this time the National Union devised a means of checking the flow of funds into the EFF, when it felt the Labour Party was not being as helpful as it should. A Transferable Fund was established for donations whose ultimate use was to be left to the National Union Executive. For the first months or so after its inception, at least, it is clear that direct donations to the EFF dwindled to very little. Between the end of October and early February 1913 the EFF rose only from £4115 to £4197, while £869 had been placed in the Transferable Fund at its inauguration on 5th November, and it had risen to £1164 only one week later.³

No detailed breakdown of EFF expenditure during its first six months is possible, but *The Common Cause* reported in February 1913 that of the £5293 received (which almost certainly included the Transferable Fund) £2349 had been spent on EFF campaigns, while £2000 was being held on deposit to fight the next general election on behalf of Labour candidates in specially selected constituencies.⁴

1. *The Labour Leader* 31 October 1912
 2. *The Common Cause* 14 November 1912
 3. *ibid* 31 October, 14 November 1912, 7 February 1913
 4. *ibid* 14 February 1913

By the end of 1912 the National Union had also established a fruitful working relationship with the ILP leadership. Links were established when the National Union consulted with organiser James Mylles over the ILP's Political Equality Campaign in early 1912. At this stage both organisations remained shy of an open alliance, and Mylles advised Catherine Marshall "It will be best to treat this as private".¹ However, after the inauguration of the new election policy one of the EFF Committee's first actions had been to send Annot Robinson to the ILP conference in May 1912 to organise a women's suffrage demonstration. She had also been instructed to explore the possibilities of running ILP candidates in the constituencies of a number of anti-suffragist Liberals.² Though the ILP appears to have been slow to respond to the National Union's early offers of help,³ by the end of the year a meeting had been arranged between Henry Brailsford, Catherine Marshall, Isabella Ford, W.A.C. Anderson and the ILP's treasurer Benson to establish how "the National Union could influence the selection of candidates".⁴ Another meeting, between Isabella Ford and Benson resulted in an agreement that the ILP would accept National Union funds if they were paid into its general fund, and from there transferred to particular constituencies for the support of ILP candidates.⁵ In return ILP MPs were committed to oppose the third reading of the Reform Bill should it exclude women (though Ramsay Macdonald's statements remained ambiguous on the issue).⁶ It was the advice of Benson at this meeting which led to the re-orientation of EFF activity in 1913, to a campaign among the rank-and-file membership of the Labour Party, particularly within trade union branches, which will be explored in Chapter 9.

1. James Mylles to Catherine Marshall 8 February 1912, CMP

2. Kathleen Courtney to Annot Robinson 22 May 1912, CMP

3. EFF Minutes 22 November, 20 December 1912

4. *ibid* 22 November 1912

5. *ibid* 20 December 1912

6. See report of his speech at the Women's Suffrage Demonstration 6 December 1912, *The Common Cause* 13 December 1912

CHAPTER 8 : THE FRANCHISE AND REGISTRATION BILL
OF 1912-1913

The events which surrounded the course, and eventual withdrawal, of the Liberal government's Franchise and Registration Bill were only to serve to strengthen the National Union leadership in its commitment to the new EFF policy. Not only did the suffragist campaigns surrounding this bill bring the constitutional wing of the movement into even closer touch with the Labour Party and socialist organisations, but it further illustrated the degree of internal division within the Liberal Party and Cabinet over the issue of votes for women, and confirmed the need to strengthen popular support for the demand.

The Joint Campaign Committee

Following the announcement of a new Reform Bill in November 1911, the National Union had consulted with the Conciliation Committee, the Women's Liberal Federation and the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association as to the best means of securing the safe passage of a women's suffrage amendment to what was essentially a manhood suffrage bill.¹

As a result of these meetings a Parliamentary Committee was formed to unite all who supported such an amendment on a broad, democratic basis — the position of Conservative suffragists on any possible amendment remaining unclear.² This committee first met on 14 December 1911, and each of the organisations involved was invited to send one delegate to a Central Committee to organise work throughout the country. The Committee took an office at the Peoples Suffrage Foundation Headquarters. At this stage it appears to have acted largely as a clearing house, arranging for MPs willing to speak in support of a women's suffrage amendment at meetings up and down the country.³

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 30 November, 7 December 1911
 2. *ibid* 7 December 1911
 3. *ibid* 4 January 1912

By February 1912, the committee had acquired the title of the Women's Suffrage Joint Campaign Committee with its main objects the establishment of a list of MPs prepared to speak on the issue, the co-ordination of major suffrage demonstrations and the organisation of campaigns behind the amendment in those constituencies where pressure on the MP was thought to be important. The Committee recommended that suffragist MPs should follow a co-ordinated plan: firstly to work for an equal suffrage amendment, if this failed to work for an amendment on the lines of the Conciliation Bill with the addition of the wives of voters, and failing both these simply to work for an amendment on Conciliation Bill lines.¹

At this time the Women's Liberal Federation was taking no part in the work of the Committee, though Eleanor Acland continued to urge its Executive to strengthen their commitment to the women's suffrage amendment. She advised Catherine Marshall:

Of course you have to realise that we are primarily a collection of Liberal Women, and that the Executive is far ahead of the WLAs in suffrage keenness; if we go too fast we find the WLAs leave us to join the NWLA (National Women's Liberal Association) — which is worse for suffrage than anything because that body doesn't push at all. I also suggested that those of our organisers who are good at the suffrage should be told (off?) to do suffrage work only. This met with a mingled reception". She asked Catherine Marshall for any suggestions on suffrage activity which "I could repeat ... to the sub-committee which meets on Fridays, and as you know it is easier to convert a large body like our Executive in instalments".²

Meanwhile, other Liberal women within the National Union continued to press their local WLAs to greater suffrage commitment. In a speech to one such group in early 1912, Catherine Marshall argued: "We have

1. *ibid* 1 February 1912

2. Eleanor Acland to Catherine Marshall n.d. (circa 13 February 1912) CMP (my parentheses)

lost the opportunity of having it recorded in history that the Liberal Party gave the women of England their political freedom. Do not let it be said that the opposition or indifference of Liberals threw away the great opportunity which the Reform Bill of 1912 offers".¹

The comparative weakness of Liberal support for a women's suffrage amendment compared with that from the labour and socialist movement became clear as the work of the Joint Campaign Committee continued.² The efforts of this body were now concentrated on bringing pressure to bear to ensure that the Reform Bill would be introduced that session, and it was hoped Asquith would receive a deputation at the end of June on this point. A list of constituencies was drawn up where it would be most useful to work up support for this demand, and an organiser was appointed. It was hoped to hold Joint Campaign Demonstrations in each of these constituencies.³

Demonstrations were planned in Poplar, Bishop Auckland, Huddersfield, Hoxton, Sunderland, Spea Valley, Devonport, Sheffield, Southampton, Dundee, Midlothian, and Greenock. However when the National Union sought help from its local branches and federations it found that Liberal supporters were often luke-warm. Dr Elsie Inglis of the Scottish Federation had to report to Kathleen Courtney,

I have written to the secretaries of Dundee and Greenock. Dundee I know will be quite ready to help, Greenock will find it a good deal more difficult as the society is more Liberal there. I have written a strong letter and will let you know what happens.

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1. Catherine Marshall's draft speech at Appleby 10 January 1912, CMP
 2. Joint Campaign Committee work was suspended at the time of the final Conciliation Bill. When it was reactivated it included representatives from a range of labour and women's Liberal organisation: the Fabian Society, the Women's Labour League, the Peoples Suffrage Federation, the Scottish Women's Liberal Federation, the Women's Liberal Federation and the Women's Cooperative Guild, NUWSS Executive Minutes 7 March, 21 March, 1912; Joint Committee File, May 1912, CMP
 3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 April, 16 May 1912

As predicted the campaign was successfully organised in Dundee but the National Union found it necessary to send one of its national organisers to Greenock.¹

The Sheffield society also was strongly hostile to this work. Its secretary pointed out to National Union headquarters that none of the five divisions in Sheffield were held by a Liberal anti-suffragist. The only Liberal MP, Sir J.T. Walters had worked for the Conciliation Bill, though he had disliked it, and was a very strong and popular candidate in the constituency. She concluded "opposing him would be about as useful as butting one's head against a stone wall. My committee is strongly Liberal and would resent opposing a Liberal who is satisfactory". The secretary of the Huddersfield branch also reported her committee as unwilling to oppose their MP.² Such developments only served to highlight the relatively greater commitment of organised labour to the women's cause.

Local Liberal opposition was occurring against the background of the National Union's move towards a closer working relationship with the Labour Party. It is significant that in those constituencies where a successful Joint Campaign Demonstration was organised the local Liberal political associations were not much in evidence. The Three Towns society was very diligent in organising such a campaign locally, and its one week open-air campaign was run in conjunction with the local ILP. The Assistant Honorary Secretary reported her society "very favourably impressed by the earnestness of the men".³ The Manchester Society too was very active in organising similar demonstrations, again largely with the help of the local socialists. Other successful demonstrations

1. Elsie Inglis to Kathleen Courtney 27 May, 13 June 1912, CMP
 2. Mrs Gill to Kathleen Courtney n.d. (May 1912); Helen Studdard to Kathleen Courtney n.d. (May 1912) CMP
 3. Hon. Sec. Three Towns Society to Kathleen Courtney n.d. (June 1912) CMP

took place in Dundee, Devonport and Bishop Auckland.¹

The Joint Campaign Committee continued to operate throughout the rest of 1912. It agreed to ask MPs to support the extension of the franchise to women on the lines of the local government register but became increasingly concerned that women's suffrage should not be lost through demanding too wide a measure. In October Brailsford was writing to Kathleen Courtney urging the National Union to pressure those Liberal and Labour MPs who were supposed to be sound suffragists to be prepared to accept a limited women's suffrage amendment and to oppose anything wider "which will seriously divide the supporters of women's suffrage".² On the 4th December there was a large Joint Campaign demonstration at the London Opera House to demand the inclusion of women in the Reform Bill "on broad and democratic lines". The National Union Executive Committee Minutes record that Labour supporters had sought to exclude this last phrase from the conference agenda in order to ensure maximum support, but had been outvoted by the Liberals.³ Mrs Heitland, a leading member of the National Union expressed the fear of many suffragists of an amendment which would simply remove the word "male" from the bill:

I know the whole matter with its complications of Parties and groups is a brain splitting business. But under all the circumstances I think we must put our cards so far on the table as to eliminate the Adult Suffrage fear.⁴

At this time the Peoples Suffrage Federation organiser was lobbying the adult suffragists in the House of Commons, while the Joint Campaign organiser was at work in their constituencies, to ensure that they

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 20 July 1912
 2. Henry Brailsford to Kathleen Courtney 5 October 1912, CMP
 3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 19 December 1912
 4. Mrs Heitland to Mrs Fawcett 12 December 1912, CMP

would support the more limited amendment.¹

The importance of the Joint Campaign Committee lies in that its work further illustrated to the National Union leadership the greater commitment to women's suffrage to be found in labour and socialist circles at this time. Also, while the Peoples Suffrage Federation was prepared to support less than its own full demand if necessary to safeguard the women's vote, the Liberal adultists had shown themselves less flexible. Similarly Liberal suffragists in many constituencies were clearly putting their party loyalties before those to the women's suffrage. This increasing evidence of Labour's commitment to the women's vote undoubtedly stimulated and strengthened support for the new election policy within the National Union.

On the other hand many Liberals, individually, were pressing their own government on the issue. Captain T. Smithies Taylor wrote to Liberal Minister A.J. Pease:

As a Liberal, born and bred, may I express the opinion that no extension or modification of the present Franchise will be satisfactory to the real Liberals of the country unless it includes Women under exactly the same terms and qualifications as men: and thus recognizes Women as Human Beings and Citizens.

Mrs C.E. Lehmann was rather more pugnacious:

I hope that if the cry of the suffrage societies fails to open your eyes, that the very real discontent of the members of the Women's Liberal Federation over your new Reform Bill will effectively do so. We have trusted against all odds that the Party would be as faithful to its women workers as they have been to it but when you offer us merely a private members amendment to further our highest aspirations I can tell you our loyalty is almost at breaking point.

Be wise in time is all I can say and earn your right even so late in the day to be *truly* called a *Liberal*

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 7 November, 19 December 1912

government.¹

C.P. Scott summed up these arguments for the women's suffrage cause in a *Manchester Guardian* leader for 9 July 1912:

It is one which appeals to the very root principles of a well-founded Liberalism, and it has met with a quick response from that other new and transforming force, the awakening power of organised labour ... Liberalism lives and only desires to live, by ideals and by principles. Not all the votes of all the plural voters can do a tithe of the damage which it will receive at the hands of its friends, if when put to the test, as shortly they will be, they make the great refusal.²

Such continuing evidence of divided opinion within Liberal ranks over the issue of votes for women was reflected in the government's apparent lack of enthusiasm for its own bill, which has already been remarked. The Franchise and Registration Bill passed its second reading in June 1912, but by November the Cabinet was having to discuss ways in which it might be shortened in order to get it through in the time available. Pease in his notes pointed out:

we could not cut down our bill on Franchise and Registration to plural voting — eventually depended on what was done about women's voting — if excluded there would be time enough to put in to Lords by February 10 — of all our bills this Bill had the most backing in the party and we could not now introduce a new bill, or prevent title covering all the bill and too much evisceration would be out of order.

It was decided to go ahead with the bill on a shortened time-table.³

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1. Capt T. Smithies Taylor to A.J. Pease 17 June 1912; Mrs C.E. Lehmann to A.J. Pease n.d. MSS Gainford [67]
 2. Quoted in Hammond, *C.P. Scott* p.111
 3. Pease Diaries 20, 21, 27 November 1912. See also Pease's memorandum on a meeting with Whitley and Thring 28 November 1912, on the order in which the bill was to be read, MSS Gainford [65(1)]

Asquith's anxieties over the bill were revealed in a conversation with Pease a few weeks later. Pease noted:

I undertook to ascertain if it was possible to stick to plural voting penalty clause and drop others, if pressure of time compelled this course. I explained that the title of the bill might be regarded to be so wide as not to have proper relationship to contents and it might be more difficult to get a fresh bill through than the whole of the bill which had secured a second reading. He twice repeated the question is full of complications.

Pease appears to have felt little sympathy for Asquith's quandary.

The whole position is attributable to the Prime Minister having committed himself to go with the Bill, as a Government under Parliament Act under a belief his Ministers and party were against him — whereas a majority of the Cabinet are prepared to stand by the bill only if women are excluded.¹

Nonetheless, a few weeks later Pease was drawing up a memorandum pointing out the dangers involved in women's suffrage amendments.

It may be of interest to realise the importance which can be attached to the retention of the word 'male', as the Government are pledged by the Prime Minister to proceed with the Bill in the event of women's suffrage being included, and so far as I can gather from the attitude of the Liberal members in the House of Commons there are at least 50 who intend to vote against the Bill in the event of women's suffrage being included in the measure and the Government would, therefore, run a great danger of the rejection of one of their principle bills if the word 'male' is struck out.

It is not clear to whom this memorandum was addressed, but it was an obvious invitation to vote against the first amendment which would be called, and which was essential if specific women's suffrage amendments were to follow.²

1. Pease Diaries 2 December 1912

2. Memorandum on Franchise and Registration Bill n.d. first draft, third and final draft 18 December 1912 MSS Gainford [67]

From early November the National Union had been worried that another whispering campaign was underway, suggesting Asquith's resignation would follow the passage of any women's suffrage amendments. Kathleen Courtney told Birrell it was "the prevalent belief in the Nationalist Party" that this was the case. Birrell denied knowledge of any such rumours but agreed to see Redmond and Asquith on the point. Additional pressure on the Nationalists was planned through a large women's suffrage meeting in Dublin, to be addressed by well-known Home Rulers and Liberal MPs, together with other "friendly pressure".¹

C.P. Scott, worried by the rumours of Asquith's possible resignation over women's suffrage wrote to Grey for a statement to counteract their effect. Grey replied:

It has never occurred to me as possible that it would be consistent with his promise (of a free vote) for the Prime Minister to resign if the decision of the House of Commons was adverse to his opinions.

He would himself be reluctant to vote for a third reading of the Franchise Bill if women were excluded.

If therefore it was the case that the Government is to be broken up if women's suffrage be put into the Bill, the natural corollary would be that I and others who are in favour of women's suffrage would leave the Government and vote against the third reading if women's suffrage be not put into the Bill.

He suggested Scott should approach Asquith direct.²

This produced little result however, as Asquith, denying any responsibility for the rumours, therefore held he might ignore them. He added that as Lloyd George and Grey were being so active on the suffrage side, "I do not regard myself (as an individual being) as being under any obligation to accept a purely passive part, or to conceal in any way my opinion".³

1. Kathleen Courtney's notes on her meeting with Birrell 1 November 1912; Kathleen Courtney to Florence Balgarnie 29 November 1912, CMP

2. Hammond op cit pp.113-115

3. *ibid* (his parentheses)

Grey then attempted to kill the rumour in a statement to be read to a suffrage demonstration in Glasgow on 9th December, to the effect that the passage of the women's suffrage amendments would not result in resignations or the break up of the government.

In December, Leif Jones, a leading temperance MP, asked Asquith to deny these rumours. The reply was indefinite though it was reported in the Liberal press as an explicit denial. Scott recommended that one of the National Union seek a personal interview with Asquith, but there is no record that this occurred. Meanwhile it appears Asquith was considering a general election before the bill would have become law.¹

Four amendments to the Bill were involved for the suffragists. The first to be taken would be that to omit the word 'male' from the bill. This was essential before any consideration could be given to specific women's suffrage amendments. This was to be put by Sir Edward Grey, a Liberal suffragist, Arthur Henderson, a Labour suffragist, and Alfred Lyttelton, a Liberal Unionist suffragist. The three suffrage amendments were to be taken in the following order; first an adult suffrage amendment, to be put by Henderson and Snowden (of the Labour Party), second, the "Norway" amendment, to be put by W.H. Dickenson and Francis Acland (of the Liberal Party) which would enfranchise wives of electors; and finally the Conciliation Bill amendment, to be put by Alfred Lyttelton and Mr Goldman (a Unionist).

From papers on the committee stage discussions of the bill it is clear that an age restriction was also much favoured for women' suffrage

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 19 December 1912; C.P. Scott to Kathleen Courtney 22 December 1912, CMP; Lloyd George to Asquith 25 December 1912, MSS, Asquith 13/110. Lloyd George argued it would be better to postpone the general election until the summer so that the government's three major bills — Franchise, Irish Home Rule, and Welsh Disestablishment — could complete all their three stages, and then be passed by simple resolution in the first session of the new Parliament

na amendments, and an age limit of over 25 was part of the "Norway" amendment. When the final version of the bill was introduced in January 1913 the government had removed the occupier qualification, and the bill provided for a simple residential qualification only.¹ It was estimated the bill would add three million new voters to the electorate. Henderson's amendment would add about ten and a half million women voters, while the "Norway amendment" would involve 5 million women voters, and the Conciliation Bill amendment would enfranchise about one million women.²

The National Union's strategy for the Bill were outlined in Catherine Marshall's "Points for Parliamentary Interviews".³ This stressed that the first amendment did not automatically mean adult suffrage, and it was necessary for every suffragist MP to vote for it. All Liberal suffragists were to be asked to vote for the adultist amendment, "even if it cannot be carried, we want a good vote". Conservatives were not to be pressed to vote on this. All Liberals would also be asked to vote for the Norway amendment "which will be the one specially patronised by Suffragist Ministers". In addition Lord Lytton and Lord Robert Cecil were working with the National Union to get Unionist support. Lord Robert Cecil was to be one of its official backers. "In return we expect Liberals to pledge themselves that if this effort fails they will vote for the Municipal Amendment (the Conciliation Bill Amendment). If Liberals won't act as a Party and cannot control their Irish allies, they have no right to assume an 'all or nothing' attitude".

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1. Franchise and Registration Bill 2 December 1912, MSS Gainford 67
 2. See *Daily Telegraph* cutting 20 January 1913, MSS, Gainford[67] and Eleanor Rathbone's Memorandum on the Approximate Number of Women who would be Enfranchised by various amendments to the Reform Bill, Their Advantages and Disadvantages, n.d., (1912) CMP. The NUWSS had been worried that the "Norway" amendment, as first formulated, would be felt to enfranchise too many women — approximately seven to eight million. This is presumably why a higher age limitation was attached to the amendment in its final form
 3. "Points for Parliamentary Interviews" July 1912, CMP

In consultations with the Conservative suffragists the National Union stressed the difficulty of getting Liberals to vote for the Conciliation Bill amendment, if the Conservatives did not in return "make some effort to carry the Norway Amendment". It was noted "the steady influence of the married women, and the fact that Householders 'have a stake in the country' are arguments that generally appeal to them". Nonetheless, only reliable Conservative suffragists were to be "pressed urgently" to vote for the Norway amendment.¹

All suffragist MPs were to be urged to "work steadily with one of three groups", Arthur Henderson's, Dickenson's or the Conciliation Committee. Further "it ought to be a point of honour" for all genuine suffragist MPs "not to vote *against* any of these recognised amendments, even if he cannot quite bring himself to vote for it". Every suffragist MP, whatever party, should be asked to vote against the third reading of the bill if women were excluded from its final form. If they refused they were to be asked to abstain. Finally "it should be made clear to Conservatives that by voting for a women's suffrage Amendment they do not commit themselves to vote for the Bill as a whole on its third reading".²

The vote of the Irish Nationalist MPs was seen as very important. Scott saw both Dillon, now a committed anti-suffragist, and Devlin, formerly a suffragist, and both stressed the damage done to the cause by militant outrages in Ireland. Two other factors weighed with the Irish Nationalists. Firstly, gratitude and loyalty to Asquith; secondly the belief that the Prime Minister's authority was involved in the issue. They believed Asquith "had placed himself in an almost impossible position" and the Nationalists felt they had to support him "as the

1. *ibid*

2. *ibid*

maintenance of his personal credit and authority were vital to the prospects of Home Rule".¹

Scott replied by pointing out the danger of alienating Labour and Radical Liberals: "If the Reform Bill were passed without any women being enfranchised there would be a good many hostile votes on the Government side against the third reading and that personally I should support this opposition". Dillon admitted this danger, and stressed the matter remained open "and might be largely determined by Asquith's speech". Devlin recommended that Scott see Redmond after the third reading of the Irish Home Rule Bill.²

Scott also sought Lloyd George's advice on the Irish vote. Lloyd George "strongly recommended that as a means of neutralising Irish hostility the Dickenson amendment to the Reform Bill be amended so as to exclude Ireland". This would involve an anomaly but "Irishmen could then oppose the Bill only nakedly on grounds having no direct relation to the merits of the question as it affected Ireland".³

When Scott saw Redmond a few days later the Nationalist's leader at first insisted his MPs were to have a free vote on the women's suffrage amendments. Scott repeated that if these should be defeated by Irish votes he would feel that "emancipation for Irishmen had been purchased at the cost of its refusal for Englishwomen. Our allegiance would be shaken and our ardour cooled".⁴

Redmond insisted that the passage of the women's suffrage amendments would put Asquith in an impossible position. He would almost certainly be forced to use the Parliament Act for a cause he opposed in principle. Scott pointed to Asquith's pledge to the suffragists as a

1. Scott Diaries 15-16 January 1913

2. *ibid*

3. *ibid*

4. *ibid* 20 January 1913

denial of this. Redmond replied that he could not think why Asquith had made the pledge in the first place, and "at all events he must be relieved from the necessity of fulfilling it". Finally, Scott asked that he would work for the dropping of the bill, should women be excluded, and Redmond "seemed well inclined to".¹

Scott also managed to arrange a meeting with Asquith, who was prepared to discuss "any subject — except women's suffrage". Consequently Scott suggested they discuss "the political situation as affected by women's suffrage". He explained his view that if the Franchise Bill passed without women's suffrage it "must alienate considerable forces of opinion and those among the most energetic of the party and produce coolness and even hostility". Asquith agreed, but felt the alternative would be "much more undesirable and even ruinous". Nor did he feel it would be possible to drop the bill, and proceed with a Plural Voting Bill, for lack of time in which to implement the Parliament Act for any new bill. "We parted on a conciliatory observation by him that I had put the matter in rather a new light to him and he would consider it".²

By mid-January Evelyn Sharp had persuaded Mrs Pankhurst to declare a WSPU truce until after the amendments had been taken believing it was "the only way of saving the Union, though personally she dislikes the amendments". Nevinson remained anxious, nonetheless. "Danger still is that the Pankhursts will find means to fulfil their prophecies of disaster".³

Increasingly, the National Union concentrated its efforts behind the Conciliation Committee amendment, the narrowest, in the belief that this appeared to have the best chance of success. Among the Liberals, Francis Acland and his committee were working hard, and had canvassed

1. *ibid*

2. *ibid*

3. Nevinson Diaries 13 January 1913

nearly every Liberal MP. Lord Robert Cecil was undertaking the same work among Conservative MPs, and had hopes that a considerable number would be voting for the Dickenson (Norway) amendment, and even a few for the adult suffrage amendment. The Labour Party was organising a special whip behind the Conciliation amendment should the Dickenson one be defeated. They were interviewing all the Nationalist MPs in the hope of exerting what little pressure they could. Nonetheless, the National Union had small hopes in that quarter, and optimism was clearly waning as the time approached for Grey's initial amendment to be taken.¹

The general excitement that preceded the debate on the women's suffrage amendments was very high. The *Manchester Guardian's* correspondent wrote "political excitement over the result of the debate which began on Friday ran higher than ever today. One would have to go back nearly ten years in the history of Parliament to find its parallel". He felt that the Grey amendment would pass "though necessarily with a small majority", estimating a majority of 12 to 20. "It ought to be realised that there are still a considerable number of Liberals uncertain which way they will vote". Though there was to be a "genuinely free vote", he predicted that those Liberals who were "party men" above all else would follow Asquith, because of "a special feeling of loyalty to their leader" after what had been a particularly trying session.²

The *Morning Post* however was predicting defeat for the Grey amendment, and the bill's withdrawal for a plural voting measure. This was likely to happen even if the amendment did pass with a narrow majority.

But such is the confusion that prevails among the Coalition there may yet be a change of front by the Cabinet. The position had never had its parallel in modern politics. The lobbying that

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 17 January 1913

2. *Manchester Guardian* cutting 23 January 1913, MSS Gainford 68

goes on is extraordinary. Ministers are as eager as a municipal deputation in favour of a Borough General Powers Bill, or business men against a clause in the Budget, and lobby with as much vigour and enthusiasm. One Radical member, not quite *a persona gratissima* with his chiefs, was astonished when a Cabinet Minister approached, put his hand in a most friendly way on the other's shoulder, and proceeded to canvass him in the interest of the side he champions.¹

The Cabinet had the previous day agreed to be bound to accept the decision of the House of Commons, with neither side resigning on defeat.

Radical members are saying nasty things about Sir Edward Grey and Mr Lloyd George, who are understood to have pressed on the Cabinet this policy of having no opinion of its own and of doing what a disorganised vote in the House of Commons may commend. That time was bound to weaken the Government in the long run must have been obvious if Ministers had given themselves time to think, but they have so forced the pace of Parliament that neither they nor their followers have had opportunities for reflection.²

The Standard described how

the shuffling and hesitating among the Liberal suffragists (were) as patent as ever. They have led to a strange development. I gathered last night that a number of stalwarts, who are very anxious to escape from their embarrassment, are now urging their friends to concentrate on the adult suffrage amendment as being the most democratic of all. In this way they would be able to pose as very advanced and democratic suffragists, in the full knowledge that their vote would be given in favour of a hopeless proposal.

They could then abstain on the Dickenson and Conciliation amendments as "anti-democratic". "Even if the Grey amendment is carried the subsequent enfranchisement amendments have little, if any, chance of success".³

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1. *Morning Post* cutting 23 January 1913, MSS Gainford 68
 2. *ibid*, see also cutting from *The Standard* 23 January 1913 loc cit, which described it as "the greatest travesty ever known of the theory of Cabinet responsibility".
 3. *The Standard* 23 January 1913 loc cit

In such a situation of general confusion, leadership from a strong suffragist Minister was clearly essential, but, as David Morgan has shown, Lloyd George was prevented from any very public activities, by his involvement in the Marconi scandal at just this critical time. There was no question, at this point, of his being able to challenge Asquith's leadership on the Franchise issue.¹

One of the most influential Lobby correspondents, also a suffragist, P.W. Wilson, sought to provide dithering Liberal suffragists with some of the arguments that might harden their resolve.

If women are not included in the Bill, it is not, I think denied that some serious problems will have to be faced by the Government.

It was possible that the Labour Party would then vote against the Bill's third reading.

Grave militancy is taken for granted — the truce of course would end — and stringent coercive measures could hardly be avoided. I am merely stating a known fact when I say that against the advantage said to be derived from defeating the amendments must be set the complete paralysis and probable disruption of the Women's Liberal Federation, a very important ally of Liberal movements. The non-militant National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies appears to regard this as the last real opportunity during the present Parliament and the present Government of securing the enfranchisement of women — a view not perhaps unreasonable. On this assumption, the National Union must be expected to work for an entirely new political combination, if success is not attained.

Defeat then would not bring even the briefest spell of tranquility to the Government and Parliament. The prospect, as all parties are fully aware would be quite otherwise, nor must I be taken here to refer either solely or even chiefly to militancy. Non-militant strategy, backed by ample resources, should not be left entirely out of account.²

This was an implicit reference to the damaging political significance

1. Morgan, *Suffragists and Liberals* p.108-9
 2. Cutting *Daily News* 22 January 1913, MSS Gainford 68. P.W. Wilson later became involved in negotiations between Lloyd George and the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union, see Chapter 10

of an association between the National Union and the Labour Party, on the suffrage issue.

All this debate and anxiety came to nothing when Bonar Law raised a point of order on the bill, questioning the exclusion of the occupier franchise, present in the second reading, from the final form of the bill. At this point the Speaker refused to give an immediate ruling, but he let it be known to Liberal Ministers shortly afterwards, that he was considering ruling that the Bill would not be capable of women's suffrage amendments.

Although the ruling was generally described by the government as a bombshell, Arthur Thring had written to Pease on 8th January 1913,

I enclose two copies of the Franchise guillotine resolution altered as I would suggest. I confess I do not like having the question, whether these "women's" amendments are in order, over. I think the government and the House ought to know before they allocate time whether the "women" discussion is in order or not for certain. Could it be done by means of a question. It seems absurd after all that has happened and all these preparations to say that it is doubtful whether you can discuss the question of women's franchise at all.¹

The issue does not appear to have been discussed in Cabinet, and yet clearly Pease could not have kept the problem to himself, and it seems very unlikely that the government had not been expecting just such a reversal for the bill.

The Unionists, at least felt the problem with the bill to be an obvious one:

Opinion is a good deal divided on the question of this point of order, but I confess that the general feeling is that it would be better for us that the Plural Voting Bill should go through

1. A Thring to Pease 8 January 1913. Thring was the civil servant in charge of preparing the bill. See also the somewhat ambiguous memorandum on the Franchise and Registration Bill amendments on a similar point, both n.d. MSS Gainford [65(1)]

rather than the Suffrage Bill. The former at any rate, so far as my recollection goes, preserves the University seats; and I am not at all sure that in the present condition of the parties in the House of Commons, the keenest advocates of Female Suffrage will allow the Plural Voting Bill to go through, in view of the fact that no female suffrage amendment can be grafted upon it. The point of order had to be raised in any case, as it was obvious that the Government must have been fully prepared for the situation.¹

When the Cabinet met to discuss this development, it was generally felt that such a ruling would go against precedents established in the passage of the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts, but there was no right of appeal. It was therefore decided that the Bill would have to be withdrawn, though a final decision was postponed to the following Monday, when the Speaker's decision became public.²

With the withdrawal of the Franchise Bill, Pease wanted to press right ahead with a new bill to simplify registration and abolish plural voting. He maintained Asquith's promise of full facilities for a women's suffrage bill could be fully fulfilled by the offer of facilities for another private member bill the following session. However, this view did not prevail, as Asquith had to come to an agreement with his suffragist Ministers which prohibited such a course.³

The Standard reported "a Cabinet quarrel which threatens to bring to a blaze the long-smouldering dissension between the Whig and Lloyd George sections of the Ministry".⁴ Certainly Haldane's letters to his mother at this time are clearly anxious and worried about these events, while to his sister he revealed the nature of some serious splits in the government.

1. Letter to Arthur Steel Maitland, signed Bal (Lord Balcarres) from 7 Audley Street, 24 January 1913, Steel Maitland Papers GD193/159/2, Scottish Record Office
 2. Asquith to the King, 25 January 1913, MSS Asquith 7
 3. J.A. Pease Diaries 24, 27 January 1913
 4. Cutting *The Standard* 27 January 1913, MSS Gainford 68

Sunday night's (the day before the final decision to withdraw the bill) was an important meeting. I said I should have to resign if we went back on the Suffrage Arrangements and Lloyd George said he would also — so we deputed him and Grey to see the Prime Minister in the morning.

Haldane at least, seemed pleased with the outcome of this discussion.

The Prime Minister behaved like an angel and managed yesterday's Cabinet admirably. The new plan is a good one and should afford the cause as good a chance as it had before — the main danger is now the folly of the militant women.

The government had finally agreed to offer the suffragists full facilities for a private member bill next session, while all its own franchise legislation appears to have been abandoned. Haldane wrote to his sister:

I think the new Suffrage Bill will stand a good chance, probably as good as the clauses in the late Bill. The air is cleared a great deal.¹

The Times' correspondent reported considerable dissatisfaction in the Liberal Party at the decision not to proceed immediately with a plural voting measure. He explained "The Suffragist Ministers desired that since women suffragists have lost their Parliamentary opportunity the Government for their part should make a sacrifice — a propitiatory sacrifice".² The Diaries of Charles Hobhouse, another member of the Cabinet, indicate that it was unanimously agreed to introduce a Plural Voting Bill but not until the following March.³

Another account of events in the Cabinet was offered to Conservative Party chairman, Arthur Steel Maitland, on behalf of Austen Chamberlain:

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1. Richard Haldane to Mary Haldane, 24, 25, 27 January 1913, Haldane Papers 5989; Richard Haldane to Elizabeth Haldane 28, 30 January 1913 Haldane Papers 6012, National Library of Scotland
 2. Cutting *The Times* 28 January 1913, MSS Gainford 68
 3. Edward David (ed) *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse*, London, Murray 1977, p.132

Apparently the Suffragist members of the Government have now made it a condition that there should be no extension of the male Franchise unless at the same time the vote is extended to some women. If, therefore, women's suffrage can be defeated next session (in the private member bill), it would appear that we shall have no male suffrage bill at all. In any case a year has been gained.¹

For the time being stale-mate seems to have been declared by the opposing factions within the Liberal Party. This would certainly explain why no further extension to the franchise was attempted during the remaining life of the government, or any attempt to simplify registration procedures — both measures which would have been thought likely to enhance the Liberal Party's electoral chances. In failing to face up to the issue of women's suffrage, the Liberal government had provided the Unionist party with the ability, not only to destroy the Franchise Bill, but to prevent any further franchise extension during that Parliament.

Philip Snowden wrote this assessment of the situation to Mrs Fawcett:

I write to you venturing to submit the suggestion that you ought to consent to nothing less than a Government bill with women in it from the first. The suggestion is being made by Lloyd George that a new Manhood Suffrage bill should be introduced and concurrently a private member's women's suffrage bill with Government facilities. I do not think that this idea ought to be entertained for a moment.²

Other suffragist MPs supported this view. Lord Robert Cecil had advised that Unionists would not vote for any private member bill which had to pass under the Parliament Act, so that if the proposed private member bill were defeated in the Lords, as it would be, it would also

1. J. Wilson to Arthur Steel Maitland 30 January 1913, Steel Maitland Papers GD 193/159/3
 2. Philip Snowden to Mrs Fawcett 26 January 1913, MGFP

face defeat in the House of Commons as Unionist suffragists defected. Francis Acland advised any campaign which the National Union undertook in demand of a government measure could only prove beneficial to any private member bill which might be introduced. On the other hand, if the National Union decided to support a private member women's suffrage measure, which was then defeated, they would scarcely be in a position to urge the Labour Party to vote against any Manhood Suffrage measure which might be introduced thereafter.¹

On these considerations the National Union Executive confirmed its decision to work for a new government bill, though they planned no definite action to oppose any private member bill. They agreed the text of a resolution, to be used by National Union branches and a meeting of the Young Liberals (presumably for Francis Acland, the president of that body), to the effect that only a government measure would fulfil the pledges given.²

The National Union also consulted with Mrs Broadley Reid for the WLF and Lady Selborne for the CUWFA. They were both inclined to work for a private member bill if good facilities were offered, but felt their hand could only be strengthened by the National Union's insistence on a government measure.³

Catherine Marshall expanded the Executive's position in a circular to all National Union societies about the forthcoming Council, and the worth of Asquith's offer:

Facilities next session! What a sickening familiarity there is about those words! Ever since Sir Edward Grey told us in 1910 to 'concentrate on 1911' the promise of facilities has been used to keep us waiting 'just for one session more'. It is no

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 27, 28 January 1913
 2. *ibid*
 3. *ibid*

wonder that this time, when 'facilities' are offered to us in exchange for the incorporation of an amendment in a Government Bill, we turn indignantly from the counterfeit coin and say to Mr Asquith: — This does not discharge your debt.

But the fact that what Mr Asquith now offers is not the equivalent of what he offered us in 1911 is not in itself sufficient reason for rejecting the offer. We must not let anger, however justifiable, blind our judgment. The question we should ask ourselves is: Is this chance good enough for us to work for, or can we expend our time and our energy and our money more profitably in other ways?

She rejected as unsound,

The argument that we are bound to support it because it is the best we can get from this Government. That is not sufficient reason for claiming our support. The best Bill in the world is not worth working for if it has no chance of passing ... the fact (if it is a fact) that Mr Asquith's offer is 'the best we can get from this Government' is not in itself a sufficient reason for supporting the bill; but it might be sufficient reason for opposing the Government ... If the best that the Suffrage members of the Cabinet can get for us is a worthless offer ... that means that we have nothing to hope for so long as the present Government remain in power. If this is the conclusion the Council comes to its course will be clear and the shaping of a new policy easy.¹

At a meeting with Lloyd George shortly after the Speaker's ruling Mrs Fawcett made it clear that the National Union would regard only a new government measure as adequate to fulfil pledges they had received. They would not accept the government's plan of a new private member bill. At first Lloyd George said anything else was quite out of the question, but eventually he agreed to press for a government measure, though with no hope of success.

The National Union's official position that the government's offer did not provide "an equivalent opportunity" to a free vote on amendments to a government bill, was acknowledged by Grey. At a meeting with

1. Catherine Marshall draft circular February 1913, CMP (her parentheses)

Mrs Fawcett and Kathleen Courtney Grey found himself unable to "put the offer in a more favourable light", or suggest ways of neutralising or winning the Irish vote for a private member bill. He agreed that a campaign for a government bill could not harm any private member measure, providing it did not involve active opposition to it. All the suffrage groups in the house thought it right to concentrate on the demand for a government measure, and set small value by Asquith's new offer.¹

The National Union leaders then asked Grey if he felt an active anti-government policy would harm the chances of a private member bill, and he thought not, if it did not work against those Liberals who had been consistently good friends to the cause. A new Liberal Suffrage Committee was being formed in the House of Commons, with Sir John Simon as chairman, and Leif Jones as secretary. It would undertake to consult with the Conservative suffragists, but not with the Labour Party. The Conservative suffragists were apparently thinking in terms of a referendum on the basis of the Conciliation Bill provisions, as the best hope. A union between Conservative suffragists and the Labour Party "on a measure for the simple removal of the sex-disqualification" was also suggested at this meeting.²

In this context the work of the EFF was to have profound consequences for the possibility of any future franchise reform. For the previous months much of its campaigning had been aimed at strengthening official Labour support for the women's cause at the forthcoming Annual Conference in January 1913. Margaret Robertson and Ada Neild Chew had campaigned among Labour activists for support of a resolution urging the Parliamentary Labour Party to vote against the third reading of any Franchise Reform Bill which excluded women. A suffrage supplement

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 6 February 1913

2. *ibid*

had also been arranged to appear with the *Labour Leader* issue for the 9th January, paid for by the EFF. This was also sent out to all WCG branches and all delegates to the Labour Party Conference. Free literature on the suffrage issue was made available, "on the understanding it should be distributed among working people".¹

Benson's advice on the need to win trade union support, particularly among the miners, had been heeded. Before the annual conference, Margaret Robertson had visited miners' leaders Hartshorn, Smillie and Winstone, all of whom she found sympathetic to the resolution. Although a miner's MP, Stephen Walsh, led the opposition to it, at the vote the miners' delegates abstained. This represented a significant, though limited success for the suffragists. Philip Snowden's resolution, "to oppose any Franchise Bill in which women are not included", passed with a two-thirds majority, by 870 to 437 on a card vote.²

The Common Cause declared "women know henceforth that one body of men will make a united and self-sacrificing stand on their behalf. There is the less ground for bitterness, the less excuse for the extremist tactics of anger and despair".³ This was not an overstatement. The vote at the Labour Party Conference made it impossible for any solely manhood measure to be introduced by the government. Snowden wrote to Mrs Fawcett:

The importance of this vote is tremendous. It has killed any Franchise Bill which might have been intended. I may tell you that I was talking to two members of the Cabinet yesterday (George was one) and they quite fully confessed that it had put the idea of re-introducing a man Franchise Bill into the region of the impossible.

He believed —

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1. *ibid* 2 January, 6 February 1913
 2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 19 December 1912, 17 January 1913
 3. *The Common Cause* 7 February 1913

Women's suffrage now absolutely dominates home politics.¹

His prediction was to be proved true. There was to be no franchise reform under the last Liberal government. In failing to face the issue of women's suffrage, the Liberal government tied its own hands in the matter of widening the franchise, and realising its own potential support among the large proportion of the adult population which remained disenfranchised.²

The National Union leadership saw these developments in its own policy as offering the possibility of concerted action by militant and constitutionalist suffragists. A meeting was arranged with Annie Kenney and Fiona Drummond representing the WSPU. However, they refused the National Union's proposal to abandon militancy, so that all the suffrage organisations could once more work together in the demand for a government measure.³ The first WSPU demonstration for 1913 was held on 28th January, but Nevinson recorded it was "not like the old deputations indeed the organising and inspiring spirit has gone, the implicit confidence and faith, ever since the split".⁴

When C.P. Scott had met the National Union leaders a few days after the Speaker's ruling he found them "all quite cheerful, relieved to have got clear of all the dodgeries and uncertainties of the Parliamentary situation, from which even before the Speaker's decision they had little to expect". He then visited Lloyd George and suggested that the -

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1. Philip Snowden to Mrs Fawcett 26 January 1913, MGFP (his parentheses)
 2. *The Common Cause* 7 February 1913 offered this assessment of the situation "The Reform of the Franchise is inevitable. It has become an intolerable chaos, and no patching for party motives at plural voting will solve the problem. Liberalism must reform or perish".
 3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 28 January 1913
 4. Henry Nevinson Diaries 28 January 1913

Complete failure of Liberal Party would be to throw whole suffrage movement into the hands of the Labour Party. He paused a moment and then said he should not regret that. It would do the Labour Party good — give it an ideal aim. He had been disappointed in the Labour Party in Parliament. They had not fought for a single thing really worth fighting for — only for narrow trade interests. No leader worth anything. Snowden much the best man among them ... I said we should have to work for the future and perhaps wait for a suffrage Prime Minister. He said no, Asquith would be there for a long time. He would do it acting as a sort of arbitrator if he were convinced of the need. But nothing could be done while militancy continued.

Both Lloyd George's and Asquith's daughters had been threatened with kidnapping by the militants.

Many members of the Cabinet alienated or embittered — militancy no good unless on a great scale — 100,000 women in the street would mean something. At present a mere handful and greatly declining.¹

The government's response to renewed militancy was rapid and ever more repressive. The Cabinet had discussed the possibility of the Cat and Mouse Act as early as February 1913, and despite doubts as to its efficacy, from Asquith among others, McKenna was soon instructed to proceed with the bill.² The government went on to raid WSPU offices, attempt to suppress *The Suffragette*, and threaten WSPU sources of financial support. As Morgan comments "the myopia and exasperation over suffrage was making the Liberal government ever more illiberal", a point that was frequently made by suffragists at the time.³

The National Union took no part in organising support for Dickenson's private member suffrage bill which was introduced in May 1913. This purely token opportunity to advance the suffrage cause involved giving the vote to women householders, and wives of householders over

1. Scott Diaries 3 February 1913

2. J.A. Pease Diaries 11 February, 6 March, 1913; Asquith to King 13 March 1913, MSS Asquith 7

3. Morgan op cit p.124

the age of 25. Predictably the bill was lost and thereafter there was no possibility of even a government suffrage bill passing into law before the next election. If a Liberal government should then be returned, it was clear that Franchise reform would have to be one of its priorities, and that it would no longer be possible for it to exclude women from such a measure. The two issues were now inextricably tied, and, in Grey's words this had "given the whole question an actuality which it had not had before".¹ Nor were the National Union ignoring the possibility of a Unionist victory, as I will seek to show in a later chapter, when outlining the National Union's preparations for the next general election.

Meanwhile, when the government introduced a plural voting measure, the National Union concentrated on organising a campaign against this bill, whose course through the House of Parliament was overtaken by the outbreak of war.² The Liberal government thus failed to achieve even the most limited measure of franchise reform which it had been seeking.

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 6 February 1913
 2. Pease Diaries 6, 19 March 1913; NUWSS Executive Minutes 17 April, 1 May 1913

CHAPTER 9 : THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ELECTION FIGHTING
FUND POLICY 1913-14

The decision that it was now tactically necessary to press for a *government* measure of franchise reform confirmed the National Union leadership in its commitment to the EFF policy, as representing the most effective pressure suffragists could exert on the Liberal government. This view was upheld at the National Union's Annual Meeting in February, which agreed to further extensions of EFF activity. In future no government candidate would receive National Union support, however good a suffragist he might be, though "tried friends" would not be actively opposed. Preparations for the general election were to continue in defence of the seats of certain sitting Labour MPs, and to attack the seats held by leading Liberal anti-suffragists, particularly those in the Cabinet. Any candidate receiving National Union support (theoretically he might be a Unionist or Labour candidate) had to affirm that he would include women's suffrage in his election address, would urge the government to introduce a women's suffrage bill with full facilities, would oppose any extension of the franchise which excluded women, and would work to make women's suffrage part of his party's general election programme.

The aim of this extension of EFF activity was two-fold; firstly to end the life of the Cabinet as presently constituted, by seeking the defeat of anti-suffragist Ministers at elections, and secondly, to strengthen the Labour Party within the House of Commons.¹ Opposition again came from Eleanor Rathbone's Federation, that comprising West Lancashire, West Cheshire and North Wales, which sent the Executive a resolution that it not be implemented in their areas "in view of the special national conditions existing in North Wales". This request was refused though the Executive pointed out that no active steps to

1. *The Common Cause* 7 March 1913; circular on policy following the February Council 1913, MGFP

implement an EFF campaign were ever taken without first consulting the local Federation.¹

EFF Committee estimates for the six months from mid-May 1913 would indicate that the National Union was spending something over £3000 p.a. in organising Labour support. Though sizeable donations had started to come in again by early 1913, by the end of the year they were apparently no longer adequate to meet this planned level of expenditure.²

The nature of the campaigns was, by this time, beginning to disturb some Liberal MPs. In April 1913 Francis Acland had a meeting with Catherine Marshall when he confirmed that the government had now dropped all ideas of a franchise reform bill that Parliament. However, his main object in the meeting seems to have been to elicit information on the progress of EFF activity. Catherine Marshall's notes on the meeting record:

Our Relations with the Labour Party: He talked a great deal about this. Said of course people would say the Labour Party resolutions (at its recent Annual Conference) were bought. Tried to draw me as to extent of help we were giving them. Made wild assumptions which I neither agreed to nor contradicted.

I said anyone who knew anything of the Labour Party must know it was impossible to buy them ... He was impressed when I told him of the keenness among the younger Labour men, the Scotch Miners, Blackburn, etc. (he had begun by saying no working men came to his meetings. I assured him they came to ours).

I told him of their reluctance to accept our help till they were assured it was 'clean money'. Of our care about the sources it came from, rapidly growing trust and good feeling between the Labour Party and us.³

At the National Union's May Council, Catherine Marshall warned that

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 15 May 1913
 2. *ibid* 13 March, 5 June, 2 October 1913
 3. Catherine Marshall's notes 14 April 1913, CMP

many Liberals were now beginning to fear the effect of EFF policy, and were doing their best to break up the association between constitutional suffragists and the Labour Party: "This anxiety on their part is significant testimony to the effectiveness of that policy. We must be on our guard against rumour, suspicion, and so forth".¹

The pattern of EFF activity for the remainder of the period before the First World War was concentrated on two objects: the building up of suffrage support among the trade unions — notably the miners', and the development of Labour Party constituency organisation in general, with a special effort in selected constituencies. These were the seats of anti-suffragist Liberal Ministers in Accrington, Rossendale, Rotherham, East Bristol and North Monmouth, which it was hoped to persuade the Labour Party to contest, and the seats of sitting Labour MPs like Philip Snowden, Arthur Henderson, Tom Richardson, Fred Jowett and Jack O'Grady. Emphasis was put on registration, canvassing and the tracing of removals, on behalf of the Labour Party. In the summer of 1913 such activity was extended to other similar constituencies, on the understanding that it did not necessarily commit the National Union to support during the general election in these particular seats.²

The National Union's Trade Union Campaign 1913-14

The National Union had been disappointed by the Trade Union Congress resolution on women's suffrage at its 1912 Annual Conference, ~~and~~ having attempted, unsuccessfully, to influence its content. The National Union leadership were clearly not yet aware of the distinct nature of the Trade Union Congress as opposed to the Labour Party, and had not yet built up sufficiently broad contacts within the trade unions to support such a

1. Report of the Provincial Council Meeting of the NUWSS 23 May, 1913, MGFP; Catherine Marshall's notes for her reports to this meeting 23 May 1913, CMP
 2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 3 July 1913

move.¹

After the suffragists' success at the 1913 Labour Party conference effort was concentrated on securing an equally satisfactory resolution at the next Trade Union Congress (TUC) conference in September 1913. Catherine Marshall's notes for this work include the items: "Get a good man to move a suffrage resolution; a miner would be best" and the fact that Holmes, the Labour candidate in the Crewe by-election, was to get his branch of the railwaymen to recommend such a resolution to their Executive. Also 50 copies of the Labour Party resolution were sent to trades union branches asking them to endorse it and send it up to their Executives for inclusion in the TUC conference agenda.²

This work of obtaining women's suffrage resolutions from trades union branches continued throughout May with obvious success. Eleanor Rathbone was sufficiently impressed to offer to contribute towards the salary of another organiser to join the work, while the secretary of the West Lancashire, West Cheshire and North West Federation wrote to say that Miss Thompson's trade union work in their area had been "remarkably successful", obtaining resolutions from about 40 trade union branches in six weeks. Eleanor Rathbone urged some weeks later that one of the organisers concerned should visit one constituency in every Federation to show how to organise such activity. In the North East, that Federation's plans included trade union work in Gateshead, Houghton, Mid and South East Durham, and possibly North West Durham, and in particular "an attack upon the Miners Lodges, in view of the forthcoming Trade Union Congress".³

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1. Correspondence between Catherine Marshall and Arthur Henderson 29, 30 August 1912, LPA LP/WOM/12/34-35
 2. Catherine Marshall's notes n.d. circa April 1913, CMP
 3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 1 May, 15 May, 31 July 1913; Jessie Beavan to ; Catherine Marshall circa May 1913, C.M. Gordon to Kathleen Courtney 3 June 1913, CMP

The National Union found the trades unions' leaders as sensitive to deal with as those of the Labour Party. Margaret Robertson, the EFF's leading organiser, advised Catherine Marshall (about a women's suffrage resolution at the TUC conference) -

No, please *don't* see Thomas, Wardle and Henderson. If it is well to see them (which I rather doubt) Miss Bondfield and I will do it at the right moment. Nothing can be done at present, except by way of approaching those whom we *know* are with us all the way, and whom we can trust with 'confidential' information.

I am convinced that *the* essential is that the National Union should not appear in it at all. It's not like the Labour Party conference where the ILP, Fabians, WLL etc., are represented. This is *pure TU* and *very* jealous of outside interference. Bowerman made me realise that. I wished I had made Miss Bondfield go to him alone. I did next time.¹

Nonetheless, the National Union's plans for the TUC conference did not go altogether smoothly as the women's suffrage resolution did not appear on the initial agenda. Arthur Peters wrote to Catherine Marshall:

I can assure you that the absence from the agenda of the TUC of the amendment upon the suffrage question was equally a surprise to me ... I am determined to ascertain the real reason as I was distinctly promised that it would be alright ... From other sources, however, I understand that the resolution as presented to Congress will turn out alright.²

National Union workers were faced with a hard task at the conference too. Margaret Robertson reported:

Did I tell you of the agonies of the TUC? How the miners actually decided to vote *against* and I had to chase all round and see them individually and get them to meet again and reverse it (deadly secret of course that I had anything to do with it).³

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1. Margaret Robertson to Catherine Marshall 29 May 1913, CMP. Margaret Bondfield's sympathy with National Union activity is an indication of the shift in views on women's suffrage among many adult suffragists in the Labour movement. See also NUWSS Executive Minutes 15 May 1913
 2. Arthur Peters to Catherine Marshall 2 September 1913, CMP
 3. Margaret Robertson to Catherine Marshall 18 September 1913 and see also G.W. Evans to Marshall 8 September 1913, CMP

The resolution was finally successful.¹

Pressure on the miners was kept up at their own annual conference a few months later. A National Union demonstration was planned to take place during the conference in Scarborough. A theatre holding 1500 was taken, and Margaret Robertson requested: "I want Mrs Cooper, who has still lodges to visit in Yorkshire, to spend the next month more or less working the meeting up ... I have great hopes of its political effect, and of its effect in binding the Miners to us".² Miners' leaders Brace, Smillie, Stanley and Robertson appeared on the platform, and Robert Smillie promised in his speech: "women would have all the power the Miners Federation could bring to bear on Parliament in order to secure this measure of justice".³

Such support was used to strengthen the suffragists' claim that they were working in the general interest of a wider democracy. *The Common Cause* declared "the question of the vote is no longer a question of sex; Cabinet Ministers who delude themselves with this belief — if any exist — are lamentably out of touch with public feeling, and particularly with the labour movement. In the Scarborough speeches the note continually struck was: 'This is a question of democracy'".⁴

The success of the trade union campaign continued, and culminated in a large demonstration at the Albert Hall on 14th February 1914. The main intention was to show Asquith that he did indeed have a mandate to introduce women's suffrage, and that there was a large popular demand behind the women's cause, particularly among organisations of working

1. See *The Common Cause* report 12 September 1913

2. Margaret Robertson to Catherine Marshall 1 September 1913, CMP. Margaret Robertson saw this as part of a concerted and ongoing campaign to persuade Asquith of the strength of working class support for the women's vote

3. *The Common Cause* 17 October 1913; NUWSS Council Meeting EFF Report n.d. (circa October/November 1913) filed July 1913, CMP

4. *The Common Cause* 17 October 1913

class men. Trades and Labour Councils and ILP branches were strongly represented, as well as a broad section of trade union branches, with a specially large number of delegates from the Engineers and the Railwaymen. Arthur Henderson and Fenner Brockway were among those who spoke. *The Common Cause* reported: "A large space had been reserved for men, and it could have been filled again and again. The Hall was sold out, and every ticket returned was sold as fast as it came in". The crowd outside, of those hoping to buy a last minute ticket, did not disperse until 9.30 p.m. By the end of the meeting over £6000 had been pledged for the new Women's Suffrage Mandate Fund,¹ which was to be used to fight the next general election.

EFF Constituency Work 1913-14

The development of Labour Party election machinery in selected constituencies was the second main emphasis in EFF activity from the beginning of 1913. The extent of such work in any one area largely reflected the enthusiasm and interest of the local National Union federation or branch society for the EFF policy in general. The regionality of support which had become evident in 1912 continued on a similar pattern. *The Common Cause* might claim:

Naturally, the degree of popularity of the EFF policy with our members varies very much in different parts of the country, according to the extent to which organised Labour has locally shown itself active in support of our claims. Where the local representatives are lukewarm, naturally, there is little enthusiasm at the idea of cooperation,²

but the Liberal sympathies of many branches would appear to have been an equally significant factor.

1. *The Common Cause* 20 February 1914, see also issue for 27 February 1914 for the list of official delegates.
 2. *The Common Cause* 17 January 1913

a) The Manchester Federation EFF Committee

The Manchester Federation continued to be one of the strongest advocates of the EFF policy, and its own EFF Committee undertook considerable responsibility for Labour Party organising in its area. This involved constituency work in the seats of six sitting Labour MPs — in North East Manchester, East Manchester, Gorton, Blackburn, Ince and Stockport. Such activity was supported in a number of ways. Joint Labour-Suffrage campaigns took place — one week's activity in Blackburn resulted in a final Labour-Suffrage demonstration of 2000 people. New suffrage clubs, along the lines of that established in South Salford, were started in Hulme and Didsbury, and were achieving "excellent propaganda work in the working class districts of the city".¹ Others followed in Ancoats and Bradford, at the request of the local Labour MPs. Dinner time suffrage meetings outside works became commonplace, and 1147 Friends of Women's Suffrage were enrolled in 1913.² Finally, the trade union campaign in this area proved very successful, with Manchester providing the largest contingent outside London to the Albert Hall Demonstration in February 1914.³

The Manchester Federation also organised the EFF campaigns in Accrington and Rossendale, by which it was hoped to persuade Labour to contest the seats at the next election. In February 1913 deputations of working men in support of women's suffrage were organised to call on the two anti-suffragist Ministers who held the constituencies. The work in Accrington was sufficiently successful for the National Union Executive to report by mid 1913 that the Labour Party was now considering running a candidate there, "EFF work in the constituency having made it

1. Manchester Society's Annual Report for 1913

2. *ibid*

3. *The Common Cause* 10 March 1914

worth while for the Labour Party to fight this constituency".¹ Arthur Peters wrote to Catherine Marshall of his pleasure in hearing that Mrs Darlington was to begin registration work for the EFF in Accrington. The opening of another Suffrage Club in Accrington, which soon attracted 400 members contributed to this advance and the Manchester society could record "The understanding between the Suffrage and Labour movement has been strengthened and to this influence we may in part ascribe the formation of an LRC in Accrington on February 19th to consider the question of a Labour candidate".² At about this time EFF organisers Annot Robinson and Ellen Wilkinson were invited to join a local LRC, and it would seem most likely that it was the Accrington committee.³

The work in Rossendale was to match this effort, though not with quite the same degree of success. Ada Neild Chew, the EFF organiser there, had found an unpromising situation to begin with. She reported:

I took Peters to Rossendale on Monday ... The industrial organisation is strong — the political organisation does not exist. The Labour council has been financially crippled for several years owing to running a paper which got them frightfully into debt. They have also been unfortunate in their Secretaries.

However the LRC was now out of debt, and expecting to appoint a new secretary soon, with a big demonstration planned for the autumn.

Of course the idea of them asking for or adopting a Labour candidate until there is some political organisation is out of the question, but Peters thinks a year of Labour organisation might make it possible. Perhaps I am saying too much in committing him to this (you know what a dark horse he is) but I think the estimate will not be far short of the mark.

She advised against sending a woman to initiate the Labour organisation

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 5 June 1913
 2. Arthur Peters to Catherine Marshall 22 June 1913, CMP; Manchester Society's Annual Report 1913, Minute Book 31 March 1914
 3. Manchester Society Minute Book 31 March 1914

"a man the equal of Monk the Liberal Agent" should be sent initially and Miss Dring could follow up once "it became sufficiently realised that business is meant". Margaret Robertson supported this view, "We've got to give the impression in the division that the *men* are moving, and a man agent, at first at any rate, is essential".¹

However, Henderson refused the £100 offered by the EFF for an agent in Rossendale, saying the Labour Party never put an organiser where there was no MP or candidate. He had no objection to the local labour organisation taking the £100 if they wished. Margaret Robertson said this would not be possible, as they were so few "and it would not do at all for it to be known that we were doing so".²

Ada Chew continued to work Rossendale despite this setback, and by the Spring of 1914 the Manchester Society could record that a meeting called to discuss the running of a Labour candidate had voted for the proposal by 69 to 10. They believed a Labour candidate was now likely, providing the general election did not occur before the autumn.³ Certainly Rossendale appears on Peter's list of constituencies which the Labour Party was considering fighting at the general election. Together with Accrington it appears under the heading "Uncertain". McKibbin notes:

Most of the 'Uncertain' seats had candidates in the process of selection, or had already selected candidates, but had not yet settled the question of financial responsibility ... Allowing for the usual rush of sanctions on the eve of a general election it can be assumed that nearly all Peters 117 would be fought.⁴

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1. Ada Chew to Margaret Robertson 28 May 1913, Margaret Robertson to Catherine Marshall 29 May 1913, CMP
 2. G.W. Evans to Catherine Marshall 28 August and 8 September 1913, Arthur Peters to Alice Clark 15 September 1913, CMP
 3. Manchester Society Minute Book 31 March 1914
 4. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-14*, pp.73-75

b) The North East Federation EFF Committee

The North East Federation, too, continued its commitment to the EFF policy. Labour Party organisation was undertaken in Gateshead, Mid and South East Durham, Barnards Castle, Bishop Auckland, South Shields and Chester-Le-Street,¹ with a special campaign among the miners' lodges. The federation's area also saw several by-elections in which the EFF was employed.

The first was at Houghton-le-Spring, in March 1913, and Margaret Robertson and Clementina Gordon had already undertaken preparatory work during February, in case it should become a three-cornered contest.² The campaign provoked increasing fears in the National Union leadership about the direction of EFF work in the North East. Mrs Stanbury and Chrystal Macmillan complained at the language of the National Union's address to the electors "as not confining support of the Labour candidate on Suffrage grounds". The Executive agreed, and took particular exception to one paragraph and the use of the word "class". It asked the EFF committee to remind its organisers that addresses to Electors in support of Labour candidates should base that support on the suffrage issue only.³

Other than this the National Union gave the campaign its full support, providing £75 for the hire of cars for the election. The Liberal retained the seat, but Labour, fighting for the first time, polled 4165 votes. It was again estimated by a member of the Labour Party that the National Union's intervention had been worth 1000 votes to their candidate, and another was sufficiently moved to pen a series of poems,

For the lady workers in the division, whose
labours resulted I'm confident in converting

1. NUWSS Council Meeting, EFF report n.d. (July 1913) CMP
2. C. Gordon to Kathleen Courtney 3 June 1913, CMP, NUWSS Executive Minutes 20 February 1913
3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 6 March 1913

many to Labourism ... all over the division they were well received ... The workers claim for *direct* parliamentary representation, and the women's for the vote, stand on the same basis — i.e. of social justice.¹

It is clear, that through EFF work many suffragists in this area had become more closely involved with Labour politics. In Mid-Durham the National Union's organiser, Miss Dring, went to the Revision Court as Labour Agent. Catherine Marshall's notes on the state of organisation in the Houghton constituency after the election show that 11 new ILP branches had been formed, largely at the instigation of suffragist workers, and had weekly joint meetings with the five suffrage societies. The local suffragists also had two representatives on the Houghton LRC (this was clearly an "unofficial" LRC, but this does not diminish it as evidence of the close relationship that existed between Labour and Suffrage locally).² Labour Party records show that in October 1913 its Executive received a request from the North East Federation of the National Union for "Head Office to take the lead in initiating a local LRC in the Houghton-le-Spring Division". Head Office decided to consult with the Miners Federation on their intention of continuing to support a candidate, before taking further action. The following year the Labour Party Executive's Organisation and Electoral Sub Committee reported that two National Union branches had sent representatives to the conference of 25th April, preliminary to establishing a local LRC. It was resolved that "the attendance of such organisations for the purpose of the selection of a candidate would be an irregular proceeding, and the

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1. *ibid* 13 March 1913. Joseph Storey to Catherine Marshall 18 April 1913 Catherine Marshall draft article EFF By-Elections circa 26 November 1913. CMP. The election result was J.E. Wing Liberal 6930, T. Richardson, Unionist 4807, W. House, Labour 4165. See McKibbin p.83-4 for an assessment of this result.
 2. NUWSS Council, EFF report n.d. (July 1913); Catherine Marshall's notes on EFF 26 May 1913, CMP

convenors of the conference be informed accordingly".¹ Meanwhile suffragists in the North East were actively trying to encourage Labour candidatures elsewhere in their area — in Bishop Auckland, Mid-Durham and Chester-le-Street.²

During the period the EFF committee struggled to retain some degree of control over its local committee in the North East. In February 1913 the National Union Executive decided that the members of all local EFF committees should be subject to the approval of the central committee, but it never appears to have succeeded in pinning down the North Eastern committee on this subject.³

Clementina Gordon, the EFF organiser in the area, argued that she did not have EFF committees of the same type as other federations.

We tried in Gateshead, but have found by experience that such are not the best methods of getting work out of the Labour Party. Hence we now have Committees for organisation only, formed of representatives of the branches of the ILP and of the National Union in the constituency concerned. Should certain members be unable to attend through the three-shift system or for any other reason, proxies are sent. Thus though the majority of the committee remain the same there are slight variations in its personnel. Hence it is impossible for us to send an exact list of members to headquarters.

She requested that as it was responsible for organisation only, not policy, it should be exempted from the ruling. Any doubt or difficulty was always referred back to the officers of the Federation, and their ruling passed back to the local EFF committee. There is no record of the matter being finally settled.⁴

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1. Labour Party Executive Minutes 8 October 1913; Organisation and Electoral Sub-Committee 6 May 1914, LPA
 2. Catherine Marshall's notes on EFF 26 May 1913, CMP
 3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 6 February 1913
 4. *ibid* 4 July 1914, C.M. Gordon to G.W. Evans 12 June 1913, C.M. Gordon to Catherine Marshall 4 August 1913, CMP. The EFF had also had to insist to Clementina Gordon that she should not send independent reports of her work to the *Labour Leader*, EFF Minutes 23 June 1912

c) The West Riding Federation and the Rotherham EFF Campaign

Elsewhere among National Union societies the EFF policy continued to encounter a more mixed success. The Secretary of the West Riding Federation, Helena Renton, favoured the EFF policy but found herself at odds with other local suffragists when she tried to form a local EFF committee.¹ She had to report a further disappointment in Holmfirth, where the National Union had hoped to maintain some of the organisation begun in the 1912 by-election. The secretary of the local society had told her:

That things are not going well indeed the society appears to be going to pieces ... Miss Meikle who worked in the constituency is of the opinion that it will be quite impossible to have a strong non-party society in view of the EFF work that will be done, do you think therefore it would be better to concentrate on forming a good local EFF committee rather than to try to bolster up the present society.

Interestingly, Catherine Marshall underlined this passage and annotated the margin with the answer "Yes". Involvement in EFF work clearly did undermine *in practice* the National Union's commitment to a "non-party" position. Eventually Holmfirth was dropped from the EFF's operations, presumably for lack of local support.² Meanwhile Helena Renton carried on with the plans for a campaign among miners' lodges and other trades union branches.

Her trials came not only from those local suffragists opposed to the new policy. The activities of the EFF organiser in Rotherham, Mrs Oldham, became a cause for concern too. Mrs Oldham had proved an exceptionally able organiser for EFF work.³ When the possibility of

1. Helena Renton to Catherine Marshall, 2 April, 4 April, 6 May 1913, CMP
 2. Helena Renton to M. MacKenzie 2 April, 9 April 1913, CMP
 3. Mrs Oldham's Scheme for Work in Rotherham n.d. (circa December 1913). CMP; Tom Richardson, Labour MP for Whitehaven was reported to have spoken "with real enthusiasm of Mrs Oldham. Her evident capacity seem to have made a great impression on him, and he is delighted that she is going to Cumberland. He has enthused about Rotherham to the other Labour men", Margaret Robertson to Catherine Marshall 29 May 1913, CMP

running a Labour candidate in Rotherham arose in 1914, Mrs Renton began to feel that Mrs Oldham's commitment to Labour representation outweighed that to the National Union disliking her involvement with what she saw as a conspiracy on the part of the local Labour supporters to ensure a Labour candidate for their constituency.¹ Mrs Oldham reported in July 1914 that she had been assured that 10% of the election expenses could be found locally,

But the £50 a year which Mr Hodge demands towards the agent's salary will be a difficulty, he said that if we could give that, it would settle the only remaining difficulty, and that if it is thought better not to divulge from whom it came even to the parliamentary committee ... he could simply say that he would guarantee the £50 annually towards the agent's expenses, and they would take his guarantee and not question as to where it came from.²

Catherine Marshall explained such an arrangement would be impossible. The TUC and ILP insisted that the local societies should provide adequate shares of an election fund as a guarantee that they would back up a Labour candidate effectively.

For any outside organisation, or even for any wealthy individual who was in sympathy with the Labour demand, to supply these funds would frustrate this purpose; and for us to supply this money in some roundabout way which would not be accepted by the Labour Party if it were done openly would be an unfriendly as well as a dishonest action.

If a local fund were opened the EFF could contribute a "reasonable share towards it" but "we cannot be a party to supporting a *fictitious* demand for a candidate".³

Mrs Oldham replied sharply that she understood all this,

However Rotherham is in a unique position and I have talked on the political situation to every

1. Helena Renton to Catherine Marshall 10 June 1914
 2. Mrs Oldham to Catherine Marshall 24 June 1914
 3. Catherine Marshall to Mrs Oldham 14 July 1914, CMP

trade unionist here who counts I know the position thoroughly. If we find the £50 a year towards the agent's salary, we fight Rotherham, if we don't, it may be impossible to fight as Mr Hodge lays down this £50 p.a. as part of the conditions,

(i.e. to get a Steel Smelters candidate. Hodge was an official of that union). Catherine Marshall telegraphed:

Impossible to agree to suggestion. Please do nothing in the matter.¹

But soon after, Mrs Oldham was able to report that at a recent local meeting it had been agreed that Walker, of the Steelsmelters, should be adopted. The money for the agent's salary had been guaranteed and £120 for election expenses was to be raised by local trades unionists, at 6d a head for the election and 3d for the agent. She was collecting the new register the next day and was now to concentrate on this work.

Helena Renton sent an independent report of the meeting, including the information that 20 local trades union representatives had been unanimous in selecting Walker, and she "felt he would be a most popular candidate". He was to receive a deputation from the local National Union members, and a joint campaign was being planned for the autumn.²

As in Manchester and the North East, EFF organisers in the area were often increasingly absorbed into local Labour organisation. For example, the East Leeds Labour Party had put the EFF organiser, Miss Hilston, on its executive. Helena Renton recorded "they would have asked me too had I been a member of the party but for the sake of the Federation I don't feel justified in joining".³

d) EFF Activity in East Bristol

As has been shown reaction from the Bristol Society on the adoption

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1. H. Oldham to Catherine Marshall 15 July 1914, Catherine Marshall to Oldham, telegram 16 July 1914, CMP
 2. H. Oldham to Catherine Marshall 31 July 1914, Helena Renton to Marshall 31 July 1914, CMP
 3. Helena Renton to Catherine Marshall 27 July 1914, CMP

of East Bristol by the EFF had been variable. When the society did agree to cooperate with the new policy at the end of 1912, three members of its committee resigned.¹ No local EFF committee was formed, and the organiser, Mrs Townley, worked directly under the London headquarters. A special campaign during 12-26 April 1913 was followed by registration work in the constituency. Mrs Townley reported that the campaign had been a success "especially among the Committee (of the National Union branch) themselves who never before had heard Labour speeches, or met Labour men ... You will be glad to know I am billed for the Great Labour Demonstration hear (sic) on May 4th representing women's suffrage". She had hopes that a joint suffrage-labour committee would be formed for further work.²

In July it was reported that the situation was "still rather critical and difficult owing to the withdrawal of the candidate". Another was found, but again finance provided problems.

The LRC and trades unions are waiting the definite news that the ILP can finance Ayles' candidature, and it is necessary to let them know as soon as possible, as they are getting impatient, there is a large section in favour of Tillett ... Mrs Townley says this morning that if a grant is made it can be sent to the local ILP treasurer, which is much more satisfactory than the other method she suggested of an anonymous contribution to Ayles himself, of course we should hardly do this again after Holmes, I expect.³

The Bristol Society's continuing reservations are clear when at first they refused to take part in a planned *Daily Citizen* week in December 1913. Alice Clark reported that in the end "we coaxed them

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 2 January, 6 February 1913
 2. *ibid* 20 February, 17 April, 5 June 1913; Mrs Townley to Catherine Marshall 28 April 1913, CMP (my parentheses)
 3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 3 July 1913. G. Evans to Catherine Marshall 12 September 1913, CMP. Holmes had had to be dropped as an EFF candidate in Crewe, after starting negotiations with the local Liberal Party. In the meantime it appears he had been receiving financial assistance from the National Union

round and are going to try to persuade the *Daily Citizen* to have something about us in during that week. I wanted to help Labour if we possibly could".¹ EFF activity most certainly helped to maintain the Labour organisation in this constituency, but was not critical to plans to run a Labour candidate in the next election.²

e) The Scottish Federation and the EFF Policy

For its part, the Scottish Federation, while doing a considerable amount of EFF work, was badly split on the issue. While a number of the Edinburgh Society were deeply involved in the new policy, the Glasgow Society was to be one of its most consistent opponents.

Tension between the two factions was to grow as the Edinburgh activists increasingly felt themselves hampered by the attitudes of Scottish Federation officers. Alice Low, one of the Edinburgh suffragists, wrote to Catherine Marshall in November 1913:

I am worried about EFF work altogether, and a discussion with you would probably clear the air. I feel that we should be making some plans for the General Election ... Miss Gordon, Miss Pressley-Smith and I are the only people who know anything whatever about EFF work, and my own private impression is that the Officers of the Scottish Federation are all against the policy.³

This impression was confirmed in Catherine Marshall's notes on a conversation with Lisa Gordon, of the Edinburgh Society, which show that that Society "wants grants (from EFF) paid direct to their Treasurer, they object to being interfered with by the Federation and if the grant is

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1. Alice Clark to Catherine Marshall 17 November 1913, CMP
 2. East Bristol appears on Arthur Peters' list as a "selected" constituency. McKibbin notes this indicated "only formal sanction had yet to be given", op cit pp.73-75
 3. Alice Low to Catherine Marshall 25 November 1913. Earlier in the year she had had to write about the organiser Miss Pressley-Smith who "if the Scottish Federation insist on taking her away for ordinary work she has asked me to say that she will resign from the Federation if the EFF Committee will retain her", Low to Marshall 29 July 1913, CMP

paid to the Federation it considers it can interfere in the spending of it". Lisa Gordon advised:

If North East Lanark is to be worked let it be done from headquarters, don't let Scottish Federation do it as their EFF policy consists of suffrage propaganda only. If Miss Pressley-Smith could have a helper they could do it between them but Edinburgh will not agree to doing it under the Federation.

Apparently, the Edinburgh Society had nearly split away from its Federation on this question of interference and "only remain to strengthen the Federation". Catherine Marshall decided to write to the Federation first, before deciding further on the question of where to direct EFF grants.¹

Despite a visit Catherine Marshall made to Edinburgh at this time, at least in part because of this dispute, the trouble evidently continued. Part of the cause of it is indicated in a letter Catherine Marshall wrote to W.C. Anderson, thanking him for replying to a letter from an opponent of the Labour Party's alliance with the National Union in the *Labour Leader*,

I am very glad that he has at last said publicly what he has ever since last autumn been repeating more or less privately up and down the country, making cooperation between your branches and ours very difficult in many cases, especially in Scotland. His machinations almost succeeded in wrecking our work in Leith Burghs (EFF by-election). The latest evidence of his work has reached me in the refusal of the Glasgow ILP to join in a demonstration being organised by our Glasgow Society. I think the personal attitude of some of the members of our Glasgow Committee may have something to do with this (this between ourselves). I shall be very glad to know if this is so, for a special reason. We are engaged just now in rather difficult negotiations about EFF work with our Scottish Federation. The difficulty is largely due to the fact that we

1. Catherine Marshall's annotated notes of a conversation "Edinburgh Society Miss Lisa Gordon" n.d. 1913, CMP

consider certain people whom they wish to put on the Scottish Election Fighting Fund Committee as unsuitable for that work ... If you can throw any light on it I shall be very grateful.

The Glasgow Society was apparently attempting to continue its opposition to the EFF policy, which had been unsuccessful at a series of National Union Councils, by infiltrating the EFF committee for Scotland.¹

Despite such divided councils and organised opposition, some EFF campaigns did take place in Scotland.² In Midlothian work continued after the by-election of 1912. Alice Low believed it held "an important strategic position . If worked well the Liberal would not be returned again, but if left it could ^bve won back by them."³

Early on work had been begun in Leith Burghs where it was believed EFF work could influence the attitude of the anti-suffragist Liberal MP, R. Munro Ferguson, and keep "him up to the mark". This work was intensified later in 1913, when it was heard that Peters was negotiating for a Labour candidate in the constituency, and "the working women there being most anxious that we should start regular fortnightly meetings". When Leith by-election occurred in February 1914 the EFF was able to run an active campaign in conjunction with the Women's Labour League. The result was a unionist Suffragist elected by a majority of 16, while Labour polled 3346. The campaign continued after the election with registration work and joint propaganda meetings with Labour. Shortly

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1. Catherine Marshall to W.C. Anderson 8 June 1914, CMP. A short extract which survives from the Scottish Federation Executive 30 May 1914 almost certainly pertains to this. It seems that the Scottish Federation Executive hoped to put a leading member of the Glasgow Society, Andrew Ballantyne, on to the Scottish EFF committee, despite the fact he was very active with the local Liberal Party. A resolution was passed "that the Scottish Federation agrees that it is bound to carry out the policy of the NUWSS as interpreted by the NUWSS Executive but cannot agree that "policy" includes the appointment of committees, but claim the right under the NUWSS constitution to appoint its own committees and carry out electoral work in its own area", Muirhead collection, Baillie's Library, Glasgow
 2. Scottish Federation List of Constituencies n.d. circa summer 1913; M. MacKenzie to Catherine Marshall 20 April 1913, CMP
 3. Alice Low to Catherine Marshall 29 July 1913, CMP

before the outbreak of war the Edinburgh organiser could report there were 12 suffragists on local Labour ward committees in Leith and Musselburgh.¹

f) The South Wales Federation and the EFF Policy

The South Wales Federation of the National Union remained fixedly opposed to the EFF, though work in North Monmouth was continued nonetheless by organisers sent from headquarters. At first the organiser was instructed to work the constituency on ordinary propaganda lines only, in the hope that the Federation would finally come round. Eventually, however, it was necessary to tell the Federation officers that "National Union organisers cannot suppress the policy of the National Union and that if it were impossible for them to fulfil these conditions in South Wales it would be necessary to withdraw the organiser". This seems to have brought forth no response, and a month later the National Union Executive had to inform the Federation that the work was "too urgent to admit of further delay."²

The EFF organiser in North Monmouth, Miss Hilston, reported hopefully after early work in Blaenavon (which she described as "the Gibraltar of Liberalism in the constituency"). She had "almost convinced" the President of the local Liberal women's organisation (who was also president of the local BWTA), a local curate and the Wesleyan Minister's wife. The local Labour organisations, the ILP, WCG and Trades and Labour Council, were also responding well, with several women's suffrage resolutions passed.³

The South Wales Federation appear to have hoped to re-gain the

1. Alice Low to Catherine Marshall 30 May, 29 July 1913; M.A. Pressley-Smith to Marshall 1 August 1914, CMP; *The Forward* 21, 28 February, 7 March 1914. The result of the Leith by-election was:
 Provost Malcolm Smith, Liberal 5143
 G.W. Currie, Unionist 5159
 J.N. Bell, Labour 3346

2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 6, 20 February 1913

3. Miss Hilston to M. MacKenzie 20 April 1913, CMP

initiative by announcing its plan to form a local EFF committee. However, when the National Union Executive and Catherine Marshall stressed that its members would have to be sanctioned by the Central EFF committee, the idea appears to have been dropped. The South Wales Federation further embarrassed the National Union by announcing in its Annual Report "There has been no by-election in the Federation area, and we have received an assurance that the EFF policy will not be put in force in our area without our consent". This brought an angry letter from the North East Federation to National Union headquarters.¹

Hilston reported continuing good progress among local Labour supporters, but stressed the need for better Labour organisation. Peters had suggested to her that the suffragists might help in this by providing funds for an organiser. Miss Hilston stressed "it is so difficult to get them to work here, they always have Committee meetings and conferences, nothing more". She was initiating a women's branch of the ILP, as the WLL had not been able to afford to send an organiser to the area, and was also pressing the WCG to organise a branch in the area. McKenna had lost a lot of ground in the constituency, and it was rumoured that he would not stand there again. She enclosed a report from William Harris of the state of Labour support in the Western Valley, which was very hopeful. Peters supported this view of Labour's prospects in the constituency after a visit there: "I was most impressed with the general outlook ... I am certainly of the opinion that the division should be contested in the interests of Labour".² The EFF committee was able to claim "Until our organisers began their campaign the Labour forces in North Monmouth were content to be represented in Parliament

1. Catherine Marshall's Notes for Miss Price 6 June 1913; Ethel Williams to Catherine Marshall 11 June 1914, CMP
 2. Miss Hilston to Catherine Marshall 21 June 1913; Arthur Peters to Catherine Marshall 1913, CMP

by a Liberal. Our work has been two-fold, in rousing discontent amongst Labour and converting the Trade Unions to Women's Suffrage".¹

EFF By-Elections in 1913 and 1914

As well as the more routine organising of Labour Party support the EFF was involved in a number of three-cornered by-elections in the remaining period before the war. Again these represented by far the least satisfactory aspect of EFF campaigning. Firstly, suffragists continued to experience considerable frustration with the primitive level of much Labour Party election machinery. In the South Lanark by-election, for example, Margaret Robertson decided that EFF organisers would leave the constituency on polling day as there was no —

Systematic canvassing here, and with regard to what casual canvassing has been done we have taken no part in it at all, so we have no personal acquaintance with the voters. We all stayed at Midlothian, and kicked our heels all day — the same at Houghton and the same at Crewe ... it is in vain for us to make any suggestions with a man like Duncan Graham in charge. He will listen to nothing and is absolutely incapable of organising". Graham had both failed to advertise Annot Robinson's three meetings, and had announced Keir Hardie's meeting only two hours beforehand, though he had known of it for a week. Margaret Robertson's report concluded "It is heart-breaking". Another EFF organiser, Clementina Gordon confirmed this impression, "I do not think it is worth our while to stay, the Labour organisation is so bad".²

Even more importantly, however, several of the by-elections illustrated the conflict of loyalties which National Union involvement in such contests could give rise to. To begin with, there was a growing fear among some National Union leaders that many of the EFF organisers were becoming too deeply committed to Labour politics. Such concern was

1. NUWSS Council EFF Report n.d. (July 1913) CMP

2. Margaret Robertson to Catherine Marshall 10 December 1913, C.M. Gordon to Marshall 10 December 1913, CMP. The NUWSS's South Lanark election address provides another interesting example of the kind of issues the suffragist took up — in this case an emphasis on housing and industrial safety. See copy in CMP

evidenced in a resolution put to the National Union Executive in June 1913, that organisers, in speeches or letters to the press, refer to their support for Labour on suffrage grounds only. Given the background of most EFF organisers this was clearly unrealistic, and after discussion this was amended.¹

Further evidence to support such concern was forthcoming when the National Union Executive decided not to run an EFF campaign on behalf of the Labour candidate in the Keighley by-election in December 1913. The Liberal candidate, Sir Stanley Buckmaster, was a committed suffragist, while the Labour Party organisation was felt to be very weak. Consequently it was decided to run a propaganda campaign only. Margaret Robertson argued that the National Union should have taken no part at all in the election if Labour were not to be supported, but headquarters pointed out that propaganda work had begun two weeks before the Labour candidate, Bland, was announced.² The reaction of the National Union's Secretary, Kathleen Courtney was that:

The Keighley business has been a nuisance but I don't regret it as it will have opened the eyes of quite a number of people. Including my own which are open to the fact that Gordon is more Labour than suffrage, and that Margaret Robertson inclines that way. This is serious and may in the future be calamitous. What are we to do about it?³

Margaret Robertson and Clementina Gordon continued their attacks on the decision:

We have never thought that the EFF was bound to take part in every by-election where a satisfactory candidate was run: that would obviously tie us too much. What we did and do maintain is that in any three cornered fight where the Labour Candidate answers all our questions in the affirmative we should take *no part* in the election unless we are prepared to support ... It is not sufficient to have reasons which are satisfactory to ourselves, for our actions, we must

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 5 June 1913

2. For an account of this election and its significance see McKibbin op cit pp.68-70, 83-4

3. Kathleen Courtney to Marshall 17 November 1913; see also Alice Clark to Marshall 17 November and 18 November 1913, CMP

have reasons which can be publicly stated. And what is supposed to have been our main reason for not supporting the Labour candidate at Keighley, viz - that it was a forlorn hope, could not have been published in a printed statement nor given by our speakers as a reason ... We think a deplorable mistake has been made, a mistake which must lower the Labour Party's opinion of our political acumen, in thus proving that the Liberals can still buy off our opposition with fair promises ... We do not consider that the trouble has arisen from the Labour Party's failure to understand our policy but from our own failure to put that policy into practice.¹

A complaint also came from Dr Ethel Williams of the North East Federation:

We are in great trouble over Keighley here but hope to live it down. My belief is that the good Liberal women under the guise of propaganda did support Stanley Buckmaster. Our Labour friends are hurt and bitter to an extent hardly explained by the facts as we know them. I think the said ladies should be told what very serious harm they have done the cause.

Similarly, Margaret Ashton, of the Manchester Society wrote to Catherine Marshall:

I am really relieved that *you* see the seriousness of the whole bother for I do not think Miss Clark does. We can't afford to be thrown by the Labour Party — we have only them to rely on (and a broken reed at that) for the next general election.²

Alice Clark re-iterated the official National Union view:

It is impossible for us to refrain from doing propaganda work, and we had been doing it at Keighley for a fortnight before the Labour man was appointed. We must retain our freedom to be influenced by the suffrage action of the Liberals. Unless the Labour Party are prepared to embarrass the Liberal government in Parliament, we cannot hope to get the Suffrage through without the help of supporters in the Liberal Party. We know very well that the Labour Party are not prepared to embarrass the Liberal government in Parliament.

Alice Clark suggested Margaret Robertson should be co-opted on to the EFF committee:

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1. Margaret Robertson and C. Gordon to Marshall 25 November 1913, CMP
 2. Ethel Williams to Marshall 26 November 1913, Margaret Ashton to Marshall 26 November 1913, CMP (her parentheses)

It is far better for Margaret Robertson to bring us her ideas as she has them and hear the discussion on them and either convince us or be convinced. It would a little detach her from the other organisers which is desirable as she has to criticise their work.

She also wished -

We had a representative from the North East Federation on our EFF committee. They do so much work that I think their point of view would be valuable and I don't think people get so far away if they can discuss things point by point.¹

Similar tensions emerged in the North West Durham by-election in January 1914, which found the National Union opposing one of its own members, the Liberal candidate, Aneurin Williams. Mrs Fawcett received a letter from his wife hoping the National Union did not intend to support the Labour candidate, on the grounds that her husband was a "tried friend" of the cause. This plea was not to be heard and Mrs Fawcett wrote to Kathleen Courtney explaining the decision:

We felt the situation was a difficult one but I believe it would have been the end of the Labour policy if we hadn't supported Mr Stuart ... good deal of work in preparation has been done in the constituency and our people up there are in close touch with the Labour Party; also even the Liberal women have decided not to support Mr Aneurin Williams because of the attitude of the government ... The way suffragists always stand in three cornered contests is exasperating, but no doubt intentional.

Mrs Fawcett wrote a sympathetic reply to Mrs Williams, concluding -

I can only say that if his party were half as good as he is this would never have happened.

Alice Clark's letter to Mrs Williams went even further:

1. Alice Clark to Marshall 28 November 1913. Her views on the Labour Party echoed Philip Snowden "He is sure that the Labour Party won't do anything for us against the Liberals either before or after the election. He agrees that the EFF may nevertheless be useful to us as causing the Liberals uneasiness in the country. He thinks the miners friendly only because they want our help. I think that even such friendliness is of great value to us", Alice Clark to Marshall, n.d. circa November-December 1913, CMP

The position is a most painful one for us and I trust you believe how deeply we regret appearing to oppose you ... I need hardly say that if Mr Stuart (the Labour candidate) fails we shall all be extremely gratified by your success.¹

A Vice President of the Gateshead Society, Dr Dunn, wrote threatening to resign if Mrs Fawcett could not provide a satisfactory explanation for the National Union's action, believing the EFF was now unnecessary

In view of the present widespread unrest within the Liberal Party caused by the increasing number of its members who are taking a stand in favour of women's suffrage — an unrest which Mr Lloyd George has recently declared will soon become intolerable; and in view of Mr Philip Snowden's recent frank though unwilling admission in the *Englishwoman* that to the Liberal Party only can we look to carry women's suffrage.²

The chairman of the Gateshead Society assured Mrs Fawcett this reaction was important, coming from a man who had the previous year withdrawn all his subscriptions from local Liberal organisations to give them to local suffrage societies, and given up all active work for the Liberal Party. She reported that another Vice President had already resigned, and concluded "I am sure that many Liberals will be alienated by such action. I am sure the National Union cannot afford to lose so much Liberal support, so I feel obliged to protest".³

Dr Ethel Williams put the opposing view to Mrs Fawcett, who she felt could persuade Dr Dunn and Margaret Temperley not to resign, as they were both very strong suffragists. She hoped to strengthen Mrs Fawcett's resolve in the matter by reporting an incident at a recent Labour meeting.

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1. Helen Aneurin Williams to Mrs Fawcett 5 January 1913 (should read 1914), Mrs Fawcett to Kathleen Courtney 6 January 1913 (should read 1914), Mrs Fawcett to Mrs Williams 7 January 1914, Alice Clark to Mrs Williams 7 January 1914, MGFP
 2. Dr Dunn to Mrs Fawcett 8 January 1914, MGFP. See also Mrs Fawcett's circular letter n.d. (circa December 1913), MPLA M50/2/9/7
 3. Margaret Temperley to Mrs Fawcett 10 January 1914, MGFP

When the suggestion of a joint suffrage-labour campaign was raised, one LRC member had remarked that they did not yet know Stuart's attitude to women's suffrage. At this point "the meeting uprose and said 'If Mr Stuart is not the Women's man, he is not *our* man, *we* don't want him'".¹

Dr Dunn continued to maintain the EFF policy was unsound:

There are many indications, that, like the protest of Professor Gilbert Murray and his associates at Oxford, an increasing number of Liberal electors are taking a strong line in favour of suffrage ... You want to compel the Liberal party (leaders). I don't think you can, I think the compulsion will have to come from the body of the party itself.

Consequently, the National Union should avoid antagonising the Liberal rank and file. While he had to "contemplate the possibility of himself having to vote, later, for a Labour candidate because of the mistaken attitude towards Suffrage of a Liberal" he felt the EFF policy wrong, both because it did not fit the National Union's stance as "non-party", and because he feared it would be ineffective. However, the crisis eventually blew over, and Dr Dunn, Margaret Temperley and Mrs Williams remained members of the National Union.²

Resistance to EFF Policy within the National Union

The resistance to the EFF policy which the North West Durham by-election had provoked was further strengthened in January 1914, when the National Union Executive made a statement on future EFF policy to the ILP Annual Meeting in Glasgow. This discussed what would happen to the policy should the Liberal Party decide to take up women's suffrage as part of its programme for the next general election. It guaranteed that even though the National Union would no longer feel able to oppose the

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1. Ethel Williams to Mrs Fawcett 15 January 1914, MGFP
 2. Dr Dunn to Mrs Fawcett 16 January 1914, Margaret Temperley to Mrs Fawcett 17 January 1914, Mrs Williams to Mrs Fawcett 19 January 1914, Dr Ethel Williams to Mrs Fawcett 23 January 1914, MGFP (my parentheses)

Liberal Party as such, in those circumstances it would nonetheless maintain its existing commitments to Labour candidates, and would undertake not to support any candidates standing in opposition to those of Labour.¹

Chrystal Macmillan and Eleanor Rathbone, at the National Union's Executive meeting requested the withdrawal of such statements as "ultra vires", inasmuch as they elaborated on National Union election policy without the sanction of the National Union's Council.² Catherine Marshall, with a majority on the Executive, resisted this request on the grounds that "the Glasgow statement was an interpretation of policy (i.e. of what was implicit in the present policy) and not a new decision."³

In the meantime Eleanor Rathbone and three other members of the Executive were organising opinion within the National Union against the EFF policy, again around the issue of what should constitute National Union policy at the general election. This brought a reprimand from Mrs Fawcett but the campaign continued. To settle this crisis, the Half-Yearly Council was moved forward from July to April. The Executive's resolution recommended that no further decision concerning policy at a general election, beyond that outlined in February 1913, be taken until one was announced, when a Special Council would be called to consider all possible courses. It also implied criticism of those members of the Executive who had involved themselves in organising opinion in opposition to policy already decided by Council.⁴

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1. Statement made by a NUWSS Deputation to the ILP NAC at Glasgow on 26 January 1914, CMP. The statement was felt necessary because at a conference of the North West Division of the ILP it had been claimed the National Union intended opposing Labour candidates at the general election, *The Common Cause* 23, 30 January 1914
 2. Chrystal Macmillan to Marshall 8 April 1914, Marshall circular to Executive 17 April 1914; extract from NUWSS Executive Minutes 5 February 1914, CMP
 3. Catherine Marshall to Macmillan 20 April 1914. See also Marshall circular to Executive 17 April 1914, Macmillan Circular to Executive 20 April 1914, CMP
 4. Mrs Fawcett to Eleanor Rathbone 8 March 1914, MGFP. Additions to Resume of Executive Minutes 5 March and 19 March 1914, and NUWSS circular letter 21 March 1914, Manchester Society Minute Book 1912-14

The main fear of Eleanor Rathbone and her supporters seems to have been that, despite its denials, the National Union Executive intended extending its anti-Liberal policy to the general election context. They insisted they were not against the pro-Labour policy in the twenty-six or so constituencies where the National Union was already committed and agreed "the Labour Party is undoubtedly entitled to preferential treatment by the services they have already rendered us". The Executive for their part insisted they were not arguing for opposition to the Liberals in any circumstance, but against pre-judgment. "It may be best to work for the return of a Liberal Government, but it may not. Our position is that we have not yet sufficient data for deciding which party it will be best to support".¹ The Rathbone group had already decided they did not want to see an anti-Liberal general election campaign, and feared that a pro-Labour policy went hand-in-hand with support for Unionist candidates elsewhere.²

Even though Eleanor Rathbone, and her supporters, were defeated at the National Union Council, disquiet continued to be expressed, particularly among Liberal supporters of the National Union. M.A. Marshall of the Haslemere Society reported that she and two others were now the only EFF supporters on her local branch committee. Agnes Gill of the Sheffield Society wrote to Mrs Renton:

You cannot have any idea of the feeling aroused amongst Liberals here by the action of the National Union in North East Derbyshire ... (who) say if

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1. Executive's Circular to Members of the NUWSS Committee and Delegates to the Half Yearly Council; Memorandum on resolutions concerning general election policy on the agenda of the Half Yearly Council by the committee for the Discussion of General Election Policy Manchester Society Minute Book 1912-14
 2. Committee for Discussion of General Election Policy Memo pp.3-4, Manchester Society Minute Book. Evidence in Catherine Marshall's papers that the NUWSS was organising suffrage support within the Unionist Party at this time confirm the reality of these fears, and indicate that at least some part of the Executive already were preparing for an anti-Liberal campaign during the general election, see Chapter 10

you have turned your society into a Tory organisation
you must fight your own battles.

Others say:

Ask your friends the Tories to help you. What are
we to do?

Maud Dowson of the East Midland Federation confirmed this reaction:

All our Liberal members wrote to have their names
taken off our books, when the National Union adopted
anti-government policy. Of course we knew they would
and it is only natural. We forfeited a tremendous
amount of help by adopting that policy — I still
get continual reports of resignations in the Branches
(of *officials* and members).¹

Such evidence however appears to reflect a polarisation of attitudes within the National Union rather than simply a weakening of support for the EFF. Catherine Marshall was able to argue to one doubter that the policy was not losing ground. She denied that a vote for a motion by Eleanor Rathbone at the Council had been anti-EFF policy, but simply indicated a desire for no further extension of the policy to any new constituencies in preparation for the general election. She countered this example with the fact that a Newcastle resolution at the November Council to extend the EFF far more broadly had only been lost by ten votes. Further, she argued that the fact that EFF work had been entirely self-supporting, and had not yet had to draw on general National Union funds (though this was now possible) illustrated the scale of its support. "Indeed it has carried out a large amount of propaganda among trades unions which might quite legitimately have counted as ordinary National Union work i.e. the National Union has practically received financial help from the EFF instead of giving it". She might also have argued that the continual rapid increase in National Union membership

1. M.A. Marshall to Catherine Marshall 5 June 1914, Agnes Gill to Helena Renton 11 June 1914, Maud Dowson, Hon. Sec., East Midland Federation to Mabel Crookenden 13 June 1913, CMP (her parentheses)

was evidence that the EFF was not damaging National Union support — it was frequently stated that the National Union was enrolling at the rate of 1000 new members a month.¹

Closer inspection of both the membership figures and EFF finances modify this picture a little. If the rate of enrolment of 1000 a month is matched to the increase in total membership of the National Union for the years 1912-14, it is clear that there was a considerable turnover in membership, i.e. while many were joining, many were also leaving.² While Catherine Marshall's description of EFF finances was true up to this time — Spring 1914 — the estimated expenditure for the next quarter outstripped the funds in hand, and for the first time it was necessary to draw on the Transferable Fund, and another £1000 from general funds was set aside for probable expenditure in the quarter following that.³

Though donations continued to come in they were on a relatively small scale, with an occasional larger donation. By November 1913 it was announced that the EFF had raised £6923,⁴ since its inception — but over two-thirds of this had been collected by the end of 1912. The financial support of EFF policy becomes harder to calculate after the inauguration of the Transferable Fund and the Women's Suffrage Mandate fund. The latter was specifically for preparations for the next general election, and therefore would have attracted similar subscribers to the EFF. Reports of EFF and Women's Suffrage Mandate Fund donations in *The Common Cause* indicate that the two were seen as inter-related.⁵ Hence it

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1. Marshall to Miss Gunter 24 April 1914, CMP; for membership claims see *The Common Cause* 21 March 1913, Marshall to Lord Lansdowne 9 August 1913, CMP
 2. 1912 membership 42438)
1913 membership 52336) NUWSS Annual Reports 1912-1915
1914 membership 54592)
 3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 2 April 1914
 4. *The Common Cause* 21 November 1913
 5. *ibid* 22 May, 5 June 1914

is not possible to assess the popularity of the EFF simply by the rate of donations which were coming to it directly.

It would seem probable that the increasingly near possibility of a general election, together with the controversy which surrounded the Rathbone committee and the Keighley and North East Derby by-elections, was causing many National Union supporters to re-consider their position on the EFF policy. A letter from three officers of the Highgate Society highlights the problem that confronted many. They had never been able to arouse much enthusiasm for the EFF and now —

We find it increasingly difficult to raise funds or to obtain new membership. Those in favour of women's suffrage now frequently prefer to join either the Conservative and Unionist Franchise Association or one of the two new movements among Liberals — The Men's or Women's Suffrage Union. Present members are also joining these associations and seem increasingly disposed to divert the bulk of their financial help from the National Union. Many of them refuse to accept our definition of 'Non-Party' and unless some modification of the policy is agreed upon we fear that at a General Election we should lose some of our most active members, and only receive lukewarm support from others.

While they agreed the EFF policy should be continued in constituencies where the National Union was already committed, they also requested that otherwise the local societies should be allowed to support either a Conservative or Liberal candidate if he was a proved suffragist. Their own MP, W.H. Dickenson, had been much involved with the Conciliation Bills and they would want to support him. "It is hardly too much to say that the future of our branch depends on the attitude we adopt to this excellent friend to our Cause".¹

The effect of the EFF on the National Union itself in terms of membership and financial resources would seem, then, to present a very

1. Martha Garnett, Augusta Harrington and Ethelwynne Bowman to Marshall n.d. circa July 1914, CMP

mixed picture. While many committed Liberals left over the policy others welcomed the chance they felt it offered as a corrective to their Party. One donor to the EFF sent her contribution "To help purge my once beloved party — the party which still represents so much that is dear to me and is only going astray on *one* point — of those reactionaries and wobblers against whom I feel an indignation that no woman who is not a Liberal can fully share".¹

By Spring 1914 however, the tide for the EFF seemed to be turning. No doubt there were a wide variety of reasons for this; anger at the torpedoing of the Conciliation Bills and the withdrawal of the Reform Bill would now have ebbed; the approach of a general election would revive old party loyalties; the continuing ambivalence of some Labour leaders, particularly Macdonald, towards the suffragists and the performance of the Parliamentary Labour Party on issues like the Plural Voting Bill and the women's suffrage amendment to the Irish Home Rule Bill will have disillusioned many. If, as seems likely, the National Union leadership had decided to back the Labour Party in the next general election, they would almost certainly have had to confront a serious internal division among their own rank-and-file membership.

1. *The Common Cause* 4 July 1912

CHAPTER 10 : SUFFRAGE POLITICS 1913-14

National Union policy from January 1913, was aimed at securing a government bill on women's suffrage, and recognized that this goal could not be secured within the life of the existing Parliament. What was sought, therefore, was a commitment on the part of the Liberal government to include women's suffrage in its next election programme. The evidence suggests that such a success was in sight in the weeks before the outbreak of war.

The part played by the National Union's EFF policy in securing the Labour Party's commitment to votes for women was a critical element in this advance. But in the period 1913-14 suffragists were also exerting other pressures on the Liberal government which strengthened their position. To begin with, Liberal suffragist Ministers were successfully pressured to increase their public association with the suffrage cause, by both the National Union and organised women Liberal suffragists. Secondly, the National Union undertook the organisation of suffrage opinion within the Conservative Party and by the outbreak of war had established the possibility of women's suffrage becoming part of a Conservative Party election initiative. Finally, the growing body of dissidents within the militant wing of the movement were also proving successful in mobilising working class support behind votes for women, while moving into an increasingly close alliance with revolutionary socialist groups. Consequently, the failing fortunes of the WSPU during this period cannot be taken as adequate indication of the progress of the suffrage cause in the period immediately prior to the First World War.

The National Union and the Liberal Government

National Union parliamentary activity during this period ensured that "the Government should find the women's suffrage confront them at

every turn" — on the Scottish Home Rule Bill, the Plural Voting Bill, and the Welsh Disestablishment Bill (where an amendment was placed to include women in the Synod).¹

Extra-parliamentary activity during the summer of 1913 concentrated on the highly successful Women's Suffrage Pilgrimage, where suffragist marchers set off from a number of points around the country, converging several weeks later on London, for a major demonstration. Even anti-suffragists within the Cabinet appear to have been impressed by the event.² Mrs Fawcett requested that they receive a deputation from the "pilgrims" with the assertion that suffragists could "hardly believe that you and your Party can regard coercion unaccompanied by any remedial measure as an adequate response to the demand of women to share in the advantages of representative government".³

Asquith agreed to receive the deputation, admitting "I quite recognize that the request which you put forward, after the recent law-abiding demonstration of your societies, has a special claim on my consideration and stands upon another footing from similar demands proceeding from other quarters, where a different method and spirit prevails".⁴ While he warned that he had nothing further to add to his recent statements on the intention and policy of the government, the tone is clearly conciliatory, and represented the first indication of a shift in attitude on Asquith's part.

The main thrust of the National Union's arguments during this meeting was the alliance of the women's suffrage cause with that of democracy, and some speakers were clearly attempting to intimidate the Liberal leaders with evidence of working class backing for the demand.

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 3 July 1913
 2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 31 July 1913, for an account of Reginald McKenna's (anti-suffragist Home Secretary) favourable reaction
 3. Millicent Fawcett to Asquith 26 July 1913, MGFP
 4. Asquith to Mrs Fawcett 31 July 1913, MGFP

Margaret Robertson asserted of the Anti-Suffrage League that "Lord Rothschild had given £3000" while its membership was "running through the gamut of dukes and lords ... What I have found is that working men have discovered this and they are inclined to regard opposition to women's suffrage as a Conservative and Liberal Plutocracy against Democracy".¹

In his reply Asquith both denied that he had been ready to defeat the women's suffrage amendment to the Reform Bill, and agreed that there was no hope for a private member bill without government backing. Some present at the deputation appear to have believed that they had extracted a commitment from him to a women's suffrage measure in the next Parliament, though others disagreed with this interpretation. All in all, the National Union was considerably heartened by its reception, claiming that Asquith "had seemed genuinely impressed by the Pilgrimage and by the speeches made by members of the Deputation". *The Common Cause* felt able to claim that the issue was now being seen "as a question, not of sex, but of democracy".² Certainly this was the aspect of the matter which Asquith chose to stress when he received a deputation from the militant East London Federation of Suffragettes the following year.

Catherine Marshall also arranged that a deputation of the "pilgrims" should attend on the suffragist Ministers in the Cabinet, in the hope that they would make some public commitment on the issue.³ Negotiating with Lloyd George beforehand, Catherine Marshall elaborated on the suffragists' grievances against the Liberal government, particularly in its handling of the abortive Reform Bill and its failure to give adequate facilities to the two earlier Conciliation Bills. She concluded:

1. Quoted in Morgan *Suffragists and Liberals*, p.125
 2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 September 1913; *The Common Cause*, 15 August 1913
 3. Catherine Marshall draft letter to Lloyd George 5 August 1913, CMP; NUWSS Executive Minutes 31 July 1913

You will see that it is not unnatural that some people have despaired of getting fair treatment and honourable treatment from the present Liberal government.

She hoped for some better results from the deputation.

If you can give us some definite limit to the time we shall have to wait it will make a great difference, and might even bring about a truce from militancy.¹

Nonetheless the Suffragist Ministers' reception of the deputation was to prove far less successful in the National Union's eyes than that to the anti-suffragists in the Cabinet. In a letter sent to the suffragist Ministers after the deputation the National Union acknowledged "the importance of your undertaking to speak on women's suffrage in the country and of Mr Lloyd George's offer to have a suffragist speaker on his platform", but they were disappointed no more had been offered. The suffragist Ministers had insisted on the unpopularity of the issue in the country, though the deputation bore fresh evidence of the widespread support for the demand throughout the country. They had refused any more definite commitment until Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment had been successfully settled "when the position of the suffragists in the Cabinet would be different", and had simply advised the National Union to "rehabilitate" the cause and make it popular.

The National Union denied that such work was any longer necessary. If a positive response was not forthcoming at Liberal party meetings at which the Suffragist Ministers had spoken it was the fault of the Liberal Party which

Has done its best to put women's suffrage in the class of unapproved subjects. You will never get applause for women's suffrage at a party meeting till you speak of it not as a personal idiosyncrasy to be apologised for, but as a fundamental part of your political creed. Women's suffrage will never be popular in your sense of the word till you have made it so.

1. Catherine Marshall to Lloyd George 6 August 1913, Lloyd George Papers (henceforth LGP) C/9/5/8, House of Lords Record Office

It was militancy not women's suffrage which was unpopular, and was in itself due to the government's failure to cope with the issue or keep its pledges.¹

Catherine Marshall continued to court Lloyd George for a greater commitment to the suffrage issue. She hoped to be able to come and consult with him after the safe passage of Irish Home Rule and Welsh Dis-establishment, "but do persuade some of your less busy colleagues that if they mean business about women's suffrage they really ought to keep in touch with the work that is being done by the NUWSS". Meantime suffrage activists were needing a rest after the efforts of the past five years, but would continue organising work until the government was ready to provide another chance "which will not be before the next election, and perhaps not then". She then revealed her own personal hope "unless you are going to do what I have always hoped you meant to do, start a really effective demand for Adult Suffrage (which there never has been yet) at the same time as your land campaign. It would be a grand programme on which to go to the country".²

At this time another pro-suffragist Minister began to come to the fore in the National Union's calculations, Sir John Simon. In November 1913 he agreed to receive a suffrage deputation in Manchester. It included representatives from the Manchester Society of the National Union, the National Union Executive, the National Labour Party, the Liberal group on the Manchester City Council, the Manchester Labour Representation Committee, as well as individual male Liberal party workers. Catherine Marshall's notes show that very careful preparations preceded this meeting.³

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1. Millicent Fawcett et al to Suffragist Ministers 11 August 1913, MGFP; Catherine Marshall to Lloyd George 10 August, 11 August 1913, LGP C/9/5/11 and C/9/5/12
 2. Catherine Marshall to Lloyd George 29 August 1913, LGP C/9/5/20
 3. Catherine Marshall's summary of notes for Sir John Simon 12 November 1913, together with more detailed arguments, CMP

C.P. Scott, while declining to join the deputation, shared the National Union's estimate of Simon's importance as a new recruit to their cause. "Simon is, I think, the best man we now have on the suffrage side in the Cabinet. He is not more resolute than Grey, but I think he will do more. Buckmaster is another first-rater and he will be influential, though not in the Cabinet".¹ Margaret Ashton of the Manchester Society introduced the deputation by repeating the earlier request that suffrage Ministers speak on the women's suffrage issue "as an integral part of Liberal principles". G.G. Armstrong spoke as a local Liberal. He stressed his belief that the part of most value in Asquith's pledge to suffragists, the promise of a free vote on the merits of the question "had never yet been fulfilled". Feeling that the Home Rule Bill was now safe he hoped this might be possible. He hoped Simon would "openly proclaim himself a supporter of women's suffrage and would so help to remove the ban on the subject within the Party and make it no longer 'bad form' to refer to this question at Liberal meetings".

Helena Swanwick spoke for the National Union, re-iterating that what they now sought was a government measure. "We recognize that this Parliament is fully pledged to the measures now before it, but we ask that some security shall be given that the Government will, if returned to power again, deal seriously with this question. Especially we ask of you that you will help us in 'putting it before the country'". She quoted Sir Stanley Buckmaster's election campaign where he put only

1. C.P. Scott to Catherine Marshall 13 November 1913, CMP. He did not join the deputation to Sir John Simon as he had mistakenly thought it intended to ask sympathetic Ministers to refuse to serve in any future Cabinet if women's suffrage were not made part of the Liberal Party election programme. He did not think such a commitment should be sought in advance of the actual election, as the circumstances under which it was held would very much determine how wise a request this would be.

three issues before the electors: Home Rule, Welsh Disestablishment and women's suffrage. "I take this to indicate that, when the first two, which are now before the House, are disposed of Sir Stanley Buckmaster considers that women's suffrage has the next claim. This is what we ask". She, too, asked that the "Liberals educate the Electorate and Party by treating the issue not as a 'fad', but a democratic principle".

J.R. Tomlinson, speaking as another Liberal activist, asserted that the majority of the Party was for women's suffrage.

The position therefore now is that the Prime Minister with a minority of Liberals in coalition with a large Tory anti-majority, is enabled to thwart the expressed wish of the majority of his own party. Being, as I said, party Liberals as well as supporters of the Government represented by Sir John Simon, we for whom I speak are more than ever convinced that a bill rejected by the aid of Tory votes, is a good bill. We ask Sir John Simon if he can tell us anything that will allay the consequent irritation and unrest ... and if he can tell us Party Liberals anything that will enable us to work for the party whole-heartedly and unreservedly in the future as in the past.

In reply Simon promised that some of the points that had been raised by the deputation would "find a place in my speech tonight at the Free Trade Hall meeting". He "very bitterly" resented the suggestions that "the Government had not honestly done their utmost to fulfil their pledge", and took some of the blame for the failure of the Reform Bill on himself as he had been so "extremely positive that the Bill as drafted raised the questions which we would want to raise". He accepted that militancy should not affect the commitment of suffragists, but it was damaging opinion among those "friends of women's suffrage who are also devoted followers of the Prime Minister's Government Policy" and who were "naturally antagonised by the gross attacks made on Mr Asquith

by militant suffragists".

He thought the National Union was probably right in going for a government measure, but there could be no question of one that Parliament, with a Cabinet so divided on the issue — "but conditions may alter". Meanwhile they should continue to counteract the bad impression being created by militancy and develop support. "The best thing is to make the most of your Suffragist Ministers and tell them, as you have told me today, not to talk about Women's Suffrage as a fad but a faith".

In concluding the meeting Margaret Ashton repeated that the suffragists continued to feel the government remained under an obligation to fulfil its pledge and that it should "see to it that no other government measures are introduced until this has been satisfactorily dealt with". They were quite prepared to wait until Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment were out of the way but "we do feel that the Suffragist Ministers in the Cabinet should see to it that it is a live issue at the next General Election and that it shall be adopted by the Liberal Government if returned to power". Opinion in the country was ready, but it needed such a lead.¹ The other Minister on whom the National Union kept up persistent pressure was Sir Edward Grey.

Catherine Marshall arranged a confidential meeting with Sir Edward Grey and Francis Acland on 15 December 1913, from which she kept a summary of the discussion. Here she stressed again the danger of the EFF policy being extended to a "policy of blind hostility to Liberals. For the present parting of way. His power. Women's Suffrage most urgent *after Home Rule* — let us know before Council". Catherine Marshall claimed she was seeking anything he could say to strengthen her hand against the proposed development of EFF policy. There was strong feeling

1. Typescript record of the deputation to Sir John Simon 12 November 1913, CMP

particularly in the North East Federation, and general election policy would have to be settled at the Council meeting. If the situation remained unchanged "I should not be prepared to take responsibility for opposing again".

She predicted the National Union could get enough active support from its members to threaten the loss of a good many Liberal seats, noting a "strong feeling against Liberal Government, strong dissatisfaction with leadership. Wholesome to certain extent, but will easily turn to anarchistic policy. We and Labour have already had a great effect on each other". She linked the women's suffrage movement, the labour movement, and the movements for colonial independence and argued "It matters enormously to whole of future civilisation whether these three great movements run on sound and healthy lines or are driven into revolution". After Home Rule women's suffrage was the most urgent issue for settlement. She wanted Grey and the other suffragist Ministers to decide what they intended to do after Home Rule, and let the National Union know before its next Council the following month.¹ It would appear that Grey made some proposal after this meeting. Her notes of questions for Francis Acland a few days later include "Grey's proposal. For *Government* bill or for *facilities*?".² Whatever the nature of this proposal, it was not satisfactory enough to the National Union to prevent the extension of the EFF along the lines described in Chapter 9.

Women Liberals and the Suffrage

While the WLF and the National Union agreed to differ on their policy towards the private member bill of 1913, it is clear there was

1. Sir Edward Grey to Catherine Marshall 4 December 1913; her notes for the meeting 15 December 1913, CMP
 2. Catherine Marshall's notes "To ask Mr Acland" 20 December 1913, CMP

continuing tension and disagreement between suffragists in the National Union and WLF in the period 1910-13. While the National Union felt that women Liberals were not resolute enough in their suffrage commitment, the WLF resented the National Union's electoral alliance with Labour, and was jealous of the influence it sought to exercise over Liberal MPs, as well as its own membership.

A correspondence in Catherine Marshall's papers provides an instance of how this conflict of loyalties could operate at a local level, in an area where the suffrage society was based largely on organised Liberal opinion. The National Union's organiser in Ulverston, Lancashire in early 1913, Elizabeth Coyle, wrote that the local suffrage society had practically lapsed as there was no-one locally to work it. "Mrs Bliss, the Liberal candidate's wife, has given the Liberal women to understand that as her husband is in favour of women's suffrage there is no need for them to work for suffrage and the election policy will not be workable here because Mrs Bliss has them all under her thumb". Twentyfive had joined the society "but they will only pay their 1/- and more than that you will not get from them". She felt it was a waste of National Union time and money for her to remain.¹

The withdrawal of the Franchise Bill and the government's clear intention not to introduce another that Parliament had made the position of committed women Liberal suffragists even more difficult. Eleanor Acland wrote to Catherine Marshall on plans for a new Liberal women's suffrage society. "We Liberal women must have a Liberal suffrage society, distinct (I think) from the WLF which can no longer be quoted as a suffrage society. I know heaps of Liberal suffragists who say how

1. Elizabeth Coyle to Mrs Holden 27 May 1913, CMP. A more hopeful report was passed on to Catherine Marshall by Mrs Holden a little later, n.d. postmark 30 May 1913, CMP. A members meeting had been arranged and a women's suffrage stall was to be opened in the local market, "She hopes now to get a society", CMP

they can't join yours (because of Labour Party pact) and don't know what to join".

She suggested that the EFF policy should be restricted to the 78 Liberal anti-suffragist candidates, without attacking the 100 faithful supporters. "We must have a party Bill. Well then we must have a Bill of a party *strong* enough to carry it. That party will be a Radical-Labour one ... The cleavage in the Liberal party is becoming clearer and in the main it's a double cleavage running on same lines — Whig antis versus Radical-Suffragists".

She advised that the National Union should concentrate on building up its membership. "We Liberal women will do our best with our new suffrage society. I believe we could have 20,000 women one way or another by next year or before the next election".¹

Catherine Marshall reported to the National Union Executive that she had attended the Forward Suffrage Union at the WLF conference, where the proposal for a new Liberal women's suffrage organisation had been discussed. The Forward Suffrage Union had been formed of WLF members in October 1908 "for the purpose of concentrating the activities of Liberal women belonging to any Association affiliated to the WLF on their own enfranchisement". It had achieved little in the four years or so of its existence. Catherine Marshall reported that some Liberal suffragists were asking for guidance as to whether they should remain within the WLF.²

1. Eleanor Acland to Catherine Marshall 7 May 1913, CMP

2. See Forward Suffrage Union (FSU) entry in *The Women's Suffrage Annual and Who's Who-1913*, and compare with FSU's Second Annual Report 7 April 1911, CMP. One example of a Liberal suffragist seeking National Union advice on her future activities was the President of the North West Federation of the National Union, Mrs Cunliffe. She wrote to Mrs Fawcett that she had been disappointed at the WLF Conference's failure to pass strong suffrage resolutions, and she blamed Lady Carlisle's opposition for the defeat of Dickenson's private member bill in March 1913. She asked whether she should resign as President of the Ambleside WLA, estimating she could probably take seven other of its officers with her, as a protest at the attitude of both the government and the WLF. She had originally taken on the position only "to stiffen the Association up on the Suffrage", 9 March 1913, CMP

By early June 1913 the Forward Suffrage Union had formally amalgamated with the new Liberal Women's Suffrage Union (LWSU). The initiative for the new society had come from some members of the WLF Executive. They had been defeated at the recent annual conference of the WLF on their resolution that only those associations should be affiliated which would make women's suffrage a test question for Liberal candidates during elections. The new body's objectives now were to seek the withdrawal of anti-suffragists as Liberal candidates, while working to strengthen the cause within the Liberal Party, for "in many places the Men's Liberal Association were putting great pressure on the Liberal women and endeavouring to prevent them from adopting a strong suffrage policy".¹

The formation of the LWSU must be seen against the background of continuing disaffection among women Liberals. One of Lloyd George's correspondents wrote to ask if he could stop forcible feeding, and enclosing a letter from a friend, Helen Hurst, asking her to use her influence on the question. "Surely Women's Liberals can never stand this real gross injustice — even if men's Liberalism believes in it".²

Another women Liberal suffragist wrote to Mrs Lloyd George "I wish you would put before him some thoughts which we Liberal suffragist women feel about his speech on women's suffrage as reported yesterday". She

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 15 May, 5 June 1913 for Catherine Marshall's reports on the formation of the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union. The officers of the new body were Mrs Eva McLaren, Lady Aberconway, Lady Cowdray, the Hon. Lady Norman, Eleanor Acland, Mrs Heron-Maxwell, Mrs Alderton, Lady Bamford-Slack, Mrs Bonwick, Mrs Conybeare, Miss Crossfield, Mrs Corbett Ashby, Mrs Dowson, Hon. Mrs Fordham, Hon. Mrs Franklin, Alison Garland, Hon. Mrs Guest, Mrs Hancock, Mrs Hawksley, Mrs Holman, Lady Horsley, Bertha Mason, Lucy Morland, Miss Salt, Lady Fisher-Smith, Mrs Handley Spicer, Mrs Stewart-Brown, Winifred Stephens, Miss Swankie Cameron, Lady Yoxall, Mrs Mill, Helen Waddell, see the *Liberal Women's Review* July 1914, W.H. Dickenson Papers, London Record Office F/DCK/2(1914 pt.2). Mrs Corbett Ashby and Mrs Dowson were among the prominent leaders of the National Union who had attempted to prevent the extension of the EFF policy earlier in 1914. The papers of Eleanor and Francis Acland exist and may throw more light on this movement in the Liberal Party in the year or so before the war, but unfortunately they are not yet available for scholarly research.
 2. Mrs E. Nuttall to Lloyd George 24 October 1913, LGP C/10/1/67

was grateful for his support on the issue but rejected his assertion that militancy was the cause of its failure — that responsibility lay with the Cabinet. The large majority of suffrage workers were peaceful, and must be taken to include the members of the NUWW, the women's temperance organisations, the WCG and the WLL.

Look at the bitter injured feelings of the women Liberals too, as shown in our summer meetings all over the country, they are leaving in shoals, and joining the only party honestly pressing women's suffrage, a party which can refuse its own good, Manhood Suffrage, until we get free ... Every bright and clever woman in my Liberal society has left us, I am the only one who spoke and took chairs of them left. It is hard to get our Liberal women to care to go to a meeting now — they laugh at the Government for calling themselves Liberals and democrats ... Can you wonder at our intense gratitude to men like Philip Snowden and Ramsay Macdonald and the Labour associations who value their women and really think they could help England and are needed. They don't talk to Englishwomen as if they were that tiny handful of reckless goaded militants, as Liberal speakers do.¹

By this time the resignation of leading members of the WLF was becoming commonplace,² and the WLF itself was in the process of organisation decline. 1912 had seen the peak of an expansion which had been considerable since the early years of the century — between 1904 and 1912 membership rose from 66,000 to 133,215, while the number of branches had grown from 496 to 837. The annual report for 1912-13 — after the withdrawal of the Liberal's Reform Bill — noted that membership had dropped to 121,888 since the previous year, while 20 branches had withdrawn, and 30 had lapsed. It commented: there can be no real peace or concord in Liberal ranks until the women's suffrage question is settled righteously". This process of decline continued the following year, and

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1. Mrs R. Bulley to Mrs Lloyd George, for Lloyd George's attention, October 1913, LGP C/10/1/68
 2. e.g. see letter from Mrs Egerton Stewart-Brown, President of the Lancashire and Cheshire Union of WLAs to *The Manchester Guardian* 18 June 1913

by 1915 there were only 749 branches with a membership of 106,997.¹

On the formation of the LWSU, Eleanor Acland wrote to Lloyd George asking for his approval for "this new movement which we as Liberal women are starting with the object of obtaining more support within the Liberal Party for a democratic women's suffrage measure *in the next Parliament*. Our policy is to bind together Liberal Suffrage women to work for Liberal suffrage candidates only".² The result was this statement:

The Committee of the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union has received with enthusiasm Mr Lloyd George's message of approval of their new movement to concentrate Liberal efforts on improving the Suffrage position in the Liberal Party in the House of Commons next Parliament.

We thank him further for his most valuable suggestion that we should secure the cooperation of those colleagues whose names he mentioned, Sir Edward Grey and Lord Haldane.

Lloyd George's message further promised —

Help in the conduct of this new movement to raise the matter of the Enfranchisement of Women into the position of a Liberal measure of the first rank.³

Meanwhile, Francis Acland, together with Willoughby Dickenson, were doing their best to draw Grey towards this new initiative within the Liberal Party. They had floated the idea of starting a men's Liberal suffrage society —

On the lines of the new women's society and concentrating on making a suffrage party at and after the General Election ... Dickenson and I played battledore and shuttlecock with it in front of him so attractively that at last he wholly accepted the idea and said he would lead — if he could get George and Runciman and Simon to agree. He promised to see them and

1. WLF Annual Reports 1903-4, 1911-12, 1912-13, 1913-14, 1914-15
 2. Eleanor Acland to Lloyd George 3 November 1913, LGP C/10/2/12
 3. Mildred Ransom to Lloyd George, LGP C/10/2/45 together with undated statement C/10/2/45a

try to get them to help.

For himself Acland was planning to —

Get big chunks of suffrage into 24 speeches between now and the middle of December, three of them suffrage only, and should by then be able to tell you how the different arguments appeal.¹

Lloyd George quickly moved to try and scotch this initiative from Acland, Dickenson and Grey. *The Daily News* columnist P.W. Wilson appears to have acted as his go-between with the LWSU, and put up the following scheme to Eleanor Acland, at the same time seeking Lloyd George's comments on the letter. "Of course the National Union is crying out for a pledge here and now for a government measure but this is impossible. Is it not the important thing to hold *Liberal women?*"²

Wilson's letter to the LWSU contained —

The suggestion of the Liberal Party which we talked about. It is that at some early convenient date Mr Asquith should receive a deputation and pledge the Party, as a party, to confer the vote on women in the next Parliament, if the new House of Commons passes a resolution in favour of that extension of the Franchise. The resolution would deal with women's suffrage only, but the Bill might be either a women's Suffrage Bill alone, or a wider measure for men as well, with women included. In either case it would be a Government measure —

That is, the initiative alone would be left to the House of Commons.

Such a promise should satisfy everyone that Asquith's earlier pledge in 1908 had not been set aside.

Wilson argued that such a procedure could not possibly^y be ruled out of order; it would not involve either the Irish or Welsh Bills; and it would not weaken the government in the present Parliament.

1. Francis Acland to Catherine Marshall 9 November 1913, CMP
 2. P.W. Wilson covering letter to Lloyd George 17 November 1913 with a copy of his letter to Eleanor Acland 14 November 1913, LGP C/10/2/41

The pledge ought to be given at as early a date as possible so as to allow full and mature consideration of what it means by Electors before the dissolution takes place ... We all hope that Mr Asquith will long continue to lead the party, but it is clear that the pledge would not place women on the effective Register before the end of the next Parliament, when clearly Mr Asquith himself would be dependent more and more on the assistance of his immediate colleagues, who are Sir Edward Grey and Mr Lloyd George ... Mr Asquith's feelings in the matter are, as Sir Edward Grey has intimated, not the only susceptibilities to be considered. The pledge would, without splitting the Party, eliminate great perplexities from the careers both (sic) of Lord Haldane, Sir Edward Grey and Mr Lloyd George. It would be much better for such a pledge to be given at once and without pressure than that the necessity should arise for Sir Edward Grey to make a personal declaration which might be interpreted as a threat.¹

The National Union was informed of the offer and Kathleen Courtney commented:

Did you ever know anything so invidious as this scheme. In my opinion it's been devised by Lloyd George who has quite taken in PWW (Wilson). I do hope Mrs Acland won't be taken in too ... Mrs Fawcett thinks it's a device to satisfy the Liberal women; apparently large numbers are joining Mrs Acland's society and the matter is creating some stir.

Kathleen Courtney felt it imperative that Eleanor Acland and Grey should not take it up.²

Eleanor Acland soon quieted such fears. She wrote to Catherine Marshall "I can assure you 'I am not taking any'. It would only lead the Tories to force a dissolution on the issue, if the Liberals got in again. I hope you are right in saying the new Union (LWSU) is touching up Ministers a bit. At present we haven't got anything very definite out of them. Mr Lloyd George is most cordial but rather indefinite"

1. *ibid*

2. Kathleen Courtney to Catherine Marshall 17 November 1913, including details of the offer to Eleanor Acland and her draft reply refusing it, CMP

(about giving a message of approval on the Union's pledge not to work for anti-suffragist Liberals at the general election). She asked for a list of National Union Liberals who had resigned over the EFF policy as they should be "herded into our Union."¹ Though this attempt to appease Liberal women's discontent failed, it also appears to have halted negotiations with Grey.

Meanwhile Eleanor Acland continued to argue against the proposed extension of the EFF policy —

Not for the sake of the Liberal Party, but simply because I think that to have a very big effect at a *few* elections would be more striking than if you spread your funds and energies and organisers over many elections. If you could turn out one anti-suffragist Cabinet Minister you would make a rare rumpus among our poor old molluscs. But possibly you can raise a large amount of funds and energies by attacking a great many seats.

She added the postscript:

I am sure the Ministers are fussed by our new movement because we know now that they *got at* Lady Carlisle and put her up to opposing our Tunbridge Wells amendment at the WLF Council.²

When in early 1914 the National Union gave a commitment to the Labour Party regarding the general election there began a rift between it and the LWSU which was to grow from this time. Eleanor Acland wrote to Catherine Marshall, insisting that Asquith could not force his anti-suffrage Ministers to vote for a government measure, especially given his own known views. She repeated:

What we want is a suffrage party in power and I believe the LWSU is on the right lines to get that —

But the National Union's proposed extension of its EFF policy would —

Dish any good we may do. Whereas your *present* policy works in with our more mild activities most excellently. If you could only turn out

1. Eleanor Acland to Catherine Marshall 20 November 1913, CMP

2. *ibid*

Mr Hobhouse or Mr McKenna it would be worth a great deal, but your new policy would be, in my opinion, making straight for the wilderness.¹

For his part, Francis Acland now felt unable to appear on the National Union platform at the forthcoming Albert Hall demonstration for male supporters of the demand, though he "would give a finger for such a chance". His own speeches were becoming increasingly militant in tone, but he could not condone the National Union's yet greater involvement with the Labour Party. To a meeting of the League of Young Liberals, he declared:

I believe that if a great Liberal leader will lead on this suffrage subject as on others there will be a tremendous response from the country ... I say for myself ... that I shall be unable permanently to adhere to a Liberalism which refused to treat women as citizens (cheers).²

Meanwhile Eleanor Acland through the LWSU kept up the pressure on Lloyd George, stressing the critical need at that time for a leader on the women's suffrage issue. She believed many militants were realising their mistake, but needed a face-saving way out. If they "could be persuaded that powerful people were at last taking women's suffrage in earnest they would be glad at this moment to call a truce". Among "responsible suffragists no one is asking that the Liberal Party shall put suffrage on its immediate programme". They were looking to what he had referred to as "the *new* chapter of Liberalism! We want some reasonable assurance that our enfranchisement will be in that chapter".

She reported that Francis Acland was now finding his suffrage meetings "crowded and attentive", resolutions were carried by big majorities while individual men were coming up after and urging him to

1. Eleanor Acland to Catherine Marshall 20 December 1913, CMP
 2. Francis Acland to Catherine Marshall 19 December 1913; Mary McKenzie's report of Acland's speech to Catherine Marshall 8 December 1913 (speech given 27 November 1913) CMP

start a movement among Liberal electors. "I have not known in any year so many signs of men's keenness of Suffrage". The League of Young Liberals, of which Francis Acland was a leading member, were keen to make women's suffrage part of their policy. The Northern Men's Suffrage Federation had sent important deputations of electors to Haldane and Grey.¹

By this time the LWSU was clearly beginning to make some impact on the national Liberal Party. *The Manchester Guardian* reported a protest from a group of Liberal MPs about the methods of selecting Liberal candidates. They referred to persistent rumours that at Liberal Party headquarters the Chief Whip, Illingworth and the Scottish Chief Whip, Gulland were demanding that candidates should be pledged to suffrage, and demanded an inquiry.²

From Lloyd George's papers it is clear that he was keeping lists of the women's suffrage views of both Liberal MPs and prospective candidate. These were marked "Private and Confidential" and very likely originated from National Union sources. One of his correspondents protested against his association with the LWSU and "its endeavours to make the Suffrage question a shibboleth", believing, if successful, it would lead "as surely to disruption and disaster as did the similar policy of the Unionist Party on Tariff Reform".³

Nonetheless Lloyd George acceded to LWSU pressure and on their behalf intervened in at least one constituency, Cheltenham, where the Liberal candidate, Rhys Williams, was an anti-suffragist.⁴

1. Eleanor Acland to Lloyd George 26 November 1913, LGP C /10/2/59

2. *Manchester Guardian* cutting 10 December 1913, CMP

3. List of Liberal MPs and candidates December 1913 and January 1914, LGP C/17/3/26 and C/17/3/27; John N. Barran to Lloyd George 1 January 1914, enclosing issue of Scottish Women Liberals Magazine December 1913 which reported the progress of the LWSU, LGP C/10/3/1

4. Eleanor Acland to Lloyd George 4 April 1914, LGP C/11/1/25; Lloyd George to Rhys Williams 21 April 1914, LGP C/11/1/33; Dorothea Jordan to Frances Stevenson, LGP C/11/1/26

Frances Stevenson, Lloyd George's Secretary, wrote to a member of the Cheltenham LWSU, "I do not think you need despair. The Chancellor does not intend to let the matter drop, and is going to see Mr Rhys Williams when Parliament meets again" ... there was "every hope that he may be brought round".¹

The LWSU's first public meeting was held in March 1914, when it was claimed that 5000 members had been recruited in the nine months since its formation. Any Liberal society, or woman prepared to abstain from election work for anti-suffragist candidates might join. W.H. Dickinson,^e who addressed the inaugural meeting summed up its position: "After Home Rule and the Welsh Church, what follows? The reconstruction of democracy".²

The Unionist Party

In the autumn of 1913 the National Union concentrated on its EFF work, and began a new campaign within the Unionist Party. This was part of its overall strategy for the future general election, but may also have been precipitated by responses from leading Unionist suffragists. In a letter to Catherine Marshall at this time, Lord Robert Cecil had complained:

The truth is that there is too much Liberal prejudice in the National Union. Not party prejudice, but old Whig feeling, which has made them on more than one occasion exceedingly difficult for Unionists to work with.³

It is also interesting that at this time the National Union's "Pilgrimage" deputation had attended Bonar Law, though the conversation was

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1. Dorothea Jordon to Frances Stevenson 26 May 1914 and her reply 29 May 1914, LGP C/11/1/50
 2. *The Common Cause* 13 March 1914. Liberal Men's Suffrage Unions had also been formed in London and Manchester
 3. Lord Robert Cecil to Catherine Marshall 25 September 1913, CMP

private and no record of it survives.¹

For the next few months Catherine Marshall concentrated much of her attention on drumming up Unionist support. She wrote to Lady Selborne, of the Conservative and Unionist Franchise Association, "I have just heard, on good authority (a letter from Francis Acland — my parentheses) that our attempts to frighten the Liberals with the argument that a Conservative Government might bring in an 'equal terms' measure of women's suffrage are being surprisingly successful. They believed that such a measure would 'keep them out of office for a generation'" and were afraid that the Conservatives had realised this. "I also learn that the demand for an Adult Suffrage Bill from the Labour Party (and the Labour grip of electors in the industrial constituencies) is also causing the Liberals some considerable uneasiness ... Even Mr Lloyd George is afraid of a measure which would put women electors (an unknown quantity) in the majority".

Pressure from these two directions were making "the Liberals more and more inclined to think that the safest course would after all be to pass a bill on the Dickenson lines". The National Union was experiencing a most encouraging success among Labour organisations. "If the Liberals can be persuaded that Conservatives are thinking seriously about an 'equal terms' Bill, as a spur on the other side, I believe it is just possible that we might get a Government Bill on Dickenson lines even now". The Unionists were planning a House of Lords bill on women's suffrage, and Catherine Marshall suggested that, with the above considerations in mind, there was good reason for urging that it be kept to a narrow equal terms bill rather than the wider Conciliation Bill measure.²

By this time Catherine Marshall was beginning to collect information

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 September 1913

2. Catherine Marshall to Lady Selborne 13 November 1913, CMP

from local National Union societies on the suffrage views of prominent Conservatives and MPs in their areas. In November 1913 Lord Robert Cecil, having been defeated on a women's suffrage resolution at the Unionists' conference in Norwich, wrote to Catherine Marshall that he was nevertheless convinced that a Unionist government would have to do something about women's suffrage if it came to power in the near future. This would most likely be a referendum on the issue as the majority of a Unionist Cabinet was bound to be anti-suffragist. At this point Catherine Marshall was able to offer him a list of the names of friendly Conservative agents, which the National Union had collected. "I had all the lists sent to me in the first instance because you were so anxious for absolute secrecy", but this was presumably no longer necessary now the party conference was over.¹

In the Spring of 1914 National Union leaders were involved in secret negotiations with leading Unionist suffragists, Lord Lytton, Lord Robert Cecil and Lady Selborne. The aim was to find a formula for the introduction of a Unionist women's suffrage measure. All the possibilities discussed would have involved the use of a referendum.²

In considering these proposals the National Union emphasised the effect on the Liberal Party "if the knowledge that any of them (the three Unionist Suffragists' proposals) *was entertained* by the Conservative leaders and likely to be accepted by the Suffragists".

After considerable discussion the National Union Executive agreed to ask the Conservative suffragists to approach their party leaders to "discuss with them what a Conservative Government would be prepared to

1. Lord Robert Cecil to Catherine Marshall 19 November 1913; Catherine Marshall to Lord Robert Cecil 24 November 1913; CMP
 2. Memorandum headed "Absolutely Confidential. Lord Lytton's Proposal for an Initiative on Women's Suffrage" 7 May 1914, and "Private and Confidential. Various Proposals for getting a Conservative Government to legislate on the Women's Suffrage Question", CMP

do if returned to power:. In the first instance they would not make any specific proposals though "it should be pointed out ... that it was only in connection with a Government Bill that the National Union would be prepared even to consider the question of a Referendum. A Referendum clause attached to a private members bill would be regarded as a definitely hostile measure". (The National Union's name was not to be mentioned in connection with the proposed deputation to the Conservative leaders).¹

To back this initiative the National Union continued organising suffragist opinion within the Unionist Party. National Union Societies were instructed to obtain the names and addresses of influential Conservative suffragists in the area: "There is a movement in the Conservative Party favourable to women's suffrage", and the National Union wanted to make the most of it, and to put Unionist leaders in touch with their suffragist supporters in the constituencies. In regard to the Conservative Party, the National Union was now concentrating on the possibility of a promise of a government bill with a referendum attached. Catherine Marshall was to make it clear "that before deciding to support the Conservative Party on the strength of any offer they might make, it would be necessary to have a public statement of their intentions to put before the Council" (of the National Union). It was hoped that even talk of a promise of a women's suffrage referendum from the Conservative leaders would put pressure on the Liberals to move on the question.²

In the remaining months before the war these policies were continued and developed by the National Union. The campaign among Unionist suffragists was stepped up, and was closely connected with attempts to

1. Extract from NUWSS Executive Minutes 21 May 1914 on "Political Situation Absolutely Confidential please destroy when read" which was issued separate to the main body of the minutes, which went out to all National Union branches, CMP

2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 25 May 1914

get women's suffrage included in the Irish Home Rule Bill, and the similar bills which were to be introduced for Scotland and Wales.¹

National Union organisers appear to have been expecting a general election in the late summer of 1914 and were clearly pleased with their campaign among Unionist Suffragists. In mid-June Catherine Marshall reported to the Executive "the Conservatives appeared to be as much agitated as the Liberals lest the other Party should take up the women's suffrage question". Arthur Steel-Maitland, the Chairman of the Conservative Party had sent to the National Union for information and leaflets on the women's suffrage movement. Lord Robert Cecil reported "being approached by influential Conservatives, both in the House and the country, who were anxious that steps should be taken by the Party towards a settlement of the question". He had recommended a strong women's suffrage deputation to the leading Unionists in the House of Commons. By mid-July the National Union was preparing to announce Arthur Steel-Maitland's conversion to support for women's suffrage.²

Conversely there was a "marked feeling of anxiety amongst the

1. Catherine Marshall to Charles Ponsonby 4 June 1914 CMP. NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 June 1914. Interestingly there is evidence that MPs were now beginning to seek National Union help in the House of Commons on issues outside the suffrage. Catherine Marshall wrote to Willoughby Dickenson on the British Nationality Bill "I do not think we can send out yet a third whip about your amendment to the British Nationality Bill. We have already stretched our powers rather far, as it is not a question which *directly* affects the question of women's suffrage, though of course it is one on which all women must feel very strongly and be grateful to you for the stand you are making on their behalf". Nonetheless she had reminded the Labour Party of their promise of support, and let Lord Robert Cecil know that the bill was on again that night. "If your amendment is not reached our Press Department will put something more about it in the Press (they have been getting a good many letters and paragraphs into the papers in support of it, as you doubtless know).

I think that is all we can do now — we are fearfully busy in other directions. We shall anxiously await the result of the Division", Catherine Marshall to W.H. Dickenson 29 July 1914, CMP

2. Catherine Marshall to Arthur Steel-Maitland 11 July 1914, Steel-Maitland Papers GD/193/163/3; NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 June 1914

Liberals lest the Conservative Party should begin to take action, with regard to women's suffrage, and should bring in a Bill in Conservative interests". Balfour had spoken in support of the women's suffrage clause in the Scottish Home Rule Bill, although he had opposed the bill itself. In a draft speech for the London Society Catherine Marshall referred to the women's suffrage movement in the Conservative Party "as the most effective means of producing action on the part of the Liberals".¹

Women's Suffrage and the Future of Democracy

Despite these discreet dealings with Unionist suffragists, during 1914, most of the National Union's propaganda continued to concentrate on women's suffrage as part of a democratic demand from the people.

Leaflets designed for the East Fife by-election in April 1914, where Asquith was standing unopposed, carried headings like "Is This Democracy?", "Shall the People Rule?", etc.²

It was working class support for women's suffrage which was now stressed, particularly in dealings with suffragist Ministers.³ For Catherine Marshall, at least, the National Union's association with the

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1. *ibid* and Catherine Marshall draft speech for the London Society 19 June 1914, CMP
 2. NUWSS leaflet April 1914, which read: SHALL THE PEOPLE RULE. Mr ASQUITH says NO. He is trying to pose now as the PEOPLE's champion but when millions of unenfranchised PEOPLE ask for VOTES HE is the man to flout this request. Is this democracy? In Opposing the Enfranchisement of Women Mr ASQUITH advocates Taxation without Representation. Is this Democracy? Mr ASQUITH advocates Government without the consent of the Governed. Is this Democracy? Mr ASQUITH supports the MONOPOLY of political power by one sex. Is this Democracy? Mr ASQUITH supports the maintenance of a section of the community in a position of privilege from which by the ACCIDENT OF BIRTH half the nation is permanently excluded. Is this Democracy?"
CMP
 3. See e.g. Catherine Marshall to Sir John Simon 5 February 1914 and his reply 6 February 1914, CMP. She was complaining that the Newcastle Society had been prevented by the local Liberal association from contacting him during his visit there, to present evidence of working class support for the suffragist demand

Labour Party was taking on wider meanings. She wrote "I think you will find that the association of the women's movement with the Labour Movement which began after the defeat of the Conciliation Bill in 1912 and has developed so rapidly, will have some far-reaching results in other matters than the Suffrage question".¹ In a draft speech from this period she repeated the significance of the emergence of the women's movement alongside the Labour movement and those for colonial freedom. In particular she stressed the importance of the *peaceful* winning of the vote. She saw as "the great mission awaiting women to help to keep the great revolution which is coming on sane and humane lines ... I believe women will have no small voice in determining the manner in which that revolution is brought about".²

These beliefs explain what otherwise might seem perverse in Catherine Marshall's displeasure at Asquith's reception of a deputation from the East London Federation of Suffragettes. She wrote to Francis Acland expressing her disquiet at this development and asking if Sir Edward Grey would receive a deputation from the International Suffrage Alliance, at that time meeting in London, believing —

It might counter-balance some of the bad effect of Mr Asquith's action in encouraging Militancy.

Once more she stressed her belief that —

It is going to matter to the whole future of civilization *how* the suffrage is won in England ... It is vitally important, on the one hand, that it should not even appear as a concession to militancy.

1. Catherine Marshall to Charles Ponsonby 4 June 1914, CMP

2. Catherine Marshall's draft speech to the London Society 19 June 1914, CMP. Elsewhere National Union organisers were to be found publicly denigrating the Liberal Party and promoting socialism, see Helena Swanwick to Catherine Marshall 11 June 1914, about a report of a speech by Wilma Meikle, a National Union organiser, in *The Daily Citizen*, CMP

It is equally important on the other hand not to delay the granting of it much longer. The present state of things is creating a revolutionary spirit in the women's movement (quite apart from militancy) which will inevitably help to stimulate and join hands with the revolutionary element in the Labour movement. If that happens on a large scale the women, instead of having a steadying influence in the social upheaval that is coming, will have the opposite effect, reinforcing all that is most violent and uncontrolled and bitter ... I think the prospect is rapidly becoming very serious. It affects not only this country but the whole of Europe, because the Women's Movement, with the Socialist Movement, tends to develop strongly on international lines.

She concluded:

Women's suffrage is bound to come soon, Militancy or no Militancy, if for no other reason than because the Labour Party will insist on it.¹

Meanwhile, with a general election in the offing, Catherine Marshall consulted with Henderson on how the Labour vote could best be used to support women's suffrage. She suggested the possibility of asking Labour supporters to either cast their vote for suffragists against anti-suffragists, irrespective of party, or withholding their vote if neither of the major parties put women's suffrage in their programme. Henderson advised instead that she write to the National Labour Party at the time of the general election suggesting that women's suffrage be made a test question for securing the Labour vote in constituencies, as was done in regard to the Taff Vale judgement in 1906. He thought they would almost certainly agree.²

By July 1914 Catherine Marshall could note "The foremost issue in General Committee" of the TUC was the textile workers resolution for adult suffrage, for the forthcoming conference. It was hoped to make

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1. Catherine Marshall to Francis Acland 23 June 1914, and similar letter to Lady Betty Balfour 22 June 1914, directed at Arthur Balfour, CMP
 2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 June 1914 and Catherine Marshall's "Mr Henderson, Labour Vote. General Election" n.d. circa July 1914, CMP

this issue a test question for parliamentary candidates. Both Henderson and W.A.C. Anderson, of the ILP, were pleased with this development, and Henderson was confident it would be carried.

Meanwhile the "Liberals were making great efforts to detach us from support of Labour candidates". The direction of her own thinking is reflected in a question she framed for the Labour leaders "What do they think about the 'Progressive Suffrage Party' — Labour and Radicals".¹ Further plans included the raising of the question of women's suffrage being a test question for the Labour vote at events like the Durham Miners' Gala and the idea of a general strike for women's suffrage. "Even the suggestion of it would be of great value to Suffragists abroad".²

Not surprisingly, in the light of these widespread and complex attempts to undermine anti-suffrage power in the Liberal Party, relations between the National Union and the LWSU became very strained.

The LWSU had been continuing the struggle within the WLF for a more determined suffrage position and had put a resolution to the WLF Annual Conference that members should strike against anti-suffragist Liberals in elections. It had been lost by 400 votes to 456 against. Nonetheless, the National Union felt the meeting had gone very well for the suffrage cause. Those members who had come top of the poll for election to the WLF Executive had all been involved with the LWSU. Further, the conference had passed resolutions calling for a government women's suffrage bill, and another that it was the duty of the WLF to secure the selection of suffragist candidates.³

As the possibility of the general election drew closer however relations between the National Union and LWSU clearly began to break down. Eleanor Acland resigned as a Vice President of the National Union on account of its election policy, but suggested a joint conference

1. Catherine Marshall's "Notes for the Labour Party" 23 July 1914, CMP
 2. Catherine Marshall, Miscellaneous Parliamentary Notes July 1914, CMP
 3. WLF Annual Report 1913-14. NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 June 1914

between the Executives of the two organisations. This meeting took place on 27 July 1914.

The LWSU hoped to persuade the National Union not to support a third candidate in those seats where a strong Liberal suffragist were standing. The suffragist leaders were not prepared to consider this for a number of reasons: they did not consider the pledge on women's suffrage required by the LWSU was strong enough nor enforceable; moreover the Liberal Whips would probably respond to such an agreement by moving anti-suffrage candidates to seats where a Labour candidate was unlikely; and finally "we regard a Conservative Government in the future that does nothing for women's suffrage as less injurious to suffrage than a Liberal government that does nothing for suffrage".

The suffragist leaders were unimpressed with the LWSU's claim that it had achieved the replacement or conversion of anti-suffragist candidates in several seats — Colchester, Exeter, and Hampstead were cited. However, Catherine Marshall did suggest that if the LWSU could effect a change in certain constituencies, like Harrow, where the National Union had plans to oppose the anti-suffragist Liberal, the National Union might no longer wish to intervene.¹

The result of the meeting was inconclusive, but it illustrates the growing strength of the LWSU within Liberal circles, the strength of

1. Proceedings of the conference of the executive committees of the NUWSS and LWSU 27 July 1914, CMP. The strength of disaffection which the National Union's policy indicated among some women Liberals was also clearly matched by some male Liberals. H.G. Barclay, a Liberal and a National Union member, was anxious that the National Union should commit itself to a firm anti-government policy at the general election, though he felt the EFF policy was insufficient, as it did not affect enough constituencies. "Personally, I feel we are too much afraid of offending Liberal members of our societies. Better to have fewer members who will do something than many who want us to do nothing". He also wrote to *The Common Cause* 9 June 1914, declaring "I am a Liberal and an elector whose vote is already pledged to suffrage first", CMP

the National Union's commitment to its alliance with the Labour Party, and the increasing and almost unavoidable polarisation among women suffragists, which was developing with the approach of the general election.

Even at this late date the National Union had not despaired of obtaining some firm commitment to suffrage from the government. Lloyd George was the Minister on whom most of the National Union's pressure was exerted in the month or so before war broke out. In early July he received an invitation from Catherine Marshall to attend the Durham Miners' Gala, on the 25th July, where the National Union was to have a platform. She suggested he came in disguise if necessary, and added "Can't you bring Mr Asquith too? It will really be an excellent opportunity for you to test for yourself how much the suffrage question counts today with the working classes".

She had also enclosed a National Union pamphlet on the effects of the EFF, pointing out that she had been its secretary since its inception.

What I said on Thursday about the feeling in the Labour movement throughout the country was not guess work or hearsay but was based on first-hand knowledge.

I believe that the developments of the last two years and the indirect as well as the direct result of our present policy are going to have a very far reaching effect on all the political parties.

She believed that once Irish Home Rule were accomplished and he took —

Stock of the forces at work in the country ... you will be surprised to find how much has been happening whilst you have been saying that the women's suffrage cause was dead, and that nothing could be done till militancy stopped.

While Lloyd George refused the invitation to the Durham Gala, he offered to send his secretary in his place, to observe and report back

to him. Catherine Marshall replied she would prefer that he himself came to a similar demonstration later in the year — either one planned for September, in Portsmouth and coinciding with the TUC Conference, or another at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester in November, to coincide with the Liberals' annual conference.¹

At this time Lloyd George opened negotiations with Sylvia Pankhurst and George Lansbury (close to the suffrage movement in the East End of London, and also a member of the newly formed United Suffragists), it would seem with the knowledge and approval of Asquith.

In early July Lloyd George wrote to the Home Secretary, McKenna, asking for a talk with him before he took any action to re-arrest Sylvia Pankhurst, at present free on Licence under the provisions of the Cat and Mouse Act. "She and her friends mean to throw in their lot with the constitutionalists against the Militants. This would be useful and unless she is guilty of some outburst — which is extremely improbable — would it not be desirable to leave her alone?". The letter was sent with a covering note which stated "Since writing enclosed letter, the Chancellor saw the Prime Minister who promised to see the Home Secretary and arrange matters with him".²

It would seem most likely then that those moves were following up Asquith's reception of the East End deputation on 20th June 1914. This event has generally been accepted by previous writers as a clear indica-

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1. Catherine Marshall to Lloyd George 11, 15, 17, 22 July 1914, LGP C/11/1/68, C/11/1/71, C/11/1/72, C/11/1/75. Her note of assertive self-confidence was echoed by Margaret Ashton. She wrote to Catherine Marshall with details of the formation of a Men's Liberal Suffrage Union, on the lines of the existing women's organisation, which was to ask to Asquith to receive a deputation at the time of the National Liberal Federation conference in November, and address an agents' meeting on women's suffrage. The Manchester Society planned its own demonstration to coincide with the conference. "I shall also propose that we have a Deputation to Asquith ourselves — to *tell* him not to ask him anything", 31 July 1914, CMP
 2. Lloyd George to McKenna 6 July 1914, LGP C/5/12/9

tion that Asquith was at last preparing to move on the issue.¹

Asquith's statement must also be set against the background of the National Union's campaigns which for the previous two years had increasingly come to concentrate on evidence of working class support for the demand, and the association of the women's demand with the call for democracy. His statement also compares interestingly with Lloyd George's points in his letter to the Liberal Chief Whip in 1911, and Margaret Robertson's speech during the National Union's deputation to Asquith the previous summer.² As Morgan suggests "With, seemingly, a General Election not too far away Asquith was firing the opening shot of the campaign".³ The negotiations which Lloyd George became involved in after the East End deputation, and the evidence of Asquith's knowledge of them, provides further evidence for this view.

On 21st July 1914 Sylvia Pankhurst wrote to Lloyd George outlining her response to his proposals, and suggesting further developments of them. Lloyd George had clearly offered a women's suffrage clause in a government Reform Bill, which would be left to a free vote in the House of Commons, along with the promise of his own refusal to join a Cabinet which would not agree to the latter condition.

Sylvia Pankhurst responded by asking for his promise to leave the Cabinet if the women's suffrage clause were voted out of the proposed bill. "It would seem to balance the fear of other resignations, or rumoured resignations" which would inevitably arise. If he were prepared to go that far then he might as well declare himself unable to join any Cabinet which would not make itself responsible for the women's suffrage clause.

On the question of militancy she could see no cessation "until some

1. O'Neill *The Woman Movement* p.87. See also Morgan op cit, pp.131-2
 2. See Chapter 8 for Lloyd George's letter to Elibank
 3. Morgan op cit p.133

very definite guarantee of action has been given". Even then the most extreme militants were not likely to declare a truce until the measure was actually underway. Any such truce would only come if the women concerned were "convinced of the good faith and determination to see the matter settled of those who make the suggestions". The militant women "would very gladly make peace — (who can doubt it) — if they could but feel it to be the right thing to do".

She ended:

What a splendid rally there would be if a Franchise Bill for Manhood and Womanhood suffrage were carried in this Parliament! If the Lords were to throw it out, it wouldn't matter at all — it would only be a temporary delay that would make the enthusiasm the greater and it would be the best possible rallying cry for the General Election.¹

George Lansbury later claimed that an agreement was reached with the Liberal government, with Lloyd George promising that he, Grey and Simon would publicly pledge themselves to refuse office in any future government which did not take up women's suffrage. This opportunity was destroyed by Christabel Pankhurst's refusal to consider a truce.² What remains significant about these events however, is that only two weeks before the outbreak of war negotiations between suffragists and government were taking place. It is clear that the Liberal leadership had made up its mind to tackle women's suffrage within the context of adult suffrage reform.

1. Sylvia Pankhurst to Lloyd George 21 July 1914, C/11/1/74 (her parentheses)
 2. See Dangerfield's account in *The Strange Death of Liberal England* p.339 when he quotes *The Suffragette* "The WSPU desires to receive no private communication from the Government of any of its members", and claims that Christabel made it clear she had no wish to see Sylvia to discuss the matter. Compare Rosen p.240

While the National Union records provide no evidence of its involvement in such negotiations — in fact Catherine Marshall's correspondence with Lloyd George during this period would indicate the contrary — they do provide one further piece of evidence on the state of the issue within the Cabinet. Catherine Marshall's papers contain a report from a National Union member of an unofficial conversation with another suffragist Minister, Haldane, when she noted "his extreme friendliness to us", quoting him thus:

I say to Lord Curzon and the Prime Minister that it doesn't matter whether they think it wise or not, it has simply *got to be* and nothing can ultimately prevent it. The real obstacle now is militancy. (If a halt could be made here) most probably some big concession would be made ... I fancied though he didn't *say* so that the Cabinet would then insist on a step forward being made.¹

Such an assessment corresponds exactly with the nature of the kind of agreement Lloyd George was trying to reach with the militants. Whether militancy could have been brought under control in this way cannot be known, though neither is it clear how much longer the WSPU would have continued as an effective organisation.²

There remains the question why certain members of the government chose to open negotiations with what was, relative to the National Union or the Liberal women's organisations, a small group with, on the surface, far fewer claims on the government's attention. O'Neill and Morgan have pointed to the working-class composition of the ELFS, and suggest that the government felt the need to appease the working class vote on this issue, and possibly to draw off some of Labour's growing support.

1. F. Blakett to Dear Emily 2 June 1914, CMP

2. See Rosen pp.242-245 for an assessment of the WSPU in the last two years before the war. He describes the WSPU at the outbreak of war as but "a harried rump of the large and superbly organised movement it had once been". For the sense of "fierce rebellion" by at least one militant against instructions from headquarters to carry out further arson raids, see Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance* p.178

However, while the demand for women's suffrage had been increasingly united with the call for wider democracy, and a major section of the suffrage movement was moving into ever deeper alliance with the Labour Party, it was the National Union which had played the major role in these developments. In contrast the ELFS was closely associated with the unofficial "rebel" wing of the socialist movement, critical of the mainstream political organisations of the labour and socialist movements. Such considerations, together with the National Union's past deep roots in the Liberal Party, would suggest that it should be the constitutional suffragists whom a Liberal government would most wish to placate, together with its own organised women's supporters in the WLF and the LWSU.

It is clear from the actions and statements of suffragist Ministers like Grey, Simon and Haldane that they were becoming increasingly confident of the strength of their case. The main stumbling block in forcing women's suffrage on such a divided Cabinet remained militancy. Even if, as the evidence suggests, Asquith himself were keen to find some solution to the problem, he would need to convince his past supporters in his earlier stands against the demand. The cessation of militancy would clearly ease his position. But why then negotiate with the ELFS and not the WSPU?

Firstly no doubt because the WSPU was no longer open to negotiations with Asquith or Lloyd George. Secondly because the ELFS stood for a different kind of militancy — Sylvia Pankhurst rejected the furtive tactics of arson, bombing etc., for the continuation of open large-scale demonstrations, at whatever the cost to the participants. More importantly however, her expulsion from the WSPU coincided with other developments within that organisation which suggest that a re-alignment of militant forces was taking place.

The United Suffragists have received little attention from writers on the WSPU, yet it is clear that it represented more than a group of disgruntled former WSPU activists who had been squeezed out of the inner circle around Christabel and Mrs Pankhurst, after the expulsion of the Pethick Lawrences. It did contain many who had been at the centre of WSPU activity before October 1912, including the Pethick Lawrences, Henry Nevinson, Evelyn Sharp and others who had also been important financial supporters of the WSPU like Mrs Hertha Ayrton, the Pethick Lawrences again, and Henry Harben.¹ The latter, together with Harold Laski and other Socialist Suffragists had continued for some time after the 1912 split to try to convince Christabel of the error of her ways, but had received short shrift.²

One of the main reasons given for the ELFS's expulsion from the WSPU had been Sylvia Pankhurst's association with George Lansbury and the Daily Herald Leagues. George Lansbury became a leading member of the United Suffragists, and another important figure from the Daily Herald League, John Scurr, provided the bodyguard of dockers who protected

1. The formation of the United Suffragists was first announced in *Votes for Women* 13 February 1914. Its committee consisted of Lena Ashwell, Gerald Gould, an editor of *The Daily Herald*, Henry Nevinson, John Scurr, Evelyn Sharp, Mrs Fred Whelan, J. Gillespie, Mrs Ayrton Gould, Charles Grey, and Agnes Harben, wife of Henry Harben, an important financial supporter of both the WSPU and *The Daily Herald*. Vice Presidents included Mrs Bernard Shaw, Mrs B.A. Thomas, another major subscriber to the WSPU, Mrs Arncliffe Sennet and Israel Zangwill. It was open to men and women, militants and non-militants. Dangerfield noted the emergence of the United Suffragists alongside the East London Federation of Suffragettes as highly significant op cit pp.327-330. Rosen also notes its emergence and shows one of the links with *The Daily Herald*, but does not develop the point, op cit pp.223-236. David Mitchell has explored in some depth the links between the United Suffragists and *The Daily Herald* in *Queen Christabel*, pp.231-3 and 237.

For a discussion of *The Daily Herald* and its Leagues see R.J. Holton, *Daily Herald versus Daily Citizen 1912-15 International Review of Social History*, No.1 1974 pp.347-376

2. See Mitchell op cit pp.231-233, and Rosen pp.225-226 for Harben's correspondence with Christabel Pankhurst.

United Suffragist speakers in Hyde Park.¹ Henry Nevinson's record of the events which led up to the decision to form the United Suffragists shows both a complete disillusionment with the WSPU leadership, and the close association which was developing between this section of militant opinion and the rebel wing of the socialist movement.²

The United Suffragists was only formed early in 1914, and did not officially take control of *Votes for Women*, the Pethick Lawrences' paper, until mid August 1914. It had held three large public demonstrations, but had as yet formed no real network of branches by the outbreak of war.³

There is evidence that this re-alignment of militants was not confined to London, and that other WSPU branches were following a similar line of development. For example, by the summer of 1914 the Glasgow WSPU, under the leadership of Helen Crawford was working closely with the Daily Herald League. When Mrs Pethick Lawrence undertook a speaking tour of the East of Scotland in the early summer of 1914, she was accompanied by George Lansbury and both were warmly received by local

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1. For details of the Suffrage Speakers Defence Corps see *Votes for Women* 19 June 1914. George Lansbury addressed some of the earliest United Suffragist branches in Stroud and Amersham, *Votes for Women* 22 May 1914. Henry Harben was one of the leading speakers at the United Suffragist's demonstration 7 July 1914, *Votes for Women* 5 July 1914. The United Suffragists and ELFS worked together during the Poplar by-election *Votes for Women* 20 February 1914, while Nevinson was very close to Sylvia Pankhurst at this time, being one of the bearers of her stretcher during the vigil outside Westminster which eventually persuaded Asquith to receive the East End deputation. Also see Mitchell op cit p.239
 2. Nevinson Diaries 11, 16 October, 24, 27, 28, 30 November, 1 December 1913, 8, 14 January 1914
 3. United Suffragists centres of support by the outbreak of war were London, Edinburgh, Stroud and Amersham, and possibly the Liverpool area. *Votes for Women* 22 May, 29 May, 3 July, 26 June 1914. It is interesting that the Liverpool suffragettes appear to have joined forces with local syndicalists, and abandoned the demand for the vote, see R.J. Holton, *Syndicalism and its Impact in Britain*, with particular reference to Merseyside 1900-1914, PhD Thesis, Sussex University 1973 pp.423. The United Suffragists' first London public meeting in May required an overflow meeting, and was followed by a rally in Trafalgar Square in June and another London demonstration in July, *Votes for Women* 29 May, 19 June, 26 June, 1914

WSPU branches, in open opposition to central WSPU opinion.¹

Such material suggests that the militant forces were in the process of re-grouping at the time of the outbreak of war. In this context Sylvia Pankhurst's ELFS was not the isolated breakaway from the WSPU it at first appears, but was part of a wider development in the militant wing of the suffrage movement which was bringing a significant part of it into close association with the "rebel" socialist movement around the Daily Herald Leagues.

George Lansbury recalled the Albert Hall meeting in November 1913 demanding the release of the Irish strike leader, James Larkin, at which suffragists were much in evidence:

It is impossible to describe the red-hot enthusiasm which prevailed throughout the meeting, which was more like a religious revival than anything else. The women stewards all wore red caps, and the general feeling was such that some of the reporters really thought the social revolution had begun. The *Daily Sketch*, concluding a description of the meeting said: 'When next you tell your friends at the Club how you would manhandle the suffragettes if you were Mr McKenna, just think of Miss Defarge, of Bow and Bromley. She has done a lot of knitting. Her little red cap is a danger lamp. Take heed'.²

Elsewhere he describes the close association between the Daily Herald League and the militant suffragists, particularly in the matter of hiding "mice" suffragettes, avoiding re-arrest under the Cat and Mouse Act.³

Here was the alliance between suffragists and revolutionary social-

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1. *Votes for Women* 22 May, 5 June, 1914 and James Logan *The East of Scotland Suffragist/Suffragette Movement 1900-1914*, unpublished Open University dissertation, 1977
 2. George Lansbury, *Miracle of Fleet Street*, London: The Labour Publishing Co. 1925, p.53
 3. *ibid* pp.75-85. Mitchell *op cit* p.232 describes how G.R.S. Taylor a contributor to *The Daily Herald* and *The Clarion* visited Christabel and suggested "an alliance between militant suffragism and militant industrialism", which was rejected. Mitchell further quotes a letter to Harben from Christabel which declared "Between the WSPU and Daily Herald League and Movement there can be no connection ... It comes to this 'the men must paddle their canoes and we must paddle ours'".

ists that Catherine Marshall had warned Francis Acland of and which posed a far greater potential threat to public order than the isolated attacks of the WSPU. In opening his negotiations on the women's suffrage issue with the ELFS Lloyd George clearly hoped to further detach this section of militant opinion from that which remained loyal to Christabel Pankhurst. Moreover, if he could secure an alliance of the dissident militants, the constitutional suffragists and the women Liberals behind the government's proposals, he would have considerably undermined the position of the anti-suffragists within the Cabinet. The way would then be open for a government initiative on general franchise reform.

Thus while the WSPU may have been pushed into a position of increasing isolation and continuing organisational decline in the period 1913-14, other sections of the suffrage movement were securing significant political advances for their cause. The Liberal government found itself being squeezed between the Labour Party's firm commitment to a wide extension of the franchise which included women, and the possibility of a limited Conservative measure of women's suffrage which would serve to strengthen the propertied vote. At the same time suffrage opinion within the Liberal Party was becoming increasingly forceful, and thus the position of suffragist Ministers was strengthening within the Cabinet.

Moreover, all sections of suffrage opinion, excluding the WSPU leadership, were now prepared to present the women's demand as part of a general call for greater democracy. Developments within the National Union, together with those occurring among dissident militants, confirmed that the demand now had a significant degree of support among the working class. While for some middle class suffragists, such associations represented no more than a tactical advantage, for others they were part of their own personal political development beyond the politics of Liberalism. The tensions this generated were already evident in the

National Union in the months before the war, both over the future of the EFF policy, and in the deterioration in relations between the National Union leadership and the LWSU. The war-time period was to see the eventual resolution of such tensions in an important split within the National Union, and a realignment between the politically progressive suffragists of both the constitutional and militant wings on the one hand, and the "old guard" of the suffrage movement on the other.

CHAPTER 11 : WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE AND THE WAR 1914-18

Controversy continues to surround the question of how the war affected the success of the women's suffrage demand.¹ The previous chapters in this section have sought to show that by the outbreak of war constitutional suffragists had achieved a position for their cause, whereby it would have to be considered in any plans for future franchise reform. The war did not undermine this achievement, but did provide the political circumstances which made franchise reform an urgent necessity by mid-1916.

Existing accounts of suffrage activity during the war tend to stress the jingoistic activities of the WSPU leadership, and the consequent disintegration of the suffrage movement. They reflect a general historiographical problem, whereby the history of the movement as a whole has been distorted by an emphasis on the activities of one wing of it. However, even a more recent study by Martin Pugh² which takes cognizance of the National Union has also sought to argue that the suffrage organisations played little part in the ultimate victory, and that the suffrage movement largely disintegrated under the impact of the war.

The main purpose of this chapter is to offer an alternative analysis of the impact of the war on the suffrage movement. It will seek to show the continuing vitality of the constitutional wing of the movement, and the dissident faction of the militant wing, while exploring the controversies which seriously divided suffragists at this time. An account will be provided of suffragist involvement in the debates and political manoeuvring which preceded the Representation of the People Bill of 1917 which would indicate that their influence at this stage was not negligible.

1. Compare Martin Pugh, *Politicians and the Women's Vote 1914-18*, *History* Vol.59 1974 pp.358-374 with Arthur Marwick, *Women at War*, London, Fontana paperback ed. 1977 pp. 8, 12, 137

2. Pugh op cit pp.358-9

The Immediate Impact of the War on the National Union

Shortly before the outbreak of war, the National Union participated in the planning of a demonstration in support of peace. In the event this meeting, at the Kingsway Hall on the 4th August, was overtaken by the declaration of war, and the National Union leadership was by this time anxious not to become publicly committed to a pacifist stand.¹ Instead Mrs Fawcett advised National Union branches that probably the best way suffragists could help was "by devising and carrying through some well thought out plan which can be worked continuously over many months to give aid and succour to women and children brought face to face with destitution in consequence of the war".² It was decided, after hasty consultations with the branches by post, to suspend political activities for the time being and use the staff (by this time numbering almost 150) and organising capacities of the National Union for relief work. Mrs Fawcett was anxious to avoid the danger of a split in the suffrage ranks over the issue of support for the war.

Relief work, with all its ambiguities, seemed to offer a solution to this quandary, and certainly the pacifists within the National Union played a full part in the National Union's relief schemes. Further it provided the means for maintaining the National Union organisation in some sort of working order until the time when the fight for the vote could usefully be taken up again.³

Full accounts of the National Union's relief activities may be found in its Annual Reports for the war years, and in the columns of *The Common Cause*. Only a brief account will be offered here, to indicate the scale and extent of this work.

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 3 August 1914, MPLA M50/2/7/6. For an account of the Kingsway Hall demonstrations see the NUWSS Annual Report 1915 and Swanwick, *I Have Been Young* p.241
 2. *The Common Cause* 7 August 1914
 3. NUWSS Annual Report 1915

One of the first acts of most National Union societies was to establish a register of voluntary workers in their area, allocating them to suitable work among a wide variety of charitable and relief agencies. It also encouraged these bodies to place voluntary workers in occupations where they would not be displacing other women from paid work. Unemployment among women was one of the most pressing problems for the first year or so of the war, and the National Union and its branches were responsible for the establishment of a number of workshops and cost-price canteens to help women in this situation. By the end of 1915 most of these had been closed down as the need receded. In some towns the National Union branch appears to have become the centre and organising force of the local relief committees, whilst elsewhere National Union organisers and members were important in staffing these agencies. Other National Union members became involved in a large number of relief agencies — the Red Cross, the Belgian Relief Committee, the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association — while branches often took on the responsibility for the establishing of infant and maternity welfare centres in their area.¹

Probably the most impressive achievement in the National Union's relief work was the equipping and staffing of a number of hospital units for soldiers at the front. The idea for such a unit was initiated by the Scottish Federation of the National Union, which also administered the work throughout the war, though the funds were raised throughout the National Union. Five units had been established by the end of 1915, and were operating in Corsica, Salonika, France and Serbia. By 1916 the cost of running the units was estimated at £6000 per month and £150,000

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 27 August 1914, CMP. See Peter Cahalan *The Treatment of Belgian Refugees in England During the Great War*, PhD Thesis McMaster University 1977 pp.29, 174, 133 for suffragist involvement in relief work

had been raised since the scheme began. The London Society set up similar units, and had raised nearly £25,000 by the end of 1916. Two further units, the Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units, for Russian refugees, raised over £12,200 between November 1915 and August 1917.¹

There is no doubt that in a number of societies this work came to dominate suffrage activities. Moreover, despite Mrs Fawcett's disingenuous letter to the membership in 1915, asking them to sink their differences of opinion on the war in relief work,² much of it was undertaken in a spirit that was assertively patriotic, sometimes jingoistic. The London Society provides perhaps the most extreme example of undisguised involvement in the war effort itself. Their Women's Service Bureau was established specifically to release men needed at the front by providing women workers to replace them. Organisers were withdrawn from relief work for this purpose, and the Bureau registered 15,000 women in 1918 alone. There was a special department for the recruitment of munition workers, which selected the first 80 women to be employed in the Woolwich Arsenal. "Training schools were also opened by the Society for various *war trades*" (my emphasis), including one for oxy-acetylene welders.

Ray Strachey proudly recorded that its ever-expanding offices were never requisitioned because of the "national importance" of its work, which was testified to by the War Office, the Ministry of Munitions and the Committee of Production among others.³ However, it must be stressed that such an open involvement with the war effort was unique among National Union societies, and the essential difference between the mainstream of constitutionalist activities and that of the WSPU leadership should

1. NUWSS Annual Reports 1915-18

2. Mrs Fawcett to National Union members 23 April 1915, MGFP

3. Ray Strachey, *Women's Suffrage and Women's Service*, London: London & National Society for Women's Service, 1927 pp.26-29; London Society Annual Report 1915

not be lost sight of.¹

The National Union's continuing feminist commitment was evidenced in its establishment of a Women's Interests Committee to watch over the social, industrial and economic interests of women. In 1915, for example it took part in a Conference of Women's Organisation and Women's Trade Unions, convened by the Board of Trade, to discuss women's industrial problems. It also campaigned against the practice of employing women only in "subordinate positions" selecting the Civil Service for particular. Further, it worked on the need for trade schools for women, and co-operated with the British Association to produce a report of the displacement of men by women. The work of this committee continued and developed throughout the war, and many National Union branches set up local committees for the same purpose.²

The National Union regularly rejected assertions that it had abandoned the suffrage cause, and while it suspended political work, the definitions of what constituted "political work" had by 1916 narrowed down to intervention in by-elections. It continued to keep a careful watch on developments within Parliament which might put an obstacle in the way of women's suffrage in the future.

In assessing the effectiveness of Mrs Fawcett's policy of using relief work to maintain the organisation of the National Union, there is no question that the National Union suffered some decline in membership during the first two years of the war. It would be extremely remarkable if it had not. The affiliation fees for 1915 were £612, only £10 less than those for 1914 indicating that the membership had held pretty firm for the first year. The Manchester, Glasgow and London Society records

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1. Martin Pugh's account of NUWSS activity during the war is distorted by his heavy reliance on evidence from the London Society
 2. NUWSS Annual Reports 1915-18, and NUWSS Weekly Notes — typewritten, duplicated newsheets, Fawcett Library

support this picture, indeed in organisational terms the Glasgow Society continued to expand for the first few months of the war.¹ The main loss at this point was clearly in financial resources for suffrage work — receipts for relief work continued to reach large figures — and in the number of staff which the National Union and its societies could afford to employ.

In 1916 affiliation fees dropped from £612 to £462. The executive estimated this represented a membership of 33,334 — a drop of almost 20,000 from the pre-war figure. However, these losses were not evenly spread. While 145 societies reported a decrease in membership, 35 reported an increase. Moreover new societies were still forming in 1916, and new members being recruited.²

There was by now considerable variety in the situation of the various federations of societies which made up the National Union. The more vigorous included the Manchester, North Eastern and Scottish Federations and the London Society. Others like the Central Counties, the North Western, the South Wales and the Kentish Federations found it more difficult to keep their organisation together.³

Suffragists and Anti-war Opinion

While involvement with relief work succeeded to a considerable extent in maintaining National Union organisation, it was not able to prevent the split which occurred over its public stance on the issue of war and peace. The leadership divided broadly into three groups: those who desired to use the suffrage movement for support of the war effort, led

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1. NUWSS Annual Report 1915; Manchester Society Annual Report 1915; Glasgow Society Minutes August-December 1914
 2. NUWSS Annual Report 1916, NUWSS Executive Minutes 21 September, 16 February, 2 March, 3 November 1916; London Society Annual Report 1916
 3. NUWSS Annual Report 1916

by Mrs Fawcett; a faction led by Helena Swanwick and Isabella Ford who wanted the National Union to lead an anti-war campaign; and finally a group of more moderate anti-war opinion which wanted to see an educational campaign by National Union societies on the causes and prevention of war, led by Catherine Marshall, Kathleen Courtney and Margaret Ashton.

The anti-war factions succeeded in deleting Mrs Fawcett's patriotic resolution from the agenda of the first Council Meeting to follow the outbreak of war, which read "the British Empire is fighting the battle of representative government and progressive democracy all over the world and therefore the aim of the National Union as a part of the general democratic movement is involved in it".¹

At the Council meeting they argued for an educational campaign "to keep public opinion sane", building on a recent statement by Asquith which stressed the ultimate aim of the war as to see "the enthronement of the idea of public right as the governing idea of European politics", a "definite repudiation of militarism", "the independent existence and free development of the smaller nationalities" and finally "the substitution for force ... of a real European partnership based on the recognition of equal rights and established and enforced by a common will". The Council also passed resolutions that *The Common Cause* carry articles on the causes and prevention of war.²

A far stronger resolution from the Manchester Federation had called on the National Union to affirm its support of conciliation and arbitration and to demand the democratic control of all diplomacy. This had been withdrawn by Manchester under pressure from National Union Head Office and on this occasion Mrs Fawcett appears to have been supported by the Marshall-Courtney faction of the anti-war group, who feared precipitating a

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 4 November 1914, CMP

2. Annotated Agenda for the Provincial Council 12 November 1914, and report of the debate, CMP

split within the National Union, and still hoped to see a compromise solution.¹

Catherine Marshall and Kathleen Courtney still believed that Mrs Fawcett could be persuaded to support an educational campaign on the subject of war and peace in return for their own agreement to abstain from more active anti-war activities. Throughout the last months of 1914 they continued to press for some such compromise, threatening their own resignations from the Executive if it could not be achieved. In Catherine Marshall's words "This question is for some of us such an integral part of the whole question of women's political duties".² Meanwhile the Manchester and North Eastern Federations kept up their pressure for some such development of National Union policy.³

A new anti-war group, the Union for Democratic Control (UDC) was forming at this time and saw the National Union societies as a possible foundation on which to build up its own organisation.⁴ Both anti-war factions within the National Union leadership were involved in negotiations with UDC leaders at this time, and were seen as being associated with it by pro-war opinion in the leadership.⁵ Eventually only the Swanwick group agreed to join the UDC. This included Isabella Ford, Margaret Hills (Robertson), Ethel Snowden and Dr Ethel Williams.⁶ The Marshall/Courtney faction remained suspicious of this alliance, particularly as the UDC would not take up the principle of women's suffrage as one of its objects.⁷

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 4 November 1914, and Agenda for Provincial Council, CMP
 2. Catherine Marshall draft letter to Mrs Fawcett 28 November 1914, CMP
 3. See Manchester and District Federation circular 23 November 1914 and leaflet advertising a North East Federation meeting 26 January 1915, CMP
 4. Marvin Schwarz, *The Union for Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War*, Oxford: Oxford U.P. 1971 p.46
 5. Mrs Auerbach to Mrs Fawcett 9 November 1914, FAC
 6. See Schwarz op cit Appendix B, and Swanwick, *I Have Been Young* pp.244-66
 7. I.O. Ford to Catherine Marshall 25 October 1914; Kathleen Courtney to Catherine Marshall 31 December 1914; Catherine Marshall to Ethel Williams 2 February 1915, CMP. The NUWSS was still fighting the influence of the UDC within its branches in 1915, see circular letter from NUWSS Executive 24 August 1915, MPLA M50/2/9/51

Instead Catherine Marshall and Kathleen Courtney began to think in terms of forming a new organisation —

A sort of Liberty-Equality-Fraternity League, that would combine real feminism, real democracy, and real internationalism ... Of course, it may be said that the ILP combines all these objects, but it includes others as well which many National Union members would not, I think, be prepared to accept. And I think we ought to put women's suffrage absolutely first — as essential to the realisation of other things.¹

Support for such an organisation grew as the anti-war factions in the National Union found themselves constantly baulked by Mrs Fawcett and her supporters.

Provincial Councils were not able to determine National Union policy, and it was therefore necessary to have the successful resolutions on an educational campaign ratified by the general council at its next Annual meeting in the Spring of 1915. The anti-war contingent on the Executive were encouraged by the fact that the platform at this meeting was to include the renowned internationalist, Madame Verone. In the event the conference proved a defeat for the anti-war suffragists. While it declared its belief in arbitration as opposed to war and its support for the establishment of "a real International partnership, based on the recognition of equal right and established and enforced by a common will", it did not support the use of National Union organisation for an educational campaign to support such principles. Madame Verone's speech proved a further setback, when she roundly declared her support for the war against Germany.²

Helena Swanwick, Catherine Courtney and Kathleen Marshall now resigned from the Executive, while Maude Royden resigned from the editorship of

1. Catherine Marshall to Ethel Williams 2 February 1915, CMP
 2. NUWSS Annual Report 1915; NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 February 4 March 1915

*The Common Cause.*¹ These reverses for the anti-war suffragists were reinforced when Mrs Fawcett succeeded in preventing the National Union from sending delegates to the International Women's Congress in the Hague, despite the General Council's resolution that they should be sent. Mrs Fawcett insisted that the Congress was a peace conference, and that the Executive had no mandate to work in the peace movement. She believed attendance would damage "the reputation of the National Union for common sense" and would indicate its "total aloofness from national sentiment". Others asserted attendance would be in line with the Council's decision. A compromise was reached whereby members were allowed to attend the Congress, but not as National Union representatives.²

Nonetheless, the decision split the National Union, the opposition being led largely by societies within the Manchester and North Eastern Federations. It asserted that the Executive decision was at variance with the spirit of the Council resolutions. Many societies requested permission to send a representative to the Congress, the Street society announcing its firm decision to do so despite the Executive's ruling. Margaret Ashton reported that the Manchester Federation felt the Executive "were over-straining their powers and over-riding the Societies. It had seriously considered leaving the Union". The Executive refused to reconsider, and the resignation of the larger part of the Executive Committee followed with accusations of a "tide, which is converting the Union into a de facto autocracy, under the cover of a de jure democratic constitution".³

1. Helena Swanwick to Catherine Marshall 22 March 1915; Catherine Marshall draft letter to Mrs Fawcett 3 March 1915, CMP; C.D. Rackham to Kathleen Courtney 28 February 1915, Kathleen Courtney Papers; NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 March 1915

2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 March 1915

3. Those who resigned were Alice Clark, Isabella Ford, Emily Leaf, Cary Schuster, Helena Swanwick, Mrs Stanbury, Miss Tanner, Mrs Harley, Maude Royden NUWSS Executive Minutes 15 April 1915. See also Mrs Fawcett's letter to the membership 23 April 1915, MGFP

Letters poured in to the National Union offices, some regretting the decision not to attend the Congress, others supporting Mrs Fawcett. Many demanded a Special Council meeting to discuss the issues, and this was fixed for June. It was to consider the interpretation of the policy decided at the last Council, the extension of societies' rights to separate action and was to fill the vacancies on the Executive. The North Eastern Federation and the Manchester Federation also made repeated demands for a general re-election of all the officers of the Union.¹

The Special Council resulted in a victory for those who wanted to restrict National Union activity to relief work.² Moreover the ground was laid for further controversy when Ray Strachey, of the London Society, was elected to the post of Parliamentary Secretary, to replace Catherine Marshall. It was from this position that she was to lead the future attacks on the National Union's Election Fighting Fund policy and its alliance with the Labour Party.³

The dissenting faction of the National Union went on to provide the inspiration and leadership for many of the peace organisations that developed during the war, notably the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Plans for a new organisation had continued to be discussed among the anti-war suffragists and became the focus of their activity after the split. Helena Swanwick doubted the wisdom of Catherine Marshall's suggested Women's Independent Party. She wrote:

I would like to see a great humanist party rise,
keen on equal suffrage, proportional representation,

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 30 April, 6 May, 20 May, 14 June, 15 July 1915. Meanwhile the Executive refused to participate in a petition for a negotiated peace settlement being organised by the fellowship of Reconciliation, the pacifist group in which Maude Royden was active
 2. NUWSS Executive 14 June 1915
 3. At this Council meeting, the London Society, on which Ray Strachey was a leading member, attempted to put an end to the Friends of Women's Suffrage Scheme, an integral part of the National Union's efforts in organising working class support

devolution, a reformed House of Commons and an abolished House of Lords, free Trade and reformed Diplomacy, and tremendous economic changes. What I fear is that each group of reformers will have its first objects to which it wishes to subordinate the others, and I fear women will have to put the vote first till they get it — It is so boring a prospect!¹

Eventually this group of suffragists formed the British section of the WILPF, which had grown out of the Hague conference. This organisation had the double object of working for the settlement of international disputes by the establishment of arbitration and conciliation machinery, and the enfranchisement of women. Its chairperson was Helena Swanwick, and its executive included Catherine Marshall, Kathleen Courtney and Margaret Hills (Robertson), while other leading members included Maude Royden, Isabella Ford, Margaret Ashton and Ethel Snowden of the National Union, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence and Mrs Ayrton Gould of the United Suffragists, Sylvia Pankhurst of the East London Federation of Suffragettes and Mrs Despard of the WFL.²

The Defeat of the Election Fighting Fund Policy

The departure of the anti-war suffragists from the National Union leadership did not put an end to serious internal controversies. The seceding faction of the Executive had also, by and large, been the most dedicated supporters of the Election Fighting Fund policy, and the National Union's alliance with Labour. They were replaced by women who did not share this commitment, and the new Parliamentary Secretary Ray Strachey (more often known as Mrs Oliver Strachey at this time), began an active campaign to have the policy rescinded.

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1. Helena Swanwick to Catherine Marshall June 1915, CMP
 2. See Newberry, *Anti-War Suffragists* op cit. The WILPF issued monthly news sheets from April 1916, which give a full account of its activities. For similar conflicts within the WSPU see Rosen, *Rise Up Women*, pp.252-3

Catherine Marshall had remained as Secretary of the Election Fighting Fund after her resignation as Parliamentary Secretary, but she was not able to stem this movement against the alliance.

As early as November 1914 Mrs Fawcett was arguing it would be necessary for the National Union "to throw over its present policy" if a general election occurred before the end of the war, in order to support the government.¹ By the time of Catherine Marshall's resignation from the Executive EFF organisers were being paid out of National Union central funds, as most of their time was now concerned with relief work.² While in Manchester, former EFF organisers like Annot Robinson, Selina Cooper and Mrs Tozer kept in touch with Labour organisations, alongside their other work, elsewhere, for example in Scotland, EFF work came to a complete standstill.³

In May 1915 moves against EFF policy were consolidated when the Executive interpreted the Council's resolution to suspend political work as also suspending all EFF activity. Catherine Marshall's final resignation as EFF Secretary, and Margaret Hills (Robertson) as EFF organiser followed.⁴ Meanwhile Margaret Ashton and Alice Clark, on behalf of the EFF Committee continued to insist that the National Union's obligation to Labour party candidates in EFF constituencies must be maintained.

At this time it would appear that Catherine Marshall hoped the National Union organisation might be divided between the two factions. In her plan, the EFF Committee was to form the nucleus of a new organisation which would advocate the general principles which underlay the claim for political equality, and which would "work for the general

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1. See the copy of the NUWSS Executive Minutes 4 November 1914, MPLA. M50/2/7/8. The section dealing with election policy is marked "delete" and does not occur in the copy in CMP
 2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 4 March 1915
 3. EFF Minutes 29 January, 5 March 1915, CMP; Manchester Society Annual Report 1915 and Manchester Federation Annual Report 1915
 4. NUWSS Executive Minutes 1 July 1915

advancement of women's position, socially, industrially, economically and politically". The funds of the National Union and the EFF were to be divided between the two sections in proportion to their relative membership immediately after the division.¹ It does not appear that these proposals were ever discussed by the National Union Leadership.

At a meeting of the EFF Committee on 14 July 1915 the two sides argued their case for the continuance or suspension of the EFF policy. Mrs Fawcett presented the EFF as simply a whip with which the National Union had sought to beat the Liberal government, through intervention in elections. It was no longer relevant in war-time conditions. She advised the suspension of the EFF organisation for the meantime, but the keeping on reserve of its funds for a possible revival of its work in the future. At this time EFF reserves stood at almost £2000.

Catherine Marshall retained an altogether broader view of EFF policy. The election work had been its least important aspect:

The most vital side of the work was the whole question of bringing the Women's Suffrage Movement into friendly relations with the Democratic movement in the country; and this was more important now than ever.

It was the EFF's activity among the rank-and-file of the Labour Party which had proved most productive.

If we let the threads go now, we could not expect to pick up the work after the war at the point at which we had left it in August 1914.

Mrs Fawcett's interpretation of the policy implied that the National Union had simply been using the Labour Party as a tool. Moreover, if it was anticipated continuing the policy after the war, it was essential to maintain links with the Labour Party during the present.

Nonetheless, Catherine Marshall recognizes^d that whole-hearted

1. "Draft Resolution Proposed by Miss Marshall as a Basis for Discussion" n.d. (May 1915), CMP

supporters of the policy were probably in a minority within the National Union. If the Executive felt it likely that the policy would be reversed by a future Council meeting, it would be better to make a clean break with the Labour Party immediately. Above all she wanted to avoid any misunderstanding which might arise if the Labour Party continued to believe National Union support was committed to 22 of its candidates only to see it withdrawn at the time of actual election.

After these discussions it was agreed unanimously that any continuance of EFF activity would form an obligation to support the Labour candidate at the next contested election, and that any withdrawal at a later date by the National Union "would probably be disastrous for Women's Suffrage". (At this time East Bristol and Accrington were the only constituencies where active support of the local Labour Party machinery was being maintained).¹

Consequently, Catherine Marshall advised friendly and informal meetings with Labour leaders now, and stressed "The policy of regarding the Labour party simply as a tool would be very unfair to the Labour Party and exceedingly damaging to the National Union". If allowed to dominate National Union policy it could result in an unfriendly response from the Labour Party. Women's suffrage was now certain to be a government measure. Labour Party support would be critical either in the case of a very limited Unionist bill, or the likely Liberal choice of a women's suffrage clause to a more general reform bill, by amendment. Despite opposition from Ray Strachey, the Executive decided to accept this advice, and arranged informal meetings with Labour leaders, who were to be advised that for the present EFF policy was in suspension. Future Councils might decide to alter the policy altogether, but there were no

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 15 July 1915

grounds for fearing this at present.¹

Controversy over the EFF policy re-emerged in October 1915 when it appeared that one of the EFF candidates, Aylles in East Bristol, might fight a by-election on a no-conscription platform. When the National Union's Executive decided to suspend registration work there a conference was arranged between Mrs Fawcett, Mrs Strachey and Miss Atkinson for the Executive and Miss Tothill, President of the East Bristol Society, Mrs Townley, EFF organiser there and Aylles himself.

The representatives from East Bristol were told of the Executive's decision to suspend EFF work during the war, and of the meeting with the three Labour leaders. Aylles argued strongly that to abandon the existing registration work in East Bristol would lose all the ground gained within the local labour movement. "There are still influences in the Labour Party which are hostile, this part of it was convinced that the National Union was not sincere, and would not keep its pledges. It is the attitude of the working classes generally to the middle classes; and in East Bristol there is now more animosity to the middle classes than there was at the outbreak of war".

Aylles explained how Mrs Townley had succeeded in winning the confidence of local trade unionists, which was critical to maintaining Labour Party support for women's suffrage in the area. His candidature had only gone ahead because of the pledges made by the National Union. If EFF support were now withdrawn, it would be seen as a betrayal. Miss Tothill argued that the East Bristol Society had been built up on the basis of support for EFF policy: "Our Committee and the fortunes of the Labour candidate are closely intertwined". The East Bristol deputation

1. Mrs Fawcett to Catherine Marshall 11 October 1915, MGFP. There would seem to have been some disagreement as to what was actually said at these meetings. See Reports of meetings with WAC Anderson, John Hodge and Fred Jowett 3 August and 12 October 1915, CMP

continued to argue that all parties were continuing registration work, despite the political truce, and that to suspend it in their constituency would effectively reverse the National Union's earlier pledges.¹

Little headway was made at this meeting and the East Bristol Society considered withdrawing from the National Union.² In the meantime Catherine Marshall began to press for a reversal of the Executive's decision to suspend all further registration work on behalf of EFF candidates.³

At a joint meeting of the National Union Executive and the EFF Committee which followed this conference Catherine Marshall wanted it made clear that "the temporary suspension of political activity because of the war did not imply any repudiation of pledges given before the war ... and that the statement made to the ILP at Glasgow is still binding". That is, the National Union would keep its pledges to Labour candidates in EFF constituencies in any post-war general election. She took for granted that where pledges had been made to candidates for support in the next general election (as opposed to possible by-elections) there was no question of not continuing support. Only constituencies where candidates were not promised general election support were now under discussion.

Catherine Marshall argued that the talks held with Labour leaders recently had turned only on the general policy. "It never entered my head that they were supposed to cover the specific pledges". The Executive agreed to investigate each constituency concerned to see what pledges had been made to the local Labour organisations on behalf of the EFF — were they to one particular candidate only, did they cover only the eventuality of a by-election, or was there a commitment for general election support?

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1. "Interview with representatives from East Bristol re EFF Work" n.d. (25 October 1915) CMP
 2. Mrs Townley to Catherine Marshall 1 November 1915, CMP
 3. Catherine Marshall to Mrs Strachey 4 November 1915, CMP

Catherine Marshall believed the National Union would find itself irrevocably committed in Accrington and East Bristol, where the EFF was directly responsible for Labour candidatures, and this could also be so in Rotherham, North Monmouth, Midlothian and N.W. Durham, and possibly Holmfirth, if the earlier Labour candidate, Lunn, were retained.

She felt it imperative that where the National Union did not find itself pledged "we shall see to it that they do not think we are". Elsewhere she believed work could be suspended, but the National Union could not renege on its pledges. Eleanor Rathbone argued that the Executive needed to ask the Council if it felt bound by these pledges. The Executive would also have to decide its own position on this, put it to the Council, and resign if Council decided not to heed it.¹

Having investigated the situation in EFF constituencies Ray Strachey reported as follows: she felt the EFF was pledged only in four constituencies; East Bristol, Accrington, North Monmouthshire, and Rotherham as the National Union had caused Labour candidates to run in these four seats. National Union support was also expected in North West Durham, Barnards Castle, Bishop Auckland and West Bradford, but this represented the expectations of the local societies only, not formal EFF pledges.

Conversely the EFF committee had made pledges in Leith and Midlothian, but according to the Edinburgh EFF committee there was no local expectation that they would be kept. There were also ten other

1. Joint meeting of the EFF Committee and the NUWSS Executive 18 November 1915. The East Bristol Society had written to say it was prepared to resign from the National Union if support for the Labour candidate did not continue. Strachey hoped the situation in Accrington would be resolved by the candidate not standing. He had supported a recruiting campaign while the local Labour committee was anti-war. She included the information that on National Union urging the Accrington ILP had built a club and was in debt to £50 on account of it, NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 November 1915

constituencies where the National Union had been supporting a sitting Labour MP, and Portsmouth, where National Union support was pledged, but a candidature was now unlikely.¹

On the basis of this investigation Ray Strachey succeeded in persuading the Council meeting in February 1916 to re-affirm the suspension of the EFF policy until the circumstances of the next general election were known. However, the National Union also undertook not to oppose any suffragist Labour candidate, whatever the circumstances, in recognition of the undertaking given to the ILP conference in Glasgow in 1914. Further in those constituencies where pledges had been made registration work might continue and electoral support would be provided in the event of an election within a three-party system. Otherwise, all political work remained in suspension until the Executive or Council decided that changed conditions required its re-commencement.²

Having thus accomplished the effective end of the EFF policy Ray Strachey resigned from the position of National Union Parliamentary Secretary. Seven of the most committed of the EFF Committee also resigned: Margaret Ashton, Fred Shaw, Isabella Ford, Mrs Stanbury, Muriel Countess de la Warr, Catherine Marshall and Alice Clark. Margaret Ashton wrote to Catherine Marshall expressing the view that the EFF was no longer an independent committee in touch^{uc} with the Labour Party. It was now controlled by the National Union Executive and therefore "the middle class woman attitude of the National Union Executive is bound to prevail".³

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 20 January 1916. Compare with Catherine Marshall's assessment of National Union EFF commitments EFF Minutes 14 July 1915, CMP
 2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 3 February 1916. For the Executive's exposition of its understanding of the problems surrounding the EFF policy see its circular letter to NUWSS branches and delegates to Council, n.d. (February 1916), MGFP. Catherine Marshall was granted ten minutes to address the Council on points of fact within this letter, NUWSS Executive Minutes 16 February 1916
 3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 2 March, 16 March 1916; Margaret Ashton to Catherine Marshall 12 March 1916, CMP. The National Union did continue election work on behalf of Aylles, in East Bristol, despite his imprisonment on refusing conscription. See Walter Aylles to Mrs Fawcett 25 February 1917, FAC. It was also accepted that Leith and Midlothian would have to be accepted as EFF constituencies, if the Labour candidature asked the National Union for help at a future election

Conciliatory letters were sent to Arthur Henderson and W.A.C. Anderson explaining the Council decision and adding, rather disingenuously — "From this explanation you will see that practically no change was made by our Council with regard to the attitude of the National Union to the Labour Party". Cordial replies were received from the two Labour leaders though Anderson's contained a sting in the tail. "You may be quite certain that whatever you decide to do in the future, there will be no change in our attitude on a question which is to us a matter of principle and not expediency".¹

The issue of moving from a women's to a full adult suffrage demand emerged alongside this struggle over the EFF policy, and in a sense was the answer of the more progressive suffragists to the National Union's Executive's retreat from its alliance with the Labour Party. When Margaret Ashton resigned from the Manchester Committee she had made it clear she was now committed to working for full adult suffrage. In June 1916 the Newcastle Society passed an adult suffrage resolution which was repeated at its Annual meeting a few days later, with no dissenting votes.

On the National Union's Executive questioning this action Ethel Williams had replied that her society considered it quite in order "and that the feeling of the society was entirely for Adult Suffrage". The resolution had been sent to government Ministers and MPs in the area, but had not been published in the press. Most of the opponents of adult suffrage had apparently left the society, and Ethel Williams was supposedly anxious to remain within the National Union. The Executive requested

1. Copy of letter from NUWSS Executive to Arthur Henderson and W.A.C. Anderson 6 April 1916, and their replies 17 and 14 April respectively, MGFP. In November 1917, with women's suffrage safely underway with Labour support secured, the EFF Committee wound itself up, passing the balance of its funds to the National Union; Support for Aylles candidature still continued after this formal ending of the fund NUWSS Executive Minutes 22 December 1917, 14 February 1918

a promise that no future independent action, at variance with National Union policy, would be undertaken.¹

Controversy over the issue among the National Union's Executive followed, Mrs Osler believing that if a Special Council were not to be called "a definite expression of the views of the Executive as to action by Societies re Adult Suffrage must be given". Eleanor Rathbone felt the National Union would be justified in pushing for an adult suffrage measure if one seemed imminent — it was constitutionally free to agitate for adult suffrage once it became a practical issue. Mrs Fawcett agreed that the National Union would be free to work for a larger measure than women's suffrage if it seemed more likely to succeed. The Executive then unanimously passed a resolution "That this Committee holds itself free to support any movement for the simplification of the basis of the Franchise provided that it appears to be the best method of securing the enfranchisement of women". This resolution was sent out to National Union branches, but not to the press. In November 1916 the Manchester society passed an adult suffrage resolution, with only one dissentient.²

The Newcastle Society now went further, and rather than circulating the National Union's women's suffrage resolution to local trade union branches, circulated its own adult suffrage resolution. There was evidently similar trouble with the Leicester Society which protested that the Executive's resolution should also allow societies to work along adult suffrage lines. Newcastle requested that the Council meeting be moved forward. In their view adult suffrage was "the only practicable line", and they wished to put a resolution to this effect to the Council.³ The controversy seems to be dropped at this point, presumably on the publication of the Report of the Speakers Conference which gave the National

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 20 July 1916
 2. *ibid* 17 August, 3 November 1916
 3. *ibid* 16 November, 7 December 1916

Union leadership a positive programme to work on, and provided it with strong grounds to contain the adultist demand.

The Re-newed Suffrage Campaign 1916-17

These struggles within the National Union had intensified as the suffrage issue became revitalised by the rumours of a forthcoming Registration Bill.

The pre-war register was by now totally inadequate yet Conservative support for the government was not guaranteed for the full duration of the war, and an election might become necessary at any time. A means of drawing up a new register in war-time conditions had to be legislated for, and this raised the question of the possible enfranchisement of all those at the front. The National Union had always maintained that its political work would only remain suspended while there was no possibility of franchise reform. By this time too the urgency of much of the relief work, which had been engaging National Union energies for the previous year or so, eased. There were growing signs that many members were wanting to see a return to more active suffrage campaigning.

Nonetheless, at several joint meetings of the various suffrage bodies in London during January and February 1916, the National Union remained wary of becoming involved in a new demand for votes for women, until it was clear whether the proposed bill contained any extension of the existing franchise. It, together with the United Suffragists and WFL resisted pressure from the WILPF and the ELFS to take up the demand for full adult suffrage at this time.¹ Advice from "two prominent suffrage politicians" finally convinced the National Union leadership that it would now be "highly desirable" to resume active suffrage agitation.²

1. *ibid* 20 January, 3 February, 16 February, 2 March 1916
 2. *ibid* 2 March 1916

In consequence the Organising Committee of the National Union was instructed to draw up a scheme of work for the Spring, and a new membership drive was to be started. The Women's Interests Committee were to be told that suffrage work was now to be stepped up and the National Union would require the return of two of its organisers.

Mrs Fawcett sought further elucidation on the nature of the proposed bill from Asquith: "Not, of course, that any of us are in in degree hostile to the enfranchisement of men who have been suffering and working for our country, but it is feared that the Suffrage may be dealt with in a manner prejudicial to the future prospects of the enfranchisement of women". Asquith replied in a conciliatory tone, that no actual changes in the franchise were at present planned "but if, and when, it should be necessary to undertake it you may be certain that the considerations set out in your letter will be fully and impartially weighed without any pre-judgment from the controversies of the past".¹

A joint committee of constitutional suffrage societies was established and agreed that its members would take no action if the Registration Bill merely enabled existing voters at the front to vote.² Meanwhile, National Union federations had been called to a meeting to discuss a proposed plan of campaign. All National Union societies were instructed to hold meetings to pass resolutions urging a women's suffrage amendment to the bill if it in any way altered the franchise. These were to be

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1. Mrs Fawcett to Henry Asquith 4 May 1916, with cutting of Asquith's published reply from The Times, n.d. MGFP
 2. This meet was on 16 May 1916 and included representatives from the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, the Church League for Women's Suffrage, the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, the Free Church League for Women's Suffrage, the Liberal Women's Suffrage Union, the London Graduates Union for Women's Suffrage, the National and Professional Women's Suffrage Society, the New Constitutional Society, the Scottish Church League for Women's Suffrage and the Women Writers Suffrage Union. Eleanor Rathbone also wanted to include representatives from other organisations with an interest in women's suffrage, most particularly the WILPF. The WCG and BWTA were also excluded, though the National Union had traditionally consulted with them at such times. She was defeated, and several societies wrote to regret the exclusion of the WILPF in particular. NUWSS Executive Minutes 6 April, 18 May, 15 June, 3 August 1916

forwarded to Cabinet Ministers. 226 branches had done so by mid June.¹

When Parliamentary suffragists told National Union leaders of growing Conservative pressure to enfranchise *all* servicemen, National Union societies were instructed to call a meeting of their Executives and be ready for quick action. They were also to contact their local MPs on the issue and write to members of the Select Committee at present considering the bill. Public or members meetings were to be organised to pass resolutions on the injustice of excluding women from any bill which altered the basis of the franchise. This work was to emphasize the relationship between the demand for the vote and women's war work. Organisers were instructed to be ready to return to full-time suffrage agitation by September "in view of the necessity of reviving suffrage work".²

When Henry Nevinson, of the United Suffragists had returned from war-reporting in July 1916, he had found a "suffrage crisis in full blaze, but really promising for the first time".³ A conference of suffragist MPs and women's suffrage leaders was organised where he found "feeling for Adult Suffrage almost without exception".⁴ By this time the United Suffragists, alongside the more progressive suffragists of the National Union preferred to state the demand in terms of adult suffrage. At this meeting the United Suffragists pressed their idea of a Speakers Conference as a means of finding a compromise solution to the

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1. A few societies opposed the revival of suffrage agitation while the North and East Riding Federation reported that financial distress made any such work impossible at present. NUWSS Executive Minutes 15 June 1916
 2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 15 June, 20 July 1916. A deputation had also been arranged to the Chairman of the Select Committee on the bill. When the bill was withdrawn, it was decided to seek an interview with Asquith instead, though this was not successful. Other deputations attended Bonar Law and Lord Robert Cecil, on the Unionist side. Meanwhile Henderson continued to press for women's suffrage within the Cabinet, Cabinet Papers 1 August 1916 CAB/37/154/37
 3. Nevinson Diaries 19 August 1916
 4. *ibid* 21 August 1916

problem of franchise reform which would be acceptable to all parties. Sir John Simon was active in these developments and led a renewed campaign on the issue within the House of Commons "with an enthusiasm uncommon in one of his cool temperament".¹

When the Speaker's Conference was finally announced in September 1916 the progressive women suffragists from various groups came together with labour and socialist leaders to form the National Council for Adult Suffrage. Henry Nevinson acted as chairman, with Mrs Pethick Lawrence as treasurer and Kathleen Courtney and James Middleton as secretaries. The National Council's executive included Margaret Bondfield, Margaret Llewellyn Davies, George Lansbury, Mary Macarthur, Robert Smillie, Catherine Marshall, Maude Royden, Helena Swanwick and Evelyn Sharp.² However, dissension soon developed within the National Council between three factions.³ Sylvia Pankhurst and her supporters wanted to work only for full adult suffrage and would accept no compromise short of it. The women's suffragists on the National Council were also adultists, but were prepared to accept a compromise while wanting to press for as wide a measure as possible. The Labour leaders followed the more cautious position of the National Union and preferred to settle for whatever the Speaker's Conference offered,³ though the National Union backed Sir John Simon's call for a "wide and simple franchise", and took part in an adult suffrage conference in October.⁴

On the announcement of the Speakers Conference National Union Societies were at once advised to begin holding propaganda meetings, while a press campaign was planned with the help of a group of women journalists. A large women's demonstration in London was organised for

1. Nevinson, *More Changes...* p.337

2. Circular manifesto of the National Council for Adult Suffrage 6 October 1916, CMP

3. Nevinson Diaries 22, 24 September, 15 December 1916, 1, 3, 8 January 1917

4. NUWSS Executive Minutes 5 October 1916

the New Year. Meanwhile deputations and memorials to MPs continued, while resolutions were still flowing in from trade union branches, to be forwarded to the Speakers Conference.¹

In mid-December an informal conference was held at the home of Sir John Simon to discuss the position of the women's suffrage issue at the Speakers Conference. Present were Sir John Simon, Willoughby Dickenson, Henry Nevinson, Mary McArthur, Kathleen Courtney and Millicent Fawcett. Mrs Fawcett's memorial on the conversation recorded:

Sir John Simon and Mr Dickenson both considered there was a good chance of the Conference recommending Women's Suffrage. The difficulty and danger would arise when concrete proposals for Women's Suffrage came to be discussed. The two Members of Parliament thought there was little or no chance of Adult Suffrage being recommended by the Conference, and that for the Adultists to press for it would risk the loss of even a general recommendation for Women's Suffrage in any form. Men like Sir F. Banbury would take alarm and might probably wreck the chance of any success at all ... A good deal of talk took place about various ways of dealing with the excess of women over men. Finally I think there was a general agreement that raising the voting age for women was the least objectionable way of reducing the number of women... Finally the outcome to which I think we all agreed as the best course, was first to secure, if possible, a recommendation from the conference of the principle of Women's Suffrage, and then test the feeling of the conference by raising one after another definite schemes for carrying Women's Suffrage into effect.²

On Dickenson's advice Mrs Fawcett later contacted Lady Selbourne of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association to urge Sir William Bull to bring forward a scheme for Women's Suffrage at the conference. It would "have a better chance of being carried than anything proposed by the Liberal members of the conference".³ Thus while the women suffragists may have been excluded from the proceedings of the conference itself, they did not fail to bring pressure to bear on that

1. *ibid* 3 November, 7 December 1916
 2. Mrs Fawcett's Memo to Sir John Simon on the conversation at 36 Eccleston Square 15 December 1916, MGFP
 3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 4 January 1917

conference and would appear to have been favourable to the idea of an age restriction on the women's vote as the most preferable form of limitation. Constitutional suffragists had recognised the possible need for some such compromise since the ill-fated Franchise Reform Bill of 1912-13. At that time Eleanor Rathbone had investigated the effect of various age restrictions to the women's vote.¹

It was at about this time that the correspondence between Lady Betty Balfour, Mrs Fawcett and Lord Northcliffe took place, which Pugh has cited as showing the National Union's inability to raise a campaign on the women's suffrage issue. However, his interpretation of both the tone and implications of this correspondence are of doubtful value. Mrs Fawcett was clearly interested in Northcliffe's view that some large suffrage demonstration was needed. She forwarded his letter to the National Union's Secretary with the comment "I think we should consider it very carefully ... I rather like the idea of a united deputation". His suggestion to arrange a deputation to Lloyd George was quickly taken up and the Consultative Committee of Women's Suffrage Societies was invited to help. There could be no possible reason why Northcliffe — or Dr Pugh — should have expected the National Union to launch itself upon a WSPU-style campaign. This had never formerly been the National Union's mode of operating, and it was not now in the business of providing good copy for Northcliffe's presses.²

In January the National Union was worried by press reports that women's suffrage was not included in the Speaker's Conference Report to

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1. Arthur Henderson had recommended an age qualification for women in early Cabinet discussions as acceptable to the suffragists, CAB 37/147/31, 12 May 1916; an age restriction of 25 had also been part of Dickenson's last private member women's suffrage bill in 1913. See also Catherine Marshall's note on a discussion on means of limiting the women's franchise 18.1.1917 CMP
 2. NUWSS Executive Minutes, 4 January 1917; correspondence between Lady Betty Balfour, Mrs Fawcett and Lord Northcliffe 20-26 December 1916; Mrs Fawcett to NUWSS Secretary Mrs Atkinson 26 December 1916 all FAC. This evidence does not support Martin Pugh's assertion that Northcliffe was "frostily rebuffed", Pugh, *Electoral Reform*... p.142

be published shortly. One of its members, who was also a member of the Speakers' Conference, Mr Aneurin Williams wrote that these reports were totally unauthorised adding "Do you think your friends in the Conference would allow the matter not to be considered".¹ Two days later Dickenson wrote to Mrs Fawcett, urging her "not to let the women's suffrage societies rush to the conclusion that our conference has done nothing for the cause. I think that you will have something very substantial upon which to build a demand which I have great hopes will be successful". It would be "bad tactics to fall foul of the Conference" and could provide the government with an excuse to shelve the issue once more.²

Given that the possible proposals the Speakers Conference might make had already been discussed and tacitly accepted by leading suffragists, this does not read as a letter of apology as Martin Pugh has suggested. It was rather a warning that Mrs Fawcett and the National Union must now concentrate their energies on maintaining a united front among suffragists, and in particular, moderate the reaction of the committed adultists, so as not to endanger the ground won.³ Mrs Fawcett and Ray Strachey also had a meeting with the Unionist Minister Walter Long. He said that he found the Speakers Conference recommendations a reasonable compromise and that he would vote for them in the bill which was expected to be drawn up on the basis of the report. He was pressing

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 17 January 1917

2. W.H. Dickenson to Mrs Fawcett, 19 January 1917, MGFP. Meanwhile a press protest was organised against these rumours. National Union Societies were asked to call urgency committee meetings and plan meetings to take place on the publication of the conference report. If women's suffrage was included they were to congratulate the conference, and if not voice their protests. If meetings were impossible the society should organise memorials and deputations to local MPs. A large public meeting was organised to coincide with the National Union's forthcoming Annual Council, NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 January 1916.

3. For Pugh's interpretation see *Politicians and the Vote...* p.365

for a government measure. He also stressed that in his view the suffragists could not be too active in Parliament and urged the National Union to form groups of supporters in the House to support the compromise solution.¹

When the Speaker's Conference Report was published it advised full adult suffrage for men on a residential qualification. It then recommended a measure of women's suffrage based on age, property qualifications. Women over 30 or 35 should be qualified to vote if they or their husbands were on the local government register, which was based on an occupier franchise. As we have seen suffragists had themselves advised MPs on possible means of limiting the women's vote, and consequently these provisions were hardly the unpleasant surprise Pugh has suggested.

Suffragist reaction to the Report varied. Sylvia Pankhurst continued to hold out for "no compromise" on the question of full adult suffrage.² The National Union had taken various advice on how it should receive the Report, all of which had stressed the danger of an adultist demand. Consequently, Mrs Fawcett advised working to lower the age limitation but to take care not to upset the whole basis of the compromise which had been achieved. On these grounds the National Union Executive resolved to welcome the Speaker's report, while expressing the hope that the House would improve on the recommendations.³ The suffragists

1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 January 1916. Walter Long had previously been one of the most committed anti-suffragists. His change of view is explained by David Close, *The Collapse of Resistance to Democracy; Conservatives, Adult Suffrage, and Second Chamber Reform, 1911-1928*, *Historical Journal*, Vol.20, 1977 pp.893-918. Long's "experience of the intractability of franchise problems at the local government board since 1915 ... had led him to view franchise-reform no longer as a Liberal nostrum but instead as a public necessity, which would obstruct the solution of post-war problems if allowed to persist". loc cit p.900. Cf Pugh's explanation of Long's change of attitude, *Politics and the Vote...* p.367

2. Nevinson Diaries 6 February 1917

3. NUWSS Executive Minutes 1 February 1917. J.H. Thomas, Lord Robert Cecil and Frances Acland had provided the advice on which the decision was taken.

on the National Council for Adult Suffrage were split between those who wanted to hold out for adult suffrage, and those prepared to accept some degree of compromise while working for a wider measure than that recommended by the Speaker's Conference.¹ Its leadership felt harassed by the intransigence of those like Sylvia Pankhurst, and hampered by the refusal of most of the Labour leadership to raise an active campaign for a wider measure of women's suffrage.

While the National Union leadership was pressing other suffragists to accept the compromise reached by the Conference, Catherine Marshall consulted with Lloyd George on the feasibility of achieving a wider measure. Another meeting with former anti-suffragists Asquith and McKenna had convinced her of "the strength of the women's suffrage issue if the National Union and other bodies had not taken such a pusillanimous line from the first; it remains to be seen how much harm they have done. Greatly fear that they on the one side, and the Adultists who want to oppose anything short of perfection on the other, will play into the hands of Bonar Law and Co who are anxious for an excuse for doing nothing".²

The National Union's efforts to achieve a measure of agreement with committed adultists met with mixed success, but were undoubtedly crucial to the safe passage of the women's suffrage clause. When Mrs Fawcett and Ray Strachey first discussed the question with Kathleen Courtney, now Secretary of the WILPF, she opposed their policy of avoidance of hostile statements on the Conference recommendations, and the decision to avoid controversy for fear of losing all. Margaret Llewellyn Davies (of the Women's Cooperative Guild) also said she intended to work for

1. Nevinson Diaries 10, 13, 14, 16 February 1917
 2. Catherine Marshall's correspondence with Frances Stevenson and Lloyd George 6-15 February 1917, CMP; her notes on meeting with Lloyd George 17 February 1917, and Asquith and McKenna 19 February 1917, CMP

full adult suffrage, at least until the bill was introduced. She might be prepared to work for a more limited demand if she were then convinced that there was no chance for full equality.¹

Simon had reported to the National Union on events during the conference and stated that the anti-suffragists had swelled the vote in favour of a full adult suffrage recommendation, in the hopes of wrecking the possibility of compromise over women's suffrage.² Nonetheless, Kathleen Courtney remained adamant that the government had to introduce a franchise bill, come what may, and that therefore the suffragists should continue to press for their maximum demand — equality with men.

Simon was once more consulted, but he repeated the advice that the bill could be improved upon once introduced. In the meantime, suffragists should concentrate on ensuring that women were included in the forthcoming bill, by a positive response to the existing recommendations. He himself was to speak at an important adult suffrage rally, and at this meeting he stressed that nothing should be done that would jeopardise the introduction of a bill. He had received a great ovation, while all the other speakers had also shown "great moderation" in the eyes of the National Union's leaders.³

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 18 January, 1 February 1917
 2. NUWSS Executive Minutes 12 February 1917. Gulland, a Liberal Party manager further advised the National Union that the anti-suffragists were now considerably weakened. Harcourt had said he would not oppose women's suffrage any longer, while Asquith held that 35 was too high for the age bar. Gulland strongly advised not too hostile a tone to the report. The National Union should concentrate on working for a better provisions once the bill had been introduced. Runciman advised the National Union to press the government to include women's suffrage as an integral part of the bill, and not leave it to amendments from the House.
 3. *ibid.* Mr Prothero had also stressed that the suffrage societies should indicate their preparedness to accept compromise. The attitudes of the adultists at the adult suffrage demonstration and of the Labour Party were "important and satisfactory". The Conservative Party was now the most important factor, and the National Union should consult with Sir William Bull. See also Close, *op cit* pp.900-907 for a discussion of Conservative MPs attitudes to and action on the Representation of the People Bill, and Pugh *op cit* pp.366-74 for a discussion of how far the war had tempered anti-suffragist opinion.

The National Union made a final attempt to reach an agreement with Kathleen Courtney and Sylvia Pankhurst, but they remained firm in their intention to work for adult suffrage, unless they became convinced that it would wreck any forthcoming bill. For its part, the National Union now resolved finally to accept the Speakers Conference recommendations, and urged a government bill along those lines.¹ On 20th February a Women Workers demonstration was held in the Queen's Hall. Mrs Fawcett's speech sounded a triumphant note.

The result of the Speaker's Conference was an illustration of the deathless energy and vitality of the Suffrage movement. The Conference had been initiated by an anti-suffragist, presided over by an anti-suffragist, and consisted at first of 50% anti-suffragists; yet though the brew seemed distinctly anti-suffrage, when the tap was turned — Suffrage came out".

It was estimated six million women would be enfranchised under these recommendations. Walter Runciman and J.H. Thomas also spoke and "urged adult suffragists not to ruin the Electoral Reform Bill by pressing their own special desires too much".²

After much discussion and controversy a meeting of the National Council for Adult Suffrage passed a resolution put by Kathleen Courtney and George Lansbury welcoming the Speaker's Conference but urging the additional enfranchisement of women industrial workers and war widows. It rejected Sylvia Pankhurst's resolution calling for nothing short of full adult suffrage, and she and her followers withdrew from the Council.³

A National Labour Suffrage Conference called on 20th March 1917

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1. NUWSS Executive Minutes 12 February 1917. Mrs Thoday, Manchester Society abstained on grounds that the bill thus envisaged would exclude large numbers of industrial workers — those who were unmarried or who could not satisfy the property qualification for the local government register. During this period the National Union continued to concentrate on a sizeable press campaign
 2. *The Common Cause* 2 March 1917
 3. Agenda for National Council for Adult Suffrage meeting 27 February 1917, CMP

reached a similar position. It included representatives from the TUC, the National Labour Party, the Parliamentary Labour Party, and women's industrial organisations. The conference voted to accept the resolutions of the Speaker's Conference "as a minimum ... provided the enfranchisement of women, including women wage-earners and widows, is agreed to". A resolution calling for full adult suffrage was put by Bob Smillie and Mary McArthur, but was defeated.

The Common Cause commented:

It is very encouraging to see how truly the Labour Party are the friends of the enfranchisement of women. The fact that their only difficulty arose from the desire to enfranchise more women than the actual proposals of the Conference is very important, and still more so is the fact that, passionately though they believe in the principle of adult suffrage they are prepared to accept a measure which falls short of it for the sake of breaking down the sex barrier ... now that the Labour Party is definitely pledged not to endanger everything by raising obstructive criticism we are all in complete accord.¹

This compromise position was reinforced by the advice given to suffragists by Lloyd George during the deputation in March 1917,² and was upheld by the Labour Party's Annual Conference.³

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1. *ibid* 23 March 1917. The Scottish Miners seem to have taken the lead in demanding full equal suffrage, *The Glasgow Herald* 6 March 1917 for a report of their conference
 2. Lloyd George Papers, F/229/3 for a record of the deputation. Despite his warning of the dangers of the use of government Whips, they were eventually brought in to secure the passage of the bill, see Close *op cit* p.901. Nor was Lloyd George averse to bringing his own influence to bear on previous anti-suffragists to support the whole bill, see Sir Joseph Compton-Rickett to Lloyd George 2 April 1917, Lloyd George Papers F/43/6/2
 3. Mrs Fawcett to Arthur Henderson 23 August 1917, Arthur Henderson to Mrs Fawcett 30 August 1917, FAC. For Henderson's part in getting the Speakers Conference recommendation through Cabinet see *Lloyd George, A Diary* by Frances Stevenson, ed. A.J.P. Taylor, London 1971, p.148. Pugh underestimates the significance of the presence of two committed suffragists in the Cabinet, Lord Robert Cecil and Henderson. Both appear to have been more resolute than previous suffragist Ministers. On the other hand it should be remembered that the Labour Party's position was equally determined by self-interest. It was generally recognised that no bill would be introduced unless it was on the lines of the Speakers Conference, and even such a measure, with its limitations was very much in their interests as a Party, see discussion in H.C.G. Matthew, R.I. McKibbin and J.A. Kay, *The Franchise Factor in the Rise of the Labour Party* *English Historical Review*, Vol.XCI 1976 pp.723-752, particularly pp.736ff

The usual National Union machinery was set in motion to secure support for the women's suffrage clause of the resulting Representation of the People Bill.¹ Moreover Eleanor Rathbone recognized one anomaly created by the bill which was open to removal through an amendment, and the bill was successfully amended to include all married women over 30 on the local government registers. The campaign for this amendment was initiated and directed by the National Union. At first the government put on its whips against the amendment, but this caused such a "remarkable outburst of support" that a free vote was allowed. Resolutions had been sent in by 207 National Union branches, over 150 trades union branches and trades councils, 74 Women's Cooperative Guilds, 33 British Women's Temperance Associations and 120 other miscellaneous women's groups. Similar pressure was exerted on Bonar Law, in an attempt to ensure the clause should not be defeated by Unionist votes.²

With the successful passage of the Representation of the People Act in 1918 all women on the local government register, or who were wives of men on the local government register, or who were university graduates, and over the age of 30 were enfranchised. For the remaining period of the war the National Union concentrated on the registration of women voters, the successful introduction and passage of a bill allowing women to stand for Parliament, and the re-organisation of its own societies in the light of these advances.³

1. See Annual Report of the Manchester Society 1917; Glasgow Society Minutes 1916-17; London Society Parliamentary Sub-Committee Minutes 22 June 1917

2. NUWSS Annual Report 1917

3. *ibid* 1918. Membership and organisational strength now began to show clear signs of fast decline. Whereas affiliation fees had indicated 447 societies in 1915, this had fallen to about 333 by October 1917, and to only about 234 by October 1918. In this respect it was the winning of the vote for a considerable number of women which precipitated the decline of the suffrage societies, not simply the conditions of war

The suffrage movement had, in large part, remained intact under the impact of war, and had succeeded in exerting significant pressure to ensure the inclusion of women in the eventual franchise reform. Nonetheless, the political differences among suffragists intensified during this period. Within the National Union they centred on the issues of continuing electoral support for the Labour Party, and the transition from support for women's suffrage to that for full adult suffrage. Once the vote was won underlying political differences became insuperable and the progressive feminists, many of them now active socialists, were committed to wider social change than that envisaged by those who dominated the major suffrage organisations. While they became active in other areas — in peace organisations, the League of Nations movement, movements for colonial freedom, and, later, anti-fascism, those left in control of bodies like the National Union sought more restricted goals within the existing framework of feminist thought.

CONCLUSION

This study has sought to show how the linking of the women's suffrage movement with the demand for democracy, through the activities of the National Union, was critical to the eventual winning of votes for women. In the political context of the early twentieth century, this had led the suffrage cause to develop beyond the parliamentary lobbying activities of an elite group of middle class women, to the formation of a mass movement, and the integration of the call for votes for women with the more general demand for social regeneration and reconstruction. The recruitment of working class support was central to this process and led to the eventual alliance of a major section of the suffrage movement with the Labour Party. While many within the Liberal Party were also committed to electoral reform along democratic lines, internal tensions meant that the last Liberal government was effectively hamstrung on the issue. Among the progressive forces in politics it was left to the ^ITLP, and eventually the Labour Party to champion the principle of sex equality, alongside that of democratic representation.

However, such an achievement had not been secured without engendering considerable political and ideological tensions within the suffrage movement itself. These were evident in the division between militant and constitutional suffragists, in the splits within the militant wing itself, particularly from 1912 on, in the controversies which disrupted the National Union during the war, and in the attacks on suffragism by dissident feminists which began to be articulated shortly before the war. Such tensions continued to shape feminist debate and activity during the inter-war period.

The development from an elite pressure group to a mass movement had been underpinned by the ideological developments in feminism outlined in Chapter One. Any universalistic perspective is liable to distortion in a class society. When mid-nineteenth century feminists had sought

to apply universalistic analyses to their own situation, they identified with the position of their male social equals, not with men in general. Hence they stressed women's right to access to higher education, entry to the professions and equal votes on the basis of a property franchise.

The success of early twentieth century feminists in achieving a mass movement behind their demand would not have been possible without the increasing awareness among middle class suffragists of the socio-economic factors which also structured inequality. This made possible the move away from the classical Liberal concepts of equality which informed the simple demand for equal votes for women based on a property franchise. Consequently, by the outbreak of war a major section of the suffrage movement was committed to working for wider franchise reform as part of a more general demand for social reconstruction.

But equally significant was a further development away from the basic universalistic demand. From the earliest proponents in the seventeenth century, feminists had maintained a wariness of concepts of universality based on the male experience alone. In Juliet Mitchell's phrase, to feminists like Mary Astell, "the feminisation of men is as important as the masculinisation of women".¹ Nineteenth century feminists, under the influence of the domestic ideology, developed this tendency even more fully, and chose to lay an increasing part of the burden of their case on the sex-specific values and attributes of women. Without the analytical distinction between sex and gender which has been developed in late twentieth century feminist theory, this led them to confuse the socially conditioned characteristics of their sex, with its biological make-up. They accepted women's primary parenting role, the characteristics which supposedly accompanies it, and the sexual division

1. Juliet Mitchell, *Women and Equality*, loc cit p.389

of labour which arises from it as natural givens, rather than social products. Consequently, their capacity to offer any thorough-going analysis of patriarchy was limited.¹

Nonetheless, the gradual adoption of a particularistic perspective among feminists, through the absorption of nineteenth century domestic ideology did provide further possibilities for the widening of feminist goals and analysis. For the particularistic framework, through its stress on experiences specific to women, and its emphasis on women's distinctiveness from men, encouraged identification with the situation of any other woman. Not surprisingly, such a feminist perspective usually came to concentrate on issues like motherhood and sexuality, where class dimensions become submerged. In such a manner cross-class identification between women was facilitated.

To this extent the development of a particularistic emphasis within feminists by the turn of the twentieth century not only stimulated certain aspects of a critique of patriarchy, that is, awareness of women's economic and sexual subjection, but opened the way for middle class and working class women to work together for their enfranchisement. In the process the possession of the vote itself took on a different significance. It was no longer the symbol for middle class women's accession to the social status accorded their male counterparts. Instead it became the main tool with which women of all classes were to reform society in accordance with feminine values and needs, while at the same time helping to achieve full political democracy.

In mainstream feminist analysis, the progress of women had become inextricably bound to the progress of democracy. Thus while the assump-

1. This matter is still at issue among contemporary feminists, with a significant section of the women's liberation movement arguing that women's oppression is biologically determined, see e.g. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, New York: Morrow, 1974. For a critique of such analyses see Teresa Brennan and Carole Bateman, "'Mere Auxiliaries to the Commonwealth': Women and the Origins of Liberalism", *Political Studies* Vol. XXVII 1979 pp.199-200

tion of an overwhelmingly particularistic perspective locked suffragists into a general acceptance of the domestic role for women, it also helped them to break away from the middle class orientation of the original equal votes demand. Alongside this ideological development feminist analysis, organisation and eventually the suffrage demand itself, were being democratised to take into account the situation of women of all classes.

The logic of such developments led many among the younger generation of suffragists to attempt to link the feminist movement with what they saw as the most progressive political forces within society, in the ILP and the Labour Party. Tactical considerations enabled them to convince the leadership of the constitutional wing of the suffrage movement of the wisdom of such an alliance. Dissident militants kept up a similar struggle within the WSPU to bring it into association with the revolutionary socialist groups of the day. However, the controversies which split the movement during the war, and the final winning of the vote in 1918, undermined the hold of these progressive suffragists on feminist organisations, and the alliance was not maintained after the war, while feminists themselves divided up among a multitude of organisations and causes.

The political differences which now divided feminists were further complicated as the ideological tensions inherent in suffragism became clearer. These had first begun to emerge in the years immediately preceding the First World War, with the emergence of what was often termed at the time "individualistic feminism". Disillusioned suffragists like Theresa Billington Grieg, and Dora Marsden and Mary Gawthorpe of *The Freewoman*, began to challenge some of the particularistic, sex-stereotypical assumptions of suffragist ideology.

Theresa Billington Grieg, for example, accused the suffrage movement of encouraging a "stupid sex glorification" of women. In particular she

attacked the idealisation of the role of mother and home-maker: "The home today is commonly far from perfect ... built upon the subjection of women and continued by the infringements of the rights of the child". She had become sceptical of achieving emancipation simply through the reform of existing laws and institutions: "No passing of legal enactments can set free a woman with a slave mind. No-one can be made free by machinery".¹

The Freewoman also argued that other issues than the vote were more central to women's emancipation, notably the freeing of women from domestic duties so that they might become economically independent, and the freeing of sexuality. The end of monogamous marriage was envisaged as central to such changes. Such tendencies in feminist thought reflected the absorption of some of the ideas then current in anarcho-syndicalist circles.²

However, most other socialist feminists rejected such analyses. The Fabian socialist, Barbara Hutchins accused such 'individualistic' feminists of exaggerating "the importance of assimilating the position of women to men". In her view the fact of motherhood must always create a fundamental difference in the lives of men and women, in limiting their ability to produce exchange value: "It is almost impossible to make any logical scheme or theory that will fit the woman and the young child exactly into a commercially organised society, based on exchange value". Moreover, even while she believed women might be relieved of a large part of their domestic duties in a re-ordered society, the experience of motherhood rendered women temperamentally best suited for the production of use value, and they would thus continue to specialise in work

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1. Theresa Billington Grieg, *The Militant Suffragette Movement*, London: Frank Palmer 1911
 2. For the Freewomen's manifesto see *The Freewoman* 23 November 1911 ("Bondswomen and Freewomen") and 21 December, 28 December 1911, 4 January, 11 January, 18 January 1912 ("The New Morality")

which was effectively social mothering.¹

This debate continued among feminists during the war. Former National Union organiser, Wilma Meickle, took up the argument that women should be freed from domesticity in order to compete equally with men in the workforce. At the same time she rejected the "New Morality" which had been expounded in *The Freewoman*, seeing it only as the reverse side of the extreme prudery and sexual repressiveness which had characterised many of the older suffragists. In her view the family and monogamous marriage remained central to the interests of women, and sexual liberation offered little more than a greater freedom for them to be exploited by men.²

Once again this "individualistic" analysis came under attack from socialist suffragists, in the essays by Victor Gollancz and Maude Royden in a collection entitled *The Making of Women*.³ Victor Gollancz attempted to synthesize a critique of capitalist society with his feminist commitment, by arguing that women's emancipation could only come with the complete reconstruction of society. He attacked what he believed to be the two main aims of "individualistic" feminism — equal pay for equal work, and the freeing of women from domesticity. In his view it was the special conditions of most women's lives which needed to be recognized. Consequently, he argued, the endowment of motherhood was a more appropriate feminist demand at the present stage of society than equal pay.⁴

Such socialist feminists were not able to agree to a view of sexual equality which simply sought to make women's lives resemble men's as closely as possible. Because they too accepted the sexual division of

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1. Barbara Hutchins, *Conflicting Ideals*, London: Thomas Murby 1913, pp.35, 68, 77
 2. Wilma Meickle, *Towards a Sane Feminism*
 3. Victor Gollancz (ed), *The Making of Women: Oxford Essays In Feminism*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1917
 4. *ibid* Preface and pp.11-35

labour based on motherhood as given in nature, they insisted that in order to achieve a substantive, as opposed to a purely formal equality, feminist goals must focus on this central experience in most women's lives.

Hence, the demands of motherhood remained the limiting factor in Maude Royden's assessment of what feminists might achieve, and any attempt to circumvent them would prove utopian and inaccessible:

The difficulties of actual time and strength for work are only dependent on this supreme difficulty — the naturally defined limits of creative force in each human being.

But if this is so, is it not senseless to rebel? Let women choose — they have a right to choose — to which end they will devote themselves...But let us accept that for most of us it must be a choice and having made it, abide by it without that continual sense of resentment...Let us admit that in this necessity for choice there is hardship. Life itself is hard, and every choice we make in what we do means leaving something else we might have done undone. No-one is altogether rounded and complete. No-one does all the things she might have done... Every life is, *in a sense*, a maimed life.¹

Jane Lewis has argued that the ideas propounded by these essayists were part of the "New Feminism" which emerged in the inter-war period.² It is their influence, she believes, which explains the course taken by the National Union (which had become the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship) after the war. It is claimed that this New Feminism represented a dissatisfaction with narrow formalistic, equalitarian conceptions of equality and instead sought a reconstruction of society which recognized women's special needs, particularly in relation to their domestic role.

1. Maude Royden in *ibid* p.56 (her emphasis)
 2. Jane Lewis, *Beyond Suffrage; English Feminism in the 1920s*, *The Maryland Historian*, Vol.6 1975 pp.1-17. See also Sheila Rowbotham, *A New World for Women*, London: Pluto 1977 pp.19-20

Yet clearly much about the analysis of the New Feminists was *not* new. The standing of equalitarian demands had long since been undermined by the prevailing ideological assumptions of suffragism. The emphasis on women's particular biological fate and the claimed consequences of it were only a continuation of this ideological inheritance. The re-direction of emphasis lay rather in the recognition of the *existing* conditions of motherhood as a source of female oppression, though again the development of this critique had already begun before the war. The socialist suffragists among the New Feminists had also begun to link an analysis of women's subjection to the need for a new economic ordering of society, but the sexual division of labour remained unchallenged, and in many ways was being re-enforced by the New Feminism.

The "individualistic" stand in feminist thought was continued in the work of other socialist suffragists like Stella Browne and Dora Russell, who concentrated on issues of sexual liberation, and the potential offered for this by women's gaining control of human reproduction. However, such analyses continued to meet with a poor response from both the feminist and socialist movements, and when the demand for birth control clinics became a significant campaign in the late 1920s it was almost devoid of feminist content.¹

Similarly, the "equalitarian" strand of feminism had a very limited influence during this period, and failed to alter the direction of NUSEC, which from 1918 was under the direction of another New Feminist, Eleanor Rathbone. A major controversy developed within NUSEC between these two contending strands of feminism, over the issue of NUSEC participation in the campaign for family allowances. Eleanor Rathbone's commitment to this issue had first developed around an interest in the endowment of

1. Rowbotham, *A New World* pp.22-60; Jane Lewis, *The Ideology and Politics of Birth Control in Inter-War England*, *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, Vol.2 1977 pp.33-48

motherhood, which she had argued would eventually undermine the concept of the "family wage" for men, and thus open the way to equal pay for women.¹ However, in the course of the campaign for family allowances she had switched the burden of her arguments from those concerning female poverty to those stressing child poverty, and all feminist content was lost from the issue.

Jane Lewis has argued that it was "equalitarian feminist" perceptions which led to the opposition which this campaign encountered within NUSEC, but this would seem to be an over-simplification of the matter.² Mrs Fawcett, for example, resigned from NUSEC over the issue because she believed that the family allowance scheme would undermine the fabric of the family, and it was this aspect of the issue which challenged her personal view of feminism.

It seems possible, then that the New Feminism may well have represented a development in feminist analysis of the family, women's role within it and its place in their economic subjection, but this is an area requiring further research.

What is clear is that for all but a very few feminists in the inter-war period, the family and motherhood remained the central organising feature of women's lives. Though they located motherhood as a main source of women's social and economic oppression, their ideological heritage did not allow them to challenge the sexual division of labour which was based upon it. This problem was part of the final paradox in the history of the British women's suffrage movement. Its achievement in analysing the women's economic and sexual subjection had been considerable, but this had been facilitated by the move away from a universalistic perspective. While formally the demand for the vote represented a simple

1. Eleanor Rathbone, in Gollancz (ed) op cit pp.100-127
 2. Jane Lewis, *Beyond Suffrage* pp.1-8

equalitarian demand, its actual significance for the feminists of the period went far beyond this. British women did not simply demand the vote as human beings with equal rights to men, but as women, and particularly as mothers, with sex-specific social roles and duties. It was this ideological heritage which explained the directions of the National Union's successor, NUSEC, in the inter-war period, and which was to form the main limitation on the beginnings of a socialist feminist theory evident in the writings of former suffragists like Maude Royden and Helena Swanwick.¹ Other socialist feminists who attempted to challenge this ideological heritage found themselves without a political or organisational base from which to build.

Framing universalistic demands which appear equally pressing to women of all classes is a problem which continues to confront feminists to this day. To be truly universalistic, a feminist programme must aim at something beyond formalistic equality, and take cognizance of the social and economic inequalities which formal equality before the law does not redress.² Individualistic feminism, based on limited conceptions of universalistic principles, continues to come under attack,³ for it remains problematic whether a feminism whose ultimate aim is total autonomy for each individual can be compatible with democracy. It can never be possible to free the individual — male or female — from those constraints which social life requires from each and every one of us. The goal for feminists must be to universalise the basis on which such constraints operate by identifying, revealing and redressing the balance where aspects of *social* organisation bear inequitably on women.

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1. See Helena Swanwick, *Women in the Socialist State*, Manchester: National Labour Press, 1922
 2. Mitchell op cit pp.384-5 provides a full analysis of this problem
 3. Brennan and Bateman op cit pp.199-200

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