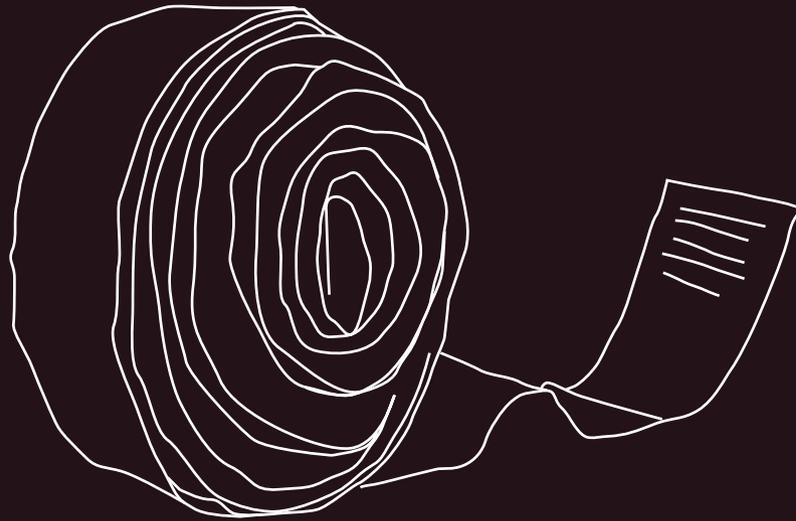




NELSON  
MODERNHISTORY

# WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS



MARYELLEN GALBALLY

SERIES EDITOR: TONY TAYLOR



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“Women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government.”

Eric Hobsbawm

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**1st Edition**

**Maryellen Galbally**

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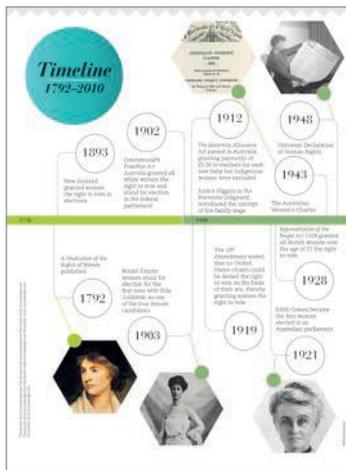
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# ABOUT THE SERIES

## Using Women's Movements

Women's Movements has been developed especially for senior secondary students of History and is part of the Nelson Modern History series. Each book in the series is based on the understanding that History is an interpretive study of the past by which you also come to better appreciate the making of the modern world.

Developing understandings of the past and present in senior History extends on the skills you learnt in earlier years. As senior students you will use historical skills, including research, evaluation, synthesis, analysis and communication, and the historical concepts, such as evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, significance, empathy, perspectives and contestability, to understand and interpret societies from the past. The activities and tasks in Women's Movements have been written to ensure that you develop the skills and attributes you need in senior History subjects.



### ILLUSTRATED TIMELINE

is a bird's-eye view of the topic and summarises the major developments of the period.

**What motivated the Nurse to serve overseas?**

**Questions and activities**

- Considering a range of sources, including the website of the Australian War Memorial, write a short biography of Jesse Tindie that includes the following information:
  - her age on enlistment
  - when she enlisted
  - where she nursed
  - any experiences she wrote about
  - what happened to her
  - her significance and contribution to the war effort
- What opportunities do you think she was referring to in the above quote?

**SOURCE 20** The Nurse and other images from the book, *Women of the Australian Army Nursing Service and other stories* by the Australian Army Nursing Service. The photograph was taken in 1917 in Cairo.

### SOURCE STUDIES

of visual and text primary sources and secondary literature appear frequently through the text and are combined with questions and activities to aid your evaluation and interpretation of evidence from the past.

**KEY FIGURES AND ORGANISATIONS**

**MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1759-1797)**

Wollstonecraft regarded as having written the founding text of feminism – A *Vindication of the Rights of Women* – Wollstonecraft argued that women had the same capacity as men to reason and have moral judgments and should therefore have the same rights as men to political participation.

**KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS**

**Disenfranchisement**  
The removal of people on the basis of their age, sex, religion or race.

**Female suffrage**  
The right of women to vote and stand for parliament.

**Feminism**  
The advocacy of equal rights and opportunities for women, especially the extension of their admission to social and political life. In practice, there can be a variety of feminisms shaped by differing political and cultural factors.

**KEY DOCUMENTS**

**Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902**  
The Act of the national parliament that granted Australian women the right to vote and to stand for election. Australia became the second country in the world to grant women the right to vote and the first country to grant women the right to stand for election.

**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**  
Adopted by the United Nations in 1979, this convention aims to protect the rights of women. Australia ratified this Convention in 1983.

### KEY FIGURES AND ORGANISATIONS, KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS, KEY DOCUMENTS

feature brief biographies, profiles, definitions and summaries of key documents as a ready reference for learning and revision.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**The woman question**

*“The full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men of both sexes.”*

19th Convention on the Extension of Franchise of the International Conference, 1919

Women's rights movements emerged in the 19th century in Britain, Europe, America and elsewhere. In the context of democratic changes which were brought about by new ideas and movements in politics, movements also emerged campaigning for women's rights in other European countries, notably France and Germany. It is important to look beyond the dominant women's movements emerged in the industrial centres of the European powers during the 19th century. Modern movements built on these campaigning for women's rights and women's rights were built on the ideas of the Enlightenment and led to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

**INQUIRY QUESTION**

- When and why did movements for women's rights emerge and what early successes did they have?

### CHAPTER INTRODUCTIONS

provide a context to the issues that are addressed.

**Exercise Pankhurst (1858-1928)**

Suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst was named in 1891 by *The Inquirer* (an American weekly news magazine) as one of the most influential people of the 20th century. She dominated the first 30 years of political life of 20th-century Britain as the powerful leader of the militant suffragette organisation, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Overlaid on the image are the dates of her birth and death and a quote from her that reads 'We have to free half of the human race, the women, so that they can help to free the other half.' One of her early commitments to the suffrage movement was with her husband Richard Pankhurst. Together they set up a suffrage society in Manchester in 1888 with the aim of obtaining the vote for married women in local elections. Success in this cause came in 1894. Campaigning for votes for women became her life's work until its success in 1928. She died shortly after all women were granted the right to vote.



### SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUALS

are biographical profiles and assessments of key historical figures and frequently include questions and activities.

**INQUIRY QUESTION**

- When and why did movements for women's rights emerge and what early successes did they have?

### INQUIRY QUESTIONS

are listed at the start of the chapter. These questions provide a focus for you as you read each chapter.

### The formation of gender identity

In consciousness-raising groups, women told stories that highlighted experiences of how they were brought up as girls in their families – how, as Simone de Beauvoir had said, ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’.

They analysed their upbringing, the custom of women changing their family name to their husbands’, and of putting girls in pink and boys in blue. They discussed the fact that some school subjects were identified as being for girls and others (such as science and mathematics) were seen as being boys’ subjects.

They also discussed the fact that occupations such as secretary, teacher and nurse were considered as being for women, while those of doctor, lawyer and tradesperson were for men. Girls were often encouraged to be teachers because they would be at home with the children after school and on school holidays.

In the collection of children’s toys they noted that there was a clear divide between the sexes.

## INFORMATION BOXES

contain extended discussions of key events, concepts and historical developments. Many also include questions and activities.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WAR FOR WOMEN

The significance of World War I for women and the achievement of further rights is debatable. Before the war the views of two Australian feminist historians about the significance of World War I for women:

**Historian 1**  
In *Creating a Nation*, Wilson, 1984, p. 218, Marilyn Lake writes:

‘World War I had extraordinary outcomes for generations. Women had not a moment of independence and freedom as girls. Few women ever managed, going for working challenges to relations between the sexes. Yet it opened a way for the women who had not been embraced by the war’.

**Historian 2**  
Alyce Tomlinson is concerned in her criticism of the effect of the war on the role of women in *Classroom Politics and Girls’ Power* (Penguin Books Australia, 2012, p. 421), that women:

‘The First World War did not provide an opportunity for Australian women to step forward and demand equal status ... because the Great War ... did not seem directly to be a war ... but the effect of winning and consolidating the status that women now social function was to have children and to dilute those around them who did not have children’.

### Questions and activities

- 1 Compare the views of the two historians. Which are the differences between them?
- 2 Based on the information in this chapter and your research, do you agree more with the first quote or the second? Support this view with your own ideas.



One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.

Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female – whatever she believes as a human being, she is said to imitate the male.

This has always been a man's world, and none of the reasons that have been offered in explanation have seemed adequate.

... Being a woman is not a natural fact. It is the result of a certain history. There is no biological or psychological destiny that defines a woman as such ... Being girls are manufactured to become women.

## HISTORIAN BOXES

introduce key historians and schools of interpretation as a way of making historiography clearer.

## DIAGRAMS AND TALKING SOURCES

are used to visually summarise complex ideas and events.

### Chapter summary

- The 19th century did not explicitly demand women the right to vote and thereby denied them political citizenship.
- Women wanted to question their lack of political and legal rights. This included the lack of access to higher education and the professions.
- Women wanted to organise through village societies to gain the right to vote.
- The right to vote was the most important addition about social status.
- Initially, the principal methods of campaigning were not successful.
- So some female suffrage societies were formed.
- The most famous organisation for WWSW decided and a new more radical society formed – the WSPU.
- The new radical methods – mainly non-violent – gained attention of the press and public.
- The WSPU knew how to represent publicity was in raising awareness of their aims and demands and they understood how to get publicity.

**Media**  
Historians reference to the chapter can be found at key directly reference our perspectives.

### Chapter review activities

- What political and legal rights did women have in Great Britain in 1800?
- Design a poster (drawing the history of the women's movement in the 19th century).
- Read the 1870 Act and the 1902 Act and the 1928 Act for women's rights. Who did they want to get the right to vote? Why was it not for all women?
- Do you think many working class women would join either of the main organisations campaigning for women's rights? Give reasons for your answer.
- Visual analysis – the cartoon below was based on the nursery rhyme ‘This little piggy that went to town’. This was part of a series of cartoons such as *The House*. Consider a cartoon in the way of the cartoon and what you see other cartoon from the series.
  - What is the ‘The House’ referring to in each of the cartoons?
  - Compare the cartoon series below the following are represented:
    - The bourgeoisie
    - The working class
    - The state of the House

**CHAPTER 10**  
The history of the 19th-century women's rights for the 19th century



## CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CHAPTER REVIEW ACTIVITIES

conclude each chapter. They include a brief precis of the topic, suggestions for further reading, and a range of learning activities that consolidate knowledge and understanding of the chapter's content. These tasks incorporate a range of historical understandings and skills.

## CONCLUSION

Women's Movements

At the end of the 20th century, what had changed for Australian women in terms of their political and legal rights? The answer to that question is a great deal had changed. The political and legal landscape for women at the end of the 20th century, and also in the few decades of the 21st century, would have been unrecognisable to women at the beginning of the 19th.

We have female politicians – a prime minister, state premiers and a Governor-General. We have women appointed as judges of the High Court of Australia. We have women who are at the top of their field, whether in science, medicine, or in business. We have women. All this would have been unimaginable for women at the start of the 19th century. It was the early triumph of all their struggles. Therefore, the way throughout the 20th century, and into the 21st century, was to achieve the rights to vote and to hold office was women's battle. They campaigned for it, they gained a victory, and they were successful in achieving child care based on maternal and child benefit.

From the 1920s onwards, an increasingly broader range of female activists, the International Labour provided Australian legislation and women. The Australian Federation of Women's Delegates to the International Women's Year Movement in the 1970s was a key factor in the success of the 1974 vote for universal suffrage for women. It was the result of a long struggle for structural change in our social conditions, as well as the result of women's role in society. Many Australian activists, the French led the 1970s Women's Liberation Movement and raising the consciousness was awareness about women's role and relationships. Some of these 20th-century activists were also the affirmative action, in both education and in the workplace.

**Activities**

- Drawing on your knowledge, research and the materials in this book, create a list of 20 things for women and the women's movement. You have been provided below.
 

1	_____
2	_____
3	_____
4	_____
5	_____
6	_____
7	_____
8	_____
9	_____
10	_____
- The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights is the reference to which we refer today to understand our rights. The 30 articles include rights to equality before the law, freedom of movement, the right to marry and found a family, the right to own property, to take part in the government of one's country, the right to work and to receive equal pay and the right to education.
  - Write each of the 30 articles on separate lines (hand written or typed).
  - What your ranking of 20 women from your collection, in the way you (your class, rankings and create 20 different 20th-century women's definitions.
- Individuals, or in small groups, develop a ranking of criteria to determine the importance of each of these criteria on development.
  - How each of the 20 women from your collection is best represented in each criterion?
  - What your ranking of 20 women from your collection, in the way you (your class, rankings and create 20 different 20th-century women's definitions.
- Write a paragraph explaining how far women have come in achieving their. Take into consideration any factors that might make it difficult for women to fully obtain the right.

## THE CONCLUSION

summarises the topic and includes a series of activities to consolidate your knowledge of it. More importantly, these final tasks will help you build an understanding and interpretation of this period in history.

## Beyond this book

The Nelson Modern History series includes numerous titles on a range of topics covered in senior History courses around Australia. For further information about the series visit: [www.nelsonsecondary.com.au](http://www.nelsonsecondary.com.au).

## SERIES EDITOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Studying modern world history is a fascinating and exciting activity for several reasons. The first of these is our closeness to the modern past. All of us who live today are in direct contact with recent and contemporary history. For example, teachers who use this book might have had grandparents who experienced, in different ways, the events of the Second World War. Students who read this book will probably have grandparents who lived through the Swinging Sixties in Australia. Other students who come from more recently arrived migrant families will have stories to tell about significant historical events from their former homeland.

And when it comes to topicality, the study of modern history is also the study of events that directly affect the way we live today. For instance, the work of 18th-century Scottish philosopher Adam Smith is still being used by 21st-century politicians to underpin their economic policies. Further, the activities of feminist and civil rights activists in the 1960s have altered the way the international community and contemporary societies deal with their citizens. And the shadow of two world wars still impinges upon the collective memories of dozens of nations, often leading to confusion between commemoration of the past, celebration of long-ago endeavours and what this book is about, the pursuit of investigative history.

The study of the modern past is exciting too because when it comes to investigating the late 19th, the 20th and the 21st centuries we can use graphic visual and auditory evidence that brings us close to a fuller realisation of how life was lived then and how the people we are researching looked and sounded. While these new sources of evidence can and do bring a freshness to our understanding of the past, they also demand new techniques of historical investigation.

Finally, the study of modern history, which is, to use historian Pieter Geyl's term, 'an argument without end', is often more intense than other forms of history because of our closeness to the events. This means that, even though conclusions may be passionately expressed, a carefully tempered and dispassionate approach to studying controversial events needs to be employed in the formulation of an historical explanation.

Having said all of that, enjoy your study of modern history.

Tony Taylor  
Series editor

## AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this textbook has given me the opportunity to revisit feminist history, reacquainting myself with feminist classics such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges and with the wealth of material about the women's movement that has been published in Australia and overseas over the last decades. Two books that were particularly valuable to the writing of this textbook were Barbara Caine's *Australian Feminism: A Companion* and *Getting Equal: The history of Australian feminism* by Marilyn Lake. I am indebted to all those who have provided such a rich archive.

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My two fellow authors and friends Sarah Mirams and Sue Gordon have been wonderful sources of support and advice during the development of this book.

A final heartfelt thanks to Jon, for his support and patience when I disappeared into my study for long hours.

Maryellen Galbally



HONNEUR

PATRIE



MIRABEAU

GAMBETTA

1789  
1830

1848  
1870

SUFFRAGE UNIVERSEL

Getty Images/De Agostini Picture Library

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# WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

Until 1848 there were no women's movements in Western societies. Women had few political and legal entitlements or rights. For most of the 19th century they were under the control of a man – either a father or a husband. They could not vote or own property and any inheritance they gained before or after marriage became the property of the husband. Their place was in the home with children.

New ideas, associated with the 18th-century Enlightenment, argued that men had natural rights to life, liberty and property. In response to these ideas Mary Wollstonecraft wrote the first feminist tract – *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* – in 1792 and a 'women's movement' began to emerge very slowly. In 1848 American women organised the first Women's Rights Convention to work for greater equality. In the second half of the 19th century, other women's movements emerged in Australia and New Zealand, Great Britain, Italy and France, creating an international movement with strong links between women in each of the countries.

In 1893 and 1902 respectively, women secured the right to vote and stand for parliament in New Zealand and Australia. Such was the connection between the international movements that leaders of the Australian movement travelled to England to support the British suffragettes' campaigns. However, it was not until 1928 that all British women won these rights.

After gaining suffrage, Australian women turned to creating a maternal citizenship that acknowledged the importance of motherhood and the rights flowing from it. From the 1930s they campaigned for new rights, such as equal pay for equal work.

In the 1970s a radical break with earlier forms of the women's movement emerged with the Women's Liberation Movement. With its origins in the United States, this new women's movement criticised structural inequalities in society and demanded personal and social liberation. The Women's Liberation Movement achieved considerable success in areas of employment, childcare and education.

◀ Marianne is one of the best-known symbols of the French Republic, representing freedom and democracy. Here, she is pictured with the national motto of France – *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* – and the words *suffrage universel*, referring to France's granting of universal suffrage in 1875. This, however, only granted all men the right to vote. Women were not granted the right to vote in France until 1944.

## KEY FIGURES AND ORGANISATIONS

ZELDA D'APRANO  
(1928–)



D'Aprano was an Australian unionist and women's liberationist. As a staunch advocate for equal pay she chained herself to the Commonwealth Building in Melbourne as a protest. She founded the Women's Action Committee, whose members protested by paying 75 per cent of a tram fare because they were only paid 75 per cent of a male wage.

EDITH COWAN  
(1861–1932)



A social activist and reformer elected in 1921 to the Western Australian parliament. Cowan was the first woman to be elected to an Australian parliament. She was responsible for introducing *The Women's Legal Status Act* that allowed women to become lawyers.

VIDA GOLDSTEIN  
(1869–1949)



Goldstein was a key figure in campaigns for women's suffrage in Victoria from 1890 when she gathered signatures for a petition to the Victorian parliament. She stood for election five times. At her first attempt, in 1903, she won 51 497 votes. She was the first woman to stand for parliament in the British Empire.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR  
(1908–1986)



Simone de Beauvoir was a French feminist whose book *The Second Sex* analysed the history of women's oppression and argued that girls' lives were shaped by their culture. She rejected any ideas about women being born with particular attributes. The book caused much debate when published in English in 1953.

DAME MILLICENT GARRETT  
FAWCETT (1847–1929)



A feminist and suffragist, Fawcett led the largest suffragist society in Great Britain – the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) – from 1897 to 1919. Under her leadership membership rose to 50 000 before the First World War. She believed in long-term change by moderate methods and was committed to non-violent activities.

GERMAINE GREER  
(1939–)



Australian Germaine Greer is of *The Female Eunuch*, an international best seller that created an enormous controversy when published in 1970. Greer argued that women's liberation was based on sexual liberation, and that by being repressed sexually through marriage and a consumerist society, women automatically become eunuchs.

MURIEL AGNES HEAGNEY  
(1885–1974)



Australian trade unionist and feminist, Heagney was a strong advocate for equal pay and was instrumental in the formation of the Council of Action for Equal Pay (CAEP). She believed in ‘a rate for the job’ and claimed that wage inequality always led to an inequality in the status and opportunities for women.

EMMELINE PANKHURST  
(1858–1928)



Leader of the militant British suffragettes, she established the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), which led attacks on property to draw attention to women’s demand for the right to vote. Arrested numerous times between 1908 and 1912, Pankhurst went on hunger strikes and was violently force-fed while imprisoned.

KATE SHEPPARD  
(1847–1934)



Sheppard was the leader of the women’s suffrage movement in New Zealand. As a founding member of the NZ Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Sheppard advocated voting rights for women and organised petitions to parliament in 1891 and 1893. When female suffrage was granted, she worked to register women as voters.

KATE MILLETT (1934–)



The American author of *Sexual Politics* (1970), Millett argued that relations between the genders are political, with power playing a significant role even in the sexual act. In support of this argument she analysed the novels of major American male authors.

ELIZABETH REID  
(1942–)



Reid was a member of the women’s movement before being appointed as advisor on women’s affairs to Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1973. She created public policy on health, education and equal opportunities. She helped fund women’s refuges, rape crisis centres, women’s health centres, childcare and working women’s centres.

JESSIE STREET  
(1889–1970)



A lifelong worker for women’s rights, Street advocated – among other causes – the right to economic independence and equal pay for women. She was instrumental in developing the Australian Women’s Charter in 1943 and she took this with her to the founding meetings of the United Nations in 1948.

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### ANNE SUMMERS AO (1945–)



Anne Summers is one of Australia's leading feminists and one of the founders of Elsie Women's Refuge. Her book *Damned Whores and God's Police* had an enormous impact in Australia. She was head of the Office of the Status of Women from 1983 to 1986, and advisor to Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1992.

### MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1759–1797)



Widely regarded as having written the founding text of feminism – *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) Wollstonecraft argued that women had the same capacity as men to reason and form moral judgements, and should therefore have the same rights as men to political participation.

### AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION OF WOMEN VOTERS

Founded in 1921 by Bessie Rischbieth as a national body that could liaise with international feminist organisations and the League of Nations. The Federation persuaded Prime Minister Billy Hughes to include a woman on the Australian delegations to the League of Nations.

### COUNCIL OF ACTION FOR EQUAL PAY (CAEP)

Formed in Sydney in 1937 as a lobby group to provide information to its affiliates and support organisations in their equal pay campaigns. Muriel Heagney acted as honorary secretary and treasurer until it disbanded in 1948.

### THE NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES (NUWSS)

The largest organisation in Great Britain dedicated to gaining the right to vote for women. Millicent Garrett Fawcett was president from 1897 to 1919. Its tactics were always peaceful and legal, and membership rose to 50 000 before the First World War.

### UNION OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN

Established in 1950 to work for the improvement of the status of women, focusing on issues of equity and social justice. Its members were working women and mothers. In the 1960s it affiliated with the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement.

### UNITED ASSOCIATIONS OF WOMEN

Formed in Sydney in 1929 by a number of women, including Jessie Street, Linda Littlejohn and Ruby Rich, who wanted a strong, radical, political organisation. It was instrumental in the organisation of the Australian Women's Charter Conference in 1943.

### WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION OF AUSTRALASIA

Formed in Melbourne in 1891, it was the first national women's organisation in Australia. Influential in all of the colonies, its main concern was the effect of alcohol on men, and the physical abuse and poverty that resulted for their families. It claimed that nothing would change until women had the vote and it actively supported the suffrage movement.

## WOMEN'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNION (WSPU)

British organisation made up of members who left the NUWSS in 1903, dissatisfied with the lack of progress in achieving the right to vote for women. Its leader was Emmeline Pankhurst, who – with her daughters Christabel and Sylvia – used increasingly militant and even violent actions. These included arson and bombings. Members were called suffragettes.

## WOMANHOOD SUFFRAGE LEAGUE OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Formed in 1891 by Louisa Lawson, Rose Scott, Maybanke Anderson, Dora Montefiore, Mary Windeyer and Eliza Ashton. Its motto was 'Equality is equity'. Tactics included petitions, deputations to politicians, public meetings and debates. Its program included women's suffrage, and women's right to property and guardianship of children.

## WOMEN'S ELECTORAL LOBBY

An independent national, feminist lobby group established in 1972 by Beatrice Faust in Melbourne in 1972. The group is dedicated to changing policies and legislation that affect women, including equal pay, childcare, abortion as well as law reform in relation to rape and domestic violence.

## WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

A feminist movement that grew out of student left-wing politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the USA. Its objectives included personal liberation and a focus on female sexuality. Its methods included consciousness-raising and direct action.

Opposite page, top to bottom: Newspix/Vince Calati; Getty Images/De Agostini

## KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

### **Discrimination**

The unjust treatment of people on the basis of their age, sex, religion or race.

### **Female suffrage**

The right of women to vote and stand for parliament.

### **Feminism**

The advocacy of equal rights and opportunities for women, especially the extension of their activities in social and political life. In practice there can be a variety of feminisms shaped by differing political and cultural factors.

### **Femocrat**

An Australian term originally used to describe a 'feminist bureaucrat' – a feminist who works in the government in areas dealing with women's issues, such as childcare or maternity leave. Now, the term is more generally applied to describe feminist bureaucrats in any government area.

### **Human rights**

The principles that set out certain standards for the rights and freedoms people are entitled to – either naturally or as decided by the law.

### **Male chauvinism**

The behaviour of a male that indicates a belief in the inferiority of women.

### **Patriarchy**

A social system in which men hold power and have authority over women and children. The term is Greek for 'the rule of the father' and came into common use in the 1970s.

### **Separate spheres**

Term used to describe a belief held in the 19th and 20th centuries that a woman's sphere is the domestic world of home and children, and a man's sphere is the public world.

### **Sexism**

Discrimination against a person on the basis of their sex.

### **Sex role stereotyping**

The assumption that particular attributes, talents, interests and values belong to a person that are based on their sex.

### **State feminism**

The activities of government departments or units that have responsibility for women's affairs – for example, the Office of the Status of Women during the 1980s and 1990s.

### **Women's rights movement**

A movement that works to achieve equal rights for women and men, and to remove any obstacles in law or customs that prevent equal rights.

### **19th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America**

This change to the United States Constitution stated that the right of citizens to vote would not be affected by their sex. It was passed in 1920 and granted women in America the right to vote.

### **Australian Women's Charter 1943**

A feminist manifesto outlining a range of issues that were to form part of an agenda for women after the Second World War. It demanded equal pay, women's right to paid work and adequate childcare, and addressed the specific needs of Aboriginal women and rural women.

### **Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902**

The Act of the national parliament that granted Australian white women the right to vote and to stand for election. Australia became the second country in the world to grant women the right to vote and the first country to grant women the right to stand for election.

### **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**

Adopted by the United Nations in 1979, this convention aims to protect the rights of women. Australia ratified this convention in 1983.

### **Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls Convention 1848**

The first document drawn up by women in the United States of America declaring their rights and the principles on which these rights were based. The declaration – written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and refined by the convention – was seen as the birth of the American women's movement.

### **Manifesto of the Women's Liberation Movement**

This 1973 political statement sets out the position of women in Australian society and is followed by a list of six demands: control over women's own bodies; repeal of abortion laws; free contraception; free 24-hour childcare; equal job opportunities and pay; and equal educational opportunities.

### **Representation of the People Act 1928, United Kingdom**

This Act gave the vote to all women over the age of 21 years on the same basis as men, and was passed with little opposition. It was passed almost 61 years after John Stuart Mill had introduced the first suffrage amendment Bill into parliament in 1867.

### **Roe v. Wade (1973)**

A legal case in the United States, in which the US Supreme Court affirmed the right of women to an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy.

### **Sex Discrimination Act 1984**

The first piece of legislation aimed at eliminating discrimination and sexual harassment in Australia. It applied to both men and women, who are now able to make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission.

The *Affirmative Action Act 1986* strengthened the Sex Discrimination Act by requiring companies and large organisations to introduce affirmative action programs.

### **Sixteen Reasons for Supporting Woman's Suffrage**

Originally a pamphlet developed by the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union during its suffrage campaign. It was reprinted by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of South Australia in 1895.

### **Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948**

This document states the rights and freedoms to which all people are entitled. It includes civil and political rights; and social, cultural and economic rights.



Getty Images/Gamma-Keystone via Getty Images

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

9780170244022

# CHAPTER ONE

## *The woman question*

“ ... the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields. ”

*UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979*

Women’s rights movements emerged in the 19th century in western countries including Great Britain, the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand, in the context of democratic changes that were brought about by new ideas and revolutionary movements. Movements also emerged campaigning for women’s rights in other European countries, notably France and Germany. It is important to remember, however, that few similar women’s movements emerged in the colonial empires of the European powers during the 19th century except in settler societies such as Australia and New Zealand. Modern movements such as those campaigning for women’s rights and workers’ rights were built on the ideas of the Enlightenment and led to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

◀ 1926 portrait of Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928), leader of the suffragette movement in Britain.

### INQUIRY QUESTION

+ When and why did movements for women’s rights emerge and what early successes did they have?

# What are women's rights?

Rights, the entitlements of individuals, have been a feature of all human societies since the ancient world. In 539 BCE, for example, the first king of Persia, Cyrus of Persepolis, granted the conquered Babylonians the rights to worship the religion of their choice and to racial equality; he also granted freedom to slaves. In medieval England, members of the nobility limited the power of King John (1166–1216) and in doing this claimed political rights formerly held only by the monarch. This claim of rights, commonly known as the Magna Carta, is considered the beginning of English liberties and constitutional government. Such rights, however, were not universal. They were usually limited to particular social groups.

In the second half of the 18th century in Europe, during the period historians call the **Enlightenment**, thinkers began to argue that all individuals had rights. John Locke, a British philosopher, was one of the first to argue that people, as individuals, had natural rights of life, liberty and property. These ideas influenced the American and French Revolutions, which were based on the rights of men to equality and freedom against the autocracy of the monarchy. The Americans included a Bill of Rights in their Constitution, placing limits on government power, and one of the early acts of the French revolutionaries was to pass the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789. The rights defined in these documents related to men.

## Enlightenment

An 18th century European intellectual and philosophical movement that emphasised rationality over tradition



## THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN RIGHTS

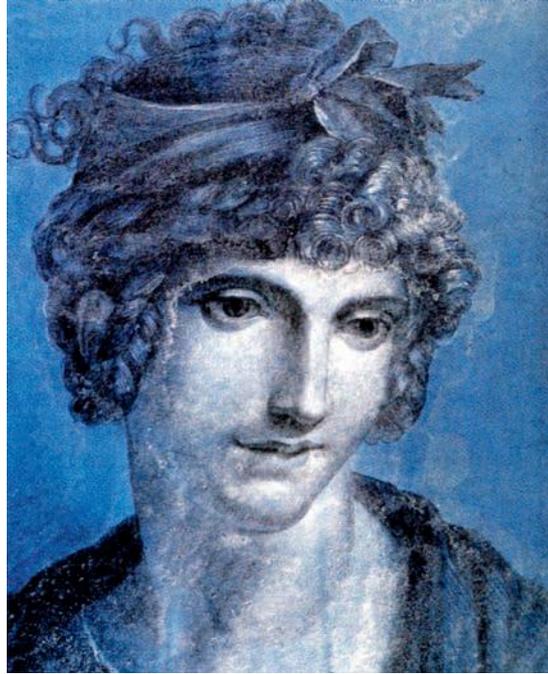
- 1776** United States: American Declaration of Independence based on the belief that all human beings are equal
- 1787** United States: US Constitution (oldest written national constitution) set out the structure of government; added a Bill of Rights in 1791 to state the limits of government and the rights of men
- 1789** France: French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen based on the Enlightenment principles of the natural, inalienable and sacred rights of man
- 1791** France: *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* written by Olympe de Gouges based on the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 using the same language and ideas
- 1792** England: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* published, written by Mary Wollstonecraft
- 1838** United Kingdom: Chartism (or The People's Charter) proposed six reforms aimed at making the political system more democratic; the first giving all men over the age of 21 the right to vote
- 1848** United States: Declaration of the Sentiments (influenced by the Declaration of Independence) declared the rights of women and passed at the Seneca Falls Convention in New York
- 1902** Australia: the Constitution gave all Australian white women the right to vote
- 1948** UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The modern movement for women's rights first emerged in the context of the American and French Revolutions. While some individuals, most notably Mary Wollstonecraft in Britain and Olympe de Gouges in France, called for rights for women at that time, their voices were largely ignored. In Britain, for example, *The Great Reform Act 1832* explicitly stated that only a 'male person' could be described as a voter. This meant that until the mid-19th century, women had made little progress in gaining and securing these rights despite the extension of political rights to many men.



Getty Images/De Agostini

**SOURCE 1.1** Portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft, c. 1797, by John Odie (1761–1807)



Alamy/INTERFOTO

**SOURCE 1.2** Watercolour portrait of Olympe de Gouges, 1784

## Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges

Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges were born and died within 10 years of each other, Wollstonecraft in Britain and de Gouges in France. They were two of the most significant advocates for women's rights in the 18th century. They both used the language of the Enlightenment – ideas about reason and rationality and the rights of liberty and citizenship. They both published treatises on the rights of women.

The *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen* by Olympe de Gouges was published in 1791. A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft was published a year later, in 1792. Mary Wollstonecraft has been referred to as the first **feminist**. She was very critical of the way girls were educated and she argued that women are capable of rationality but men and their upbringing encourage them to be frivolous.

### feminist

A woman who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes. This term was not used until the end of the 19th century in France and until the 20th century in Great Britain and the United States

*continued*

continued

### Key quotes from Wollstonecraft

I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves.

My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone.

The being cannot be termed rational or virtuous, who obeys any authority, but that of reason.

Virtue can only flourish amongst equals.

*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 1792*

Olympe de Gouges, an activist and playwright, based her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen* on the French Revolution's Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen – a significant human rights document that only applied to men. Olympe extended the document to include women.

Article One of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen proclaims that:

Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on common utility.

In the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen*, de Gouges rephrased this as:

Women are born free and remain equal to man in rights. Social distinctions may only be based on common utility.

### Questions

- 1 Why might Wollstonecraft and de Gouges be regarded as founders of the women's rights movements and as the first feminists?
- 2 What rights do they argue women should be entitled to and why?
- 3 Based on your knowledge of the world today, are the rights they identified shared by all women?

Nonetheless, this early movement began to define the issues that would dominate women's campaigns for rights. Central to these was the idea of equality, meaning that women as a group in society should have the same rights as men. The campaigns focused on addressing the inequalities between women and men that were apparent in politics, law, the economy, and in society and culture more generally. These ideas form the basis of what we mean by women's rights.

## A MOVEMENT EMERGES

By the late 19th century, organisations had been formed in Britain, France, Germany, the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand to campaign for political and legal rights for women, in what is now broadly described as the women's movement. These groups

drew inspiration from other campaigns for social change, such as the anti-slavery movement and those advocating democratic reform. Participants in this early women's movement also exchanged ideas, with feminists visiting other countries and supporting each other's campaigns. All these early women's movements identified that women lacked political rights, such as the opportunity to vote or to stand for parliaments; that access to education and professions was limited; and that women did not have equal status to men in law. The first successes of these campaigns came in New Zealand in 1893 and South Australia in 1894, when women were granted the right to vote.

## *Women's status in the 19th century*

Women had few political, legal, civil or economic rights or entitlements in the middle of the 19th century. For most of that century they were under the control of men. They did not exist legally or socially except in a relationship with a man as his wife or daughter. When a woman married, she and her husband became one person by the legal concept of **coverture** or she was 'subsumed within the person of her husband'. He existed in law but she didn't. Wives were the property of their husbands, who could make decisions about their life and welfare without consulting them. Women could not vote or stand for national elections in any Western countries in the 19th century, with the exception of New Zealand where women were granted the right to vote in national elections in 1893.

**coverture**  
Archaic legal term referring to the legal status of a married woman; she did not exist independently from her husband and was considered to be under his protection and authority

**TABLE 1.1** Political rights of women in the 19th century

Political Rights	UK	NZ	USA	France	Germany	Italy
To vote	None	1893	None	None	None	None
To be elected	None	None	None	None	None	None

### PROPERTY

Property or money inherited by a woman or gained through work became the property of her husband on marriage. If she worked after marriage the money earned belonged to her husband. Children were also considered the property of the husband. A woman did not automatically have custody of her children after the death of her husband unless he left a direction to this effect in his will. The case of Dora Montefiore illustrates the legal situation (see page 14).

As women could not own property or money, they were economically dependent on their husbands for food, clothing and a home. In marrying, a woman agreed to obey her husband, a practice that some women adhere to even today.

## Dora Montefiore and her children

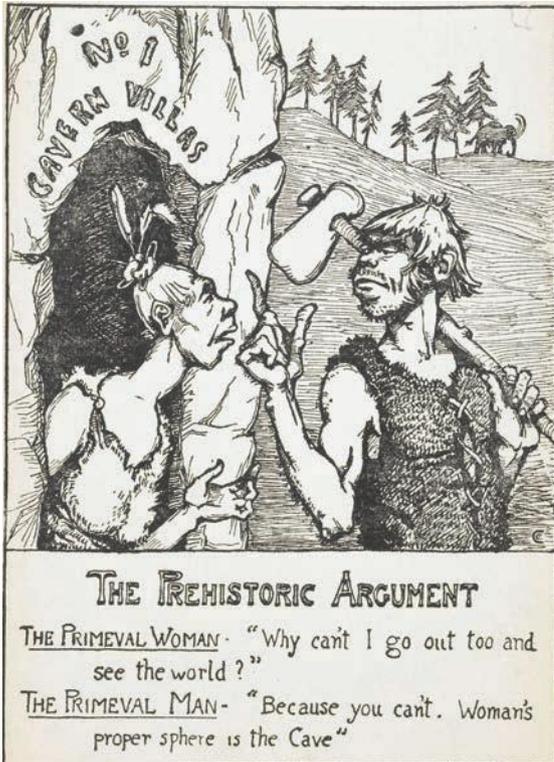
Dora Montefiore, an Englishwoman living in Sydney, discovered when her husband died in 1889 that she did not have automatic right to the custody of her two children, aged two and five years.

One lawyer remarked to me, when explaining the terms of the will: 'As your late husband says nothing about the guardianship of the children, they will remain under your care.' ... Naturally, my husband would never have thought of leaving anyone else as their guardian. 'As there is a difference in your religions,' he continued grimly, 'he might very well have left someone of his own religion as their guardian ...' 'I don't believe he could have done it, for children belong even more to a mother than to a father!' 'Not in law,' the men around the table interjected ... In law the child of the married woman has only one parent, and that is the father.' 'You don't know how your horrible law is insulting all motherhood.' And from that moment I was a suffragist ... and determined to alter the law.

Dora Montefiore, *From a Victorian to a Modern*, 1927

### separate spheres

The belief that a woman's sphere was the domestic world and a man's sphere was the public world



**SOURCE 1.3** A British pro-suffrage postcard, created in 1912 during the fierce campaign of British suffragettes for the right to vote; it encapsulates the concept of the [separate spheres](#) in an amusing way.

## THE BODY

In the 19th century, women had no rights over their own bodies. A husband could insist on sex and was legally entitled to beat his wife. If a woman was injured, only her husband could take legal action because only a man had a legal identity.

## EDUCATION

Education was not considered as necessary for a girl as it was for a boy because a woman's purpose in life was to marry, have children and remain in what was known as the woman's sphere. Any education that working class girls received was basic and focused on domestic skills. After a rudimentary education they would enter the workforce. Girls from wealthy families were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, a foreign language and a little history. All women were barred from universities, and professions such as medicine or the law were closed to them.

Working class women had a particularly hard life, with the double burden of giving birth to children and going out to work for long hours in dirty factories or sweatshops or as agricultural labourers. They would then have to return home to cook, clean and wash for their children and husbands. Single girls worked long hours as domestic servants; 16-hour days were not unusual.

In 1890, English midwife and journalist Florence Fenwick Miller summed up the position of women.

“ Under exclusively man-made laws, women have been reduced to the most abject condition of legal slavery in which it is possible for human beings to be held ... under the arbitrary domination of another’s will, and dependent for decent treatment exclusively on the goodness of heart of the individual master. ”

Florence Fenwick Miller, from a speech to the National Liberal Club, 1890

The case of Englishwoman Susannah Palmer illustrates how desperate a woman’s situation could be if she chose the wrong husband. After an unhappy marriage enduring brutal beatings, Susannah left her husband in 1869 to start a new life with her children. Through hard work she was able to make a new life and home for her children. Her husband tracked her down and took all her possessions, which was his right according to the law at the time. In retaliation she stabbed him and was immediately arrested and charged.

### Quakers

Members of the Religious Society of Friends, a Christian movement devoted to peaceful principles and founded by Englishman George Fox in about 1650

## *The beginnings of modern women’s rights movements*

From the mid 19th century, women began to take action against their lack of rights. Organisations sprang up in Europe and in the United States aimed at bringing about social, legal and political reform.

### THE UNITED STATES

In 1840, five American **Quaker** women, including Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London where they were outraged to find that they were not allowed to speak.

However, they were permitted to sit behind a curtain and listen to the male speakers.

As a result of this refusal these two women decided to hold a women’s rights convention when they returned to America. The 1848 Women’s Rights Convention was held, and some historians attribute the beginning of the women’s suffrage movement in the United States and Great Britain to this action.

### First National Women’s Rights Convention

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott called for the convention to discuss the constraints women faced and ways of overcoming them. More than 300 men and women attended the convention held in a church in Seneca Falls, New York. Out of this meeting came The Declaration of Sentiments, written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, based on the Declaration of Independence but with the word ‘women’ added where appropriate. It included the statement: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal’. This statement directly challenged the separate spheres **ideology** and women’s lack of political and legal rights. One of the resolutions Stanton drafted focused on female suffrage.



Corbis/Bettmann

**SOURCE 1.4** Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) worked in the anti-slavery movement and for women’s rights. She drafted the Declaration of Sentiments, which was discussed and amended at the first Women’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848.

### ideology

A system of ideas and beliefs, especially one that forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy

## GREAT BRITAIN

The refusal to allow women to participate in the Anti-Slavery Convention had an impact on British women as well as the Americans. Anne Knight (1786–1862), the Quaker who had founded the Women's Anti-Slavery Society in Chelmsford, was angered by the action of the convention in excluding women. She started her work for women's rights by writing a leaflet in 1847 that argued for women's suffrage. In 1851 she joined with Anne Kent to form the Sheffield Female Political Association – the first British women's suffrage organisation. They submitted an unsuccessful petition to the House of Lords calling for women's suffrage.

### women's movement

Groups and organised campaigns formed by women around issues which affected them in order to bring about change

A further petition to change the law and give married women rights to their own property and money was presented to the House of Lords in 1856 with 26 000 signatures. Although unsuccessful, it represented one of the first actions of women acting as a group in Great Britain. Petitions to parliament became one of the main tactics used by all of the **women's movements**. It took another ten years for the first petition for women's suffrage to be presented to the House of Commons in 1866; it was defeated by 196 votes to 73.

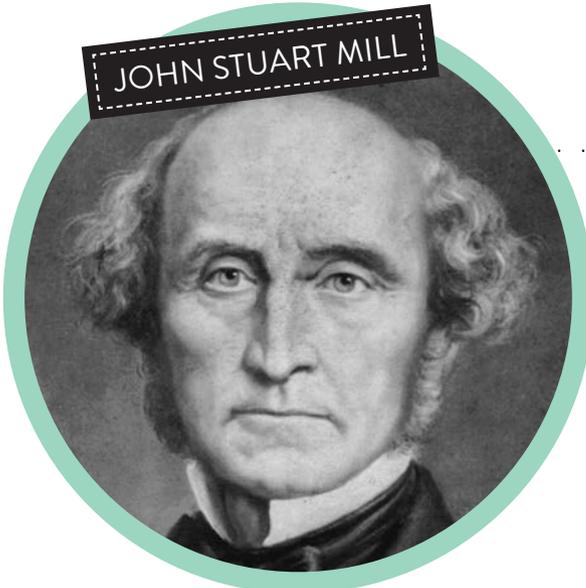


### John Stuart Mill (1806–1873)

Some men with influence did provide support to the women who were challenging current attitudes and agitating for reform. One of these was John Stuart Mill, an important philosopher in England and a member of parliament between 1865 and 1868. His ideas about the position of women appear in his book *The Subjection of Women* (1869) in which he argues that everyone, including women, should have the right to vote.

Mill's book made an impact far wider than Great Britain. Australian, American and New Zealand women read it too. A review of this book appeared in the *Goulburn Herald and Chronicle* in September 1869 and also the *Queenbeyan Age* in 1869 and *The Age* in 1870.

Alamy/History Archives



JOHN STUART MILL

*That which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a system of perfect equality, admitting no power and privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.*

*Under whatever conditions, and within whatever limits, men are admitted to the suffrage, there is not a shadow of justification for not admitting women under the same.*

From the mid 19th century, increasing numbers of women agitated for the right to vote and created a public debate about women's roles and women's rights that were summed up as the **Woman Question**.

Many of the women did not want to challenge the two spheres ideology but saw no reason why the home sphere was incompatible with having political and legal rights. The first successful challenge was that of the women's movement in New Zealand.

### Woman Question

A phrase used in the second half of the 19th century in Western societies including Australia, New Zealand, Great Britain, United States and Russia to encapsulate the challenges to the traditional place of women in society

## The first victory: New Zealand

“ All that separates, whether of race, class, creed, or sex, is inhuman, and must be overcome. ”

Kate Sheppard

The experiences and campaigns of the women of New Zealand played an important role in the world-wide campaign for women's political rights. This is because New Zealand was the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote. Following the lead of the British feminists, women in New Zealand started to protest against their lack of political and legal entitlements. In 1869 Mary Ann Müller asked the question: 'Why has a woman no power to vote, no right to vote, when she happens to possess all the requisites which legally qualify a man for that right?'



### WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN NEW ZEALAND

- 1869** Mary Ann Müller wrote 'An appeal to the men of New Zealand', an essay urging votes for women
- 1871** Early activist for women's rights Mary Colclough delivered her first public lecture on the rights of women, adopting the pseudonym Polly Plum when writing to the newspapers
- 1875** Voting rights for women in municipal elections were extended to all provinces; before then only Otago and Nelson had allowed women ratepayers to vote
- 1885** New Zealand Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was formed and opened 15 branches within a year
- 1888** WCTU published a leaflet called 'Ten reasons why the women of New Zealand should vote' and sent a copy to every member of the House of Representatives
- 1892** Eight Women's Franchise Leagues were set up  
The address, 'What a difference between a fish and a woman' was given by Marion Hattam, president of the Women's Franchise League in Dunedin to a meeting in Gore
- 1893** The address, 'So that women may receive the vote' was given to the Maori Parliament by Meri Te Tai Mangakāhia, a Maori suffragist, asking for Maori female suffrage
- 1893** Thirteen petitions were presented to parliament, signed by almost 32 000 women, asking for the franchise  
*The Electoral Act 1893* was passed by the Legislative Council, giving all New Zealand women the right to vote but not to stand for election
- 1893** Elizabeth Yates was voted in as mayor of Onehunga one day after the Electoral Act was passed, becoming the first woman in the British Empire to hold this office

In her 'Appeal to the Men of New Zealand', written under the pseudonym Femina, Mary Ann Müller pointed to the fact that New Zealand was under the rule of a queen who had considerable political power. She referred to the fact that in America a woman could be a doctor or a lawyer, a manager of a factory or the head of a school.

Müller drew attention to a case in England where a female householder had her name entered on an electoral roll and later removed. When dismissing the householder's appeal against the removal, one of the judges said that granting women the power to vote would be 'a premium on women to remain unmarried' and that married women might 'desire that their husbands might die, in order to possess votes as widows'.

He also referred to 'the legal incapacity of women' and advised that 'otherwise aliens might vote'. Müller's response was to use the language of 'natural rights' to argue for women's rights: 'Aliens we truly are – alienated from *natural rights*. But it were worse than vain to dwell upon this phase of the proceedings, the law as it now stands is against us'.

Müller's essay speaks of women bringing to parliament 'a fresher purer spirit and higher tone'. This reflects the growing belief among women at that time that attainment of the right to vote would change the relationship between men and women and lead to the creation of a better world. But in her appeal Müller explicitly rejects the idea of women gaining the right to be elected to parliament. Müller sent a copy of her pamphlet to John Stuart Mill who congratulated her on it and on the early suffrage movement. He also sent her a copy of his book *The Subjection of Women*.



<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/purification>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 15-Jul-2013

## Purification

This cartoon by G Ashley Hunter refers to the statement by feminists that women's votes would clean up politics. The boy has the letters MHR on his necklace, which stand for 'Member of the House of Representatives'. Hunter was the main cartoonist during the 1890s for the *New Zealand Graphic*, which was a weekly publication.

## Questions

- 1 What is the context of this cartoon?
- 2 What audience is it intended for?
- 3 Describe what is happening in the cartoon. Include the people and the words on the statue.
- 4 What is the main message of the cartoon?
- 5 How is the message being conveyed?
- 6 How effective is the cartoon?

**SOURCE 1.5** G Ashley Hunter, 'Purification', *New Zealand Graphic*, 18 November 1893

Another influential New Zealand woman was Mary Ann Colclough. Writing as Polly Plum, she participated in an exchange of letters and views about women's rights published in the newspaper *The New Zealand Herald* in 1871.

## THE SUFFRAGE ORGANISATION FORMS

During the 1880s, New Zealand women came together to form suffrage societies and other associations for the advancement of women. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was established in 1885 after a visit by an American campaigner, and 15 branches were quickly formed.

### The Woman's Christian Temperance Union

Kate Sheppard (1847–1934) became a leader of the New Zealand women's suffrage movement and joined the WCTU when it began in 1885. She started campaigning for the vote as a means to restrict the abuse of alcohol but gradually saw the vote as important not only for its practical end but as a symbol of women's dissatisfaction with having a sphere doled out to them and being told that anything outside that sphere was 'unwomanly'. She organised petitions to parliament and succeeded in persuading Sir John Hall, an important member of parliament, to support votes for women.

At its first convention in 1886, the New Zealand WCTU established a franchise and legal department within its organisation to promote women's suffrage. Two years later it produced a leaflet entitled 'Ten reasons why the women of New Zealand should vote'. This leaflet, written by Kate Sheppard, was sent to every member of the House of Representatives in May 1888 and is reproduced below.

#### Ten reasons why the women of New Zealand should vote

- 1 Because a democratic government like that of New Zealand already admits the great principle that every adult person, not convicted of crime, nor suspected of lunacy, has an inherent right to a voice in the construction of laws which all must obey.
- 2 Because it has not yet been proved that the intelligence of women is only equal to that of children, nor that their social status is on a par with that of lunatics or convicts.
- 3 Because women are affected by the prosperity of the Colony, are concerned in the preservation of its liberty and free institutions, and suffer equally with men from all national errors and mistakes.
- 4 Because women are less accessible than men to most of the debasing influences now brought to bear upon elections, and by doubling the number of electors to be dealt with, women would make bribery and corruption less effective, as well as more difficult.
- 5 Because in the quietude of home women are less liable than men to be swayed by mere party feeling, and are inclined to attach great value to uprightness and rectitude of life in a candidate.
- 6 Because the presence of women at the polling-booth would have a refining and purifying effect.
- 7 Because the votes of women would add weight and power to the more settled and responsible communities.
- 8 Because women are endowed with a more constant solicitude for the welfare of the rising generations, thus giving them a more far-reaching concern for something beyond the present moment.

*continued*

continued

- 9 Because the admitted physical weakness of women disposes them to exercise more habitual caution, and to feel a deeper interest in the constant preservation of peace, law, and order, and especially in the supremacy of right over might.
- 10 Because women naturally view each question from a somewhat different standpoint to men, so that whilst their interests, aims, and objects would be very generally the same, they would often see what men had overlooked, and thus add a new security against any partial or one-sided legislation.

### Questions

- 1 What organisation published this leaflet?
- 2 Who were the readers of this publication?
- 3 What effect does the writer think women would have on elections if they had the right to vote? Provide evidence.
- 4 What other attributes do women have that would contribute to better government? Provide examples.
- 5 What negative opinion about women does this leaflet challenge?
- 6 How did the leaflet help challenge stereotypes of women at the time? Use examples in your answer.

## THE SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGNS

As well as forming organisations, the suffragists held public meetings, wrote letters, and lobbied members of parliament. This lobbying appeared to be successful as several prominent men, such as Robert Stout, became supporters and publicly supported female suffrage.

### Petitions

Petitions to parliament became a common method in most English-speaking countries by which suffragists were able to:

- + put pressure on members of parliament to support suffrage
- + raise the visibility of the issue in the public arena
- + educate the public about the issue.

A suffrage petition was presented in New Zealand in 1887, then again in 1888, 1891, 1892 and 1893, calling on the parliament to grant women the right to vote.

The 1893 petition was the largest of the petitions for female suffrage, signed by almost 32 000 women—almost 25 per cent of women of voting age in New Zealand—and presented to the House of Representatives by being dramatically rolled across the floor of the chamber of the House. The petition was more than 270 metres long, consisting of more than 500 sheets of paper glued together to form a single roll.

### Maori suffragists

In New Zealand, suffragists were not restricted to the European population. Maori women also spoke out for the right to vote in the Maori Parliament, or Paremata Māori. In 1893, when the petition for female suffrage was submitted to the New Zealand Parliament, a Maori woman, Meri Te Tai Mangakāhia (1868–1920), addressed the

**SOURCE 1.6** Meri Te Tai Mangakāhia asked that Maori women be admitted as members of the Maori Parliament. She demanded far more than her white counterparts.





## OPPONENTS OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Early in the 1890s, as the suffrage movement grew bigger and more visible, an anti-suffrage group started agitating against women's suffrage. Ridicule was used extensively as a weapon against suffragists across the English-speaking world. The cartoon below is one of many that appeared in New Zealand illustrating the fears of those opposed to women gaining the right to vote.

The politician Henry Smith Fish (1838–1897) was one of the suffragists' most outspoken enemies. He paid canvassers to circulate anti-suffrage petitions in pubs. The liquor industry in particular was concerned that if women had the right to vote, they would restrict the number of hours that pubs could be open.

The anti-suffrage views were summed up in the words of Henry Wright, a resident of Wellington. After Kate Sheppard had been campaigning in that city, he wrote that women were 'recommended to go home, look after their children, cook their husbands' dinners, empty the slops, and generally attend to the domestic affairs for which nature designed them'; they should give up 'meddling in masculine concerns of which they are profoundly ignorant'.

## THE VOTE IS WON!

When the 1893 petition was presented to the New Zealand Parliament, the Lower House had previously twice passed electoral Bills that could have given women the right to vote. But the conservative Upper House (or Legislative Council) prevented these bills from being passed, by adding amendments. When, in 1893, the third Bill came before the Upper House followed by the petition, the Bill was finally passed by 20 votes to 18.

Further opposition and attempts to persuade the governor not to pass the legislation followed. However, on 19 September 1893 (now Women's Suffrage Day in New Zealand) Premier Richard Seddon sent a telegraph to Kate Sheppard, leader of the suffrage movement, informing her that the Governor had signed the Bill into law. This law gave women full voting rights but it did not give them the right to be elected to parliament. This right was not granted until 1919.



**SOURCE 1.8** Kate Sheppard is the only New Zealand woman to appear on a bank note.

## POST-SUFFRAGE: WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

After the right to vote was won in New Zealand, Kate Sheppard and other suffragists continued to campaign for other rights; in particular, for the legal and economic independence of women. The National Council of Women of New Zealand was set up with Kate Sheppard as its first president and editor of its newspaper, *The White Ribbon*. This was the first newspaper in New Zealand completely run by women.

## Cartoon by William Blomfield in *New Zealand Observer*, 2 December 1893

This cartoon was produced by William Blomfield, cartoonist and politician. He was not in favour of female suffrage. This is a satirical response to the granting of the right to vote for New Zealand women. The text underneath the cartoon reads, 'Female Voter: Come, come, my boy, you have not been looking very well lately. Better try a dose of this nice medicine. It will do you good'. Young New Zealand replies, 'I don't like your medicine, thank-you, and I'm feeling all right. But I guess I'll have to swallow it. Maybe it won't hurt me'.



### HE DOESN'T LIKE IT.

**FEMALE VOTER:** Come, come, my boy you have not been looking very well lately. Better try a dose of this nice medicine. It will do you good.

**YOUNG NEW ZEALAND:** I don't like your medicine, thank-you, and I'm feeling all right. But I guess I'll have to swallow it. Maybe it won't hurt me.

**SOURCE 1.9** 'He doesn't like it'

### Questions

- 1 What is the historical context of the cartoon?
- 2 Describe the figures in the cartoon, including their expressions.
- 3 Who do they represent?
- 4 What is the name of the medicine that the suffragist is giving the boy?
- 5 Who is the audience for the cartoon?
- 6 What is the intended message? Consider the words of the boy and the woman.
- 7 Imagine that you are a suffragist viewing the cartoon in the newspaper. Write a letter to the editor complaining about the cartoon.

# The women's movement in Australia

Inspired by movements in Britain as well as developments in New Zealand and the United States, Australian women campaigned for changes to the law in all of the colonies during the 19th century. Their campaigns focused on a range of areas in addition to suffrage. These other areas included similar issues and concerns that had motivated women in other countries and included:

- + divorce laws
- + the age of consent
- + custody of children
- + property laws
- + inheritance laws
- + alcohol consumption and its effects on women and children.



## Henrietta Dugdale (1827–1918)

One of the first women in Australia to speak out for the right to vote for women was Henrietta Dugdale. In 1869, Dugdale, who lived in Victoria, sent a letter to the *The Argus* newspaper. Writing under the pseudonym 'A.D.A', she addressed her letter to Mr Higinbotham, then Attorney-General and a supporter of female suffrage, and in it commented positively on the recently passed Married Women's Property Bill, arguing for the Marriage Act to be changed to make divorce easier. She passionately believed that female suffrage was the basis for equality between men and women.

In her later years, reflecting on her earlier political work she said:

I was the first – for sixteen years previous to the formation of our Victorian Women's Suffrage Society – and only woman who publically advocated the moral right of women to her share in political power; also, to other human rights, university learning and possession of her property after marriage.

Henrietta Dugdale, quoted in Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia: a gift or a struggle?*, Cambridge University Press, 1992



Wikipedia, private collection

### Activities

- 1 Divide into groups and select one of the issues from the list above. Using information on the issue presented earlier in the chapter and in other sources, find out what Australian women wanted to be changed and their reasons. Report your group's findings back to the class.

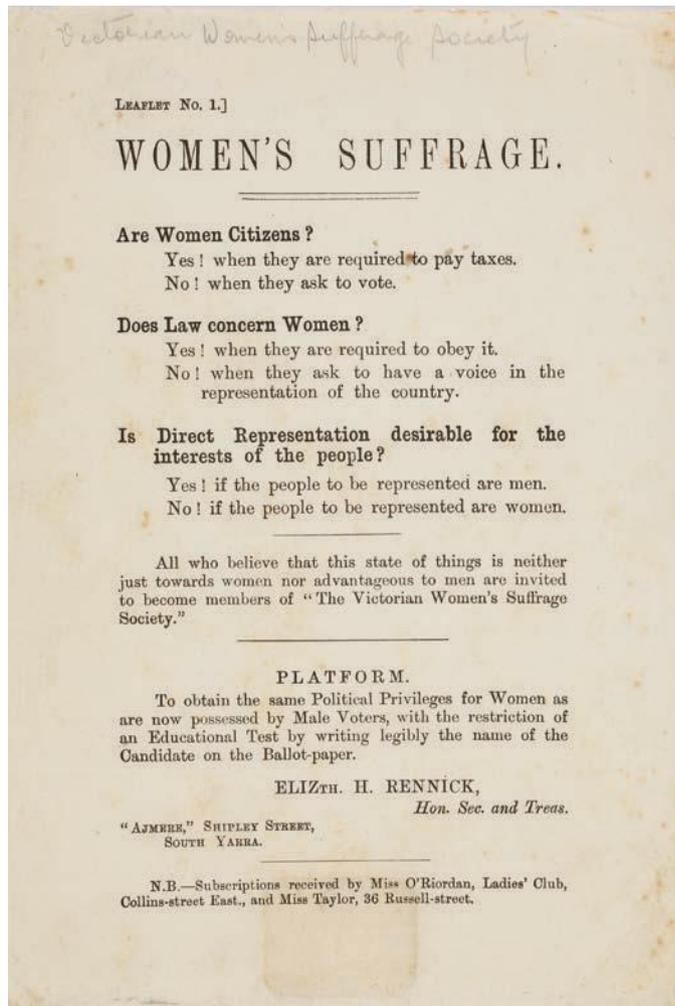
## SUFFRAGE MOVEMENTS BEGIN

During the last two decades of the 19th century the ‘woman movement’ rose to prominence in Australia as a significant political force demanding equality with men and the vote for women in each of the colonies.

**TABLE 1.2** Australian suffrage organisations

	First society formed	Vote granted	Years taken	Name	Some important women	Publications
Victoria	1884	1908	24	Victorian Women’s Suffrage Society	Henrietta Dugdale Vida Goldstein Annie Lowe	<i>Women’s Sphere</i> , published by Vida Goldstein from 1900
South Australia	1888	1894	6	The Women’s Suffrage League of South Australia	Mary Lee Catherine Spence	
New South Wales	1891	1902	11	Womanhood Suffrage League of NSW	Louisa Lawson Maybanke Anderson Rose Scott Dora Montefiore	<i>The Dawn</i> , a feminist newspaper, edited by Louisa Lawson from 1890
Western Australia	1892	1899	7	Woman’s Suffrage League	Christine Clarke Janetta Foulkes	
Tasmania	1893	1903	10	Woman’s Christian Temperance Society	Jessie Rooke	
Queensland	1894	1905	11	Women’s Equal Franchise Association; Queensland Women’s Suffrage League	Emma Miller  Leontine Cooper	<i>The Star</i> , published by Leontine Cooper for just over 12 months, included many articles on women’s suffrage

## First leaflet issued by the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society



State Library of NSW/Pamphlets relating to Australian women's suffrage. Leaflet no. 1 'Women's Suffrage' Call no.: Z1Q324.3/1

### Questions

- 1 Who produced this leaflet and for what purpose?
- 2 Summarise the arguments given in the pamphlet for women's suffrage.
- 3 Who should not get the right to vote?
- 4 In what style has it been written?
- 5 Is this an effective way of presenting ideas? Give reasons.

SOURCE 1.10 Women's suffrage leaflet

## The power of the vote

In 1888, in South Australia, Mary Lee, Mary Colton and Rosetta Birks were part of a larger group that formed the Women's Suffrage League of South Australia. In 1885, they had successfully lobbied for the raising of the age of consent from 13 years to 16 years but found that despite all their efforts they could not get other laws that discriminated against women changed. They realised that they needed the vote to get access to parliament. Mary Lee summed up the importance of suffrage when she wrote an open letter to women on 14 April 1890 stating:

“ Could women have ever descended to such depths of misery and degradation if women had a voice in making the laws for women? ”

The right to vote became the means through which women in the Australian colonies believed they could change the laws and create a better society for men, women and children.

In New South Wales, Lady Windeyer, Rose Scott, Dora Montefiore and Maybanke Anderson established the Womanhood Suffrage League (WSL) in 1891. It included some male officials, including the parliamentarian W H Suttor, who was one of two vice-presidents, and Professor MacCallum, who chaired the first public meeting. The aim of this society was to achieve suffrage for women on the same terms as men. Its motto was ‘Equality is equity’. Again, the relationship with equality and rights was closely associated with the right to vote. Maybanke Anderson set this out clearly when she wrote in the *Women’s Suffrage Journal*, on 15 June 1891, that:

“ It can be no more right or expedient for one half of our population to make laws for the other half than it would be right for the people north of the 34<sup>th</sup> parallel to legislate for those south of it. ”

In Queensland, two suffrage societies were set up in 1893: the Women’s Equal Franchise Association, with the motto ‘One woman one vote’ and led by Emma Miller, a trade unionist; and the Queensland Women’s Suffrage League, led by Leontine Cooper. The issue that divided the two groups was whether to campaign first to get rid of the plural vote, a situation in which some voters had the right to vote more than once in an election, or to get the vote first and deal with the plural vote afterwards. The two organisations cooperated on the gathering of signatures for petitions to parliament and in sending deputations to parliamentarians.

Further suffrage societies followed, including the United Council for Woman Suffrage in 1894. This society was set up in Victoria by Annette Bear Crawford and included representatives of other suffrage societies – the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, the Victorian Trades Hall Council and the Vigilance Society. Its aims were to:

- + coordinate and amalgamate suffrage societies
- + lobby members of parliament and municipal councillors about women’s suffrage
- + train women speakers and educate the public about women’s suffrage.

## Woman’s Christian Temperance Union

The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was influential in all of the colonies. Women were concerned about how much alcohol men were drinking and the effect this was having on women and children in terms of physical abuse by drunken husbands, as well as the poverty that resulted from money spent on alcohol. They were also concerned about other issues such as women’s low wages. In Australia, as in New Zealand, the WCTU concluded that nothing would change until women had the vote so it actively campaigned for women’s suffrage. It initiated the 1891 Monster Petition to the Victorian Parliament and coordinated the various groups involved in collecting the 30 000 signatures.

The Western Australian branch of the WCTU set up a suffrage department at its 1892 convention, and, after a decade of lobbying politicians, in particular Premier Sir John Forrest, and organising petitions, finally achieved votes for women in 1899.

## CAMPAIGNS AND TACTICS

The tactics or methods used by the early feminists to further their cause and achieve their aims reflected who they were. Many of them were middle-class and educated. They had the skills to produce journals and magazines, organise petitions, write letters to editors, establish suffrage

organisations, and prepare and deliver speeches. They had the time available to attend meetings and social functions where they would meet and lobby influential men – members of parliament, journalists and other men of influence in the community.

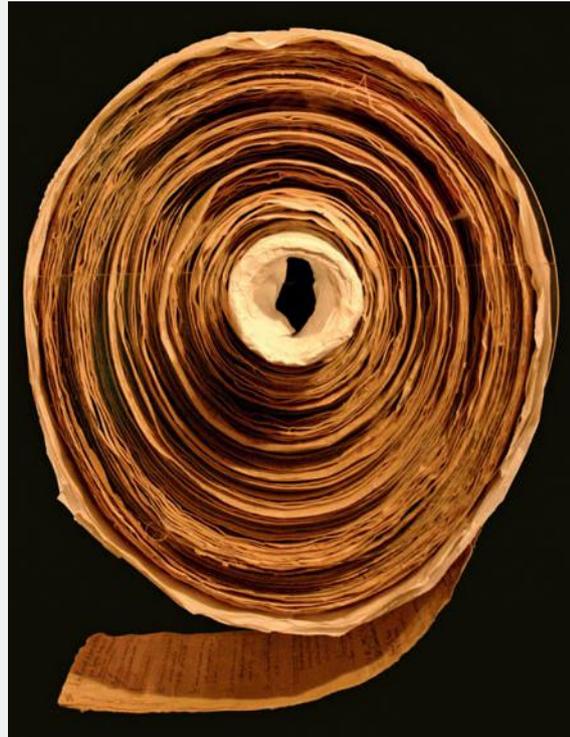
## The Monster Petition

Petitions were widely used in the Australian colonies, New Zealand, Great Britain and the United States as a way of addressing their respective parliaments. Some petitions were presented against female suffrage. The Monster Petition of 1891 included more than 30 000 signatures, which took six weeks for the women to collect, mainly from the Victorian Christian Woman's Temperance Union and the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society.

The petition sought that 'Women should Vote on Equal terms with Men' and was presented to the Victorian Parliament. It is 260 metres long and 200 mm wide, made of paper pasted to cotton or linen fabric.

The petition included the following statements in support of women's right to vote.

- + That Government of the People by the People, and for the People should mean all the People, and not one half.
- + That Taxation and Representation should go together without regard to the sex of the Taxed.
- + That all Adult Persons should have a voice in Making the Laws which they are required to obey.
- + That, in short, Women should Vote on Equal Terms with men



Reproduced with the Permission of the Victorian Parliamentary Library

**SOURCE 1.11** Now housed at the Public Record Office Victoria, the 1891 Monster Petition was a major Victorian suffrage campaign.

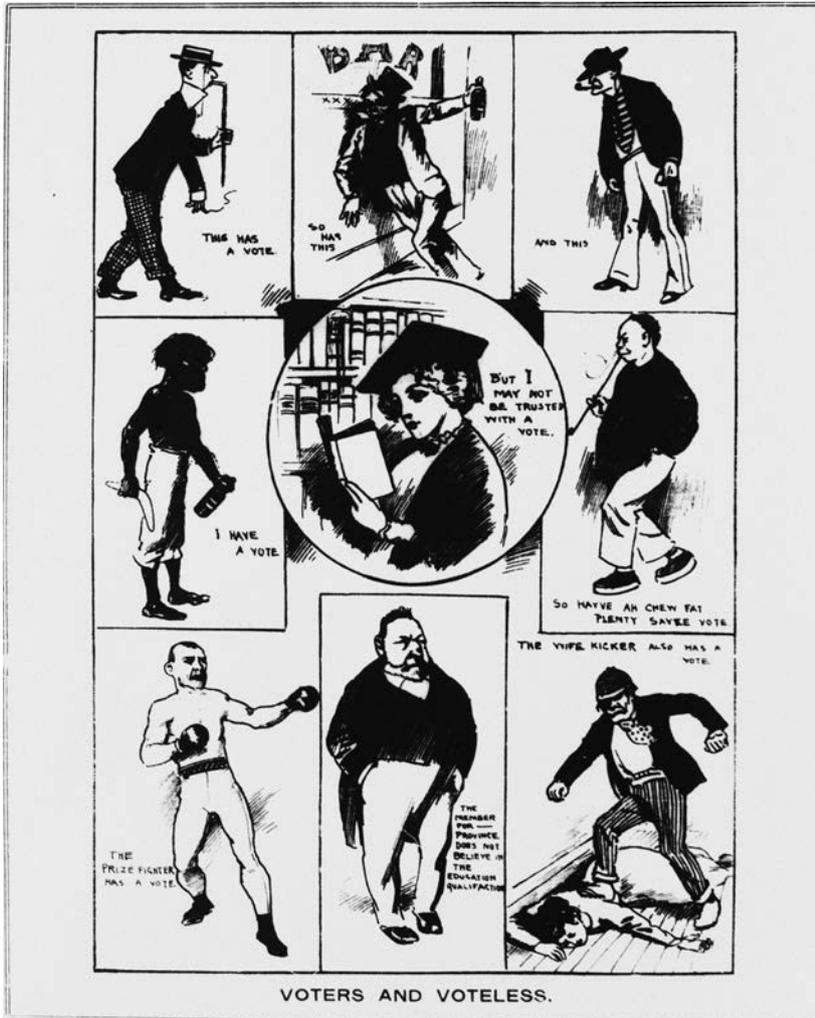
## Cartoons

The suffragists also used visual images to support their position and these included cartoons. The cartoon on page 29 challenges the idea that women should not have the vote by comparing them with those that could vote. Similar cartoons were used in the suffrage movements in New Zealand, Great Britain and America.

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

While women's suffrage groups formed in all the Australian colonies, it was in South Australia that the first success was achieved. South Australian suffrage campaigners used similar arguments and tactics as other suffrage campaigners around Australia and in New Zealand and Great Britain.

## Suffrage cartoons



State Library of Queensland, Image no. 194020

**SOURCE 1.12** 'Voters and voteless', *The Australian Woman's Sphere*, October 1900

### Questions

- 1 What is the historical context?
- 2 Who is the audience?
- 3 Identify the male figures in the image.
- 4 Describe the female figure in the centre of the image. What is she saying?
- 5 What is the message of the image?
- 6 How effective is the cartoon?

For example, they presented a petition with 11 600 signatures, organised by Mary Lee, to the South Australian Parliament in August 1894. This petition called for women to be granted the right to vote in both Houses of Parliament on the same terms as had been granted to men, and for women to be allowed to stand for election.

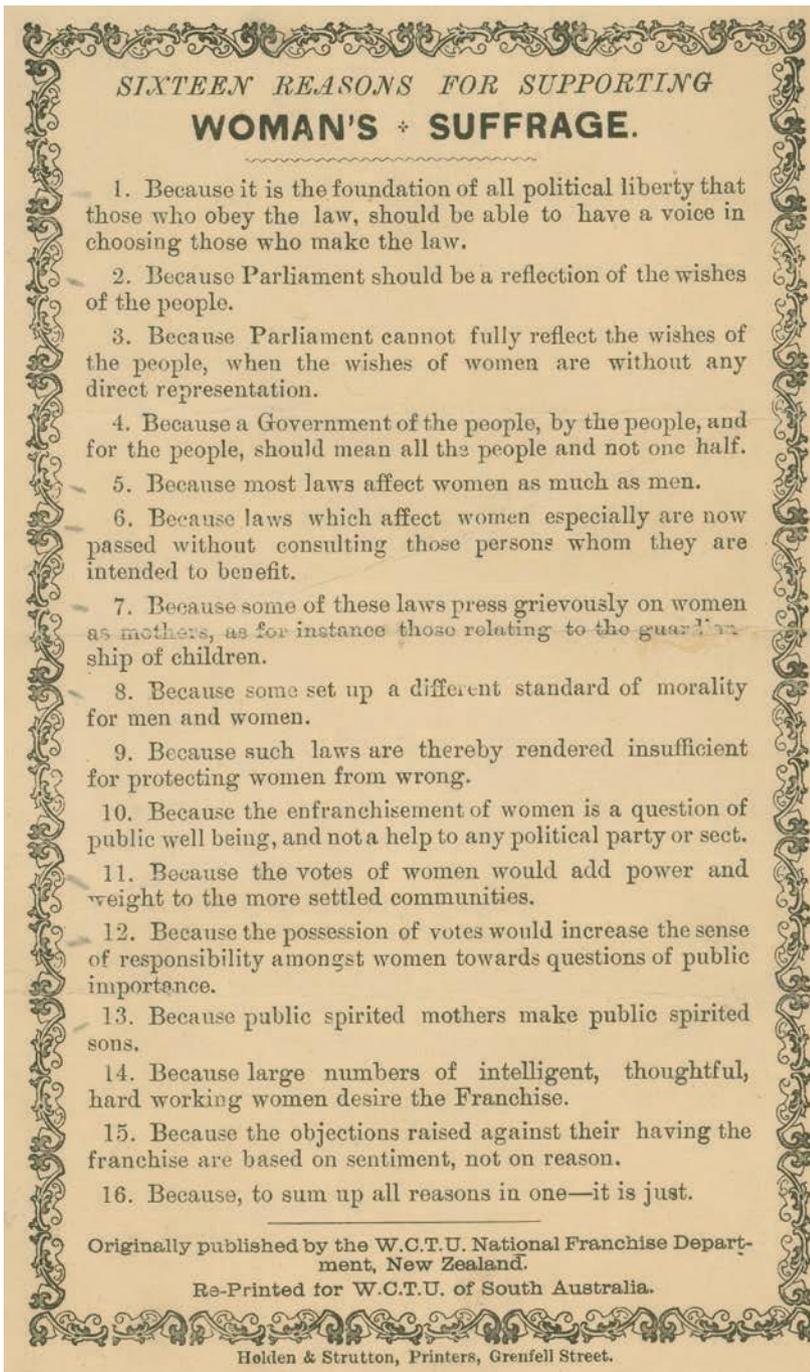
The petition was presented to parliament as it was debating a series of proposals put before the government by the Women's Suffrage League (WSL). The arrival of the petition had an impact on the debate and the Bill allowing votes for women was passed in December 1894. Queen Victoria signed her assent to the *Constitution (Female Suffrage) Act 1895* (SA) in February 1895.

South Australian women were the second to be granted the franchise after New Zealand women in 1893 and the first in the world to be granted the right to stand for election.

## Examples of the South Australian campaign

Nineteenth century civilization has accorded to women the same political status as to the idiot and the criminal. Such is the basis of our reverence for the person of woman and of our estimate of her work.

Mary Lee, a leading South Australian suffragist and social reformer, writing in 1889



State Library of South Australia/LSA SRG: 186708

### Questions

- 1 Who published this pamphlet?
- 2 What is the purpose of the pamphlet?
- 3 Who is its intended audience?
- 4 Draw a table with three columns. Column 1 is *Special attributes of women*; column 2 is *Justice or Principle*; column 3 is *Other*. Allocate each of the reasons given for supporting women's suffrage into one of the columns. Which category has the most reasons? Which category do you think is the more important for the argument? Explain your reasons.

**SOURCE 1.13** Woman's Christian Temperance Union of South Australia pamphlet. You can find a copy of this pamphlet online.

## ANTI-SUFFRAGISTS

Many men and women from all walks of life and in all the Western countries opposed the suffragists and their campaign to achieve voting rights for women. Queen Victoria was an outspoken opponent of women having the right to vote, declaring on one occasion that a prominent suffrage campaigner 'ought to get a good whipping'.

Members of colonial parliaments, newspaper editors and journalists, and men and women from all occupations were among those who opposed the vote for women. Their opposition was based on the following arguments:

- + Women should not have a public life but should be helpmates to their husbands.
- + Women are intellectually and physically inferior to men.
- + Women can't go to war so cannot fulfill the obligations of citizenship.
- + Suffrage would cause arguments between husband and wife and affect their relationship.
- + Women have a different nature to men – they are emotional, dependent and need protection. They belong in their own sphere – the home.
- + Women are emotional and lacking in reason so would not make good political decisions.
- + Women would neglect their home duties and children if given the vote.
- + Women don't need the vote.

Australian brewers, following the New Zealand example, were concerned that women would damage their industry by restricting the hours of trade or banning the sale of liquor altogether. Other men were also concerned about their potential loss of privileges and power, both in their personal life and in society. Some feared that the male votes would be outnumbered by female ones.

In Victoria in mid-1900, Carrie Reid and Freda Durham (both daughters of Legislative Assembly members) organised an anti-suffrage petition to counter the pro-suffrage ones. It was presented to parliament with 22 978 signatures.

## *Female suffrage and federation*

Support for Australian federation was growing at the same time as the women's movement. Many women perceived that winning the right to vote could be part of the federal movement and therefore supported it. Maybanke Anderson turned to fighting for federation as attempts to gain the right for women to vote in New South Wales failed again and again. She set up the Women's Federal League (WFL) and prepared to petition the 1897 Federal Convention that was taking place in Adelaide. The WFL called for the inclusion of women in the federal agenda.

At the dawn of the 20th century, Australian suffragists and their supporters had reason for cautious optimism, and this new century was deemed by feminist activist Maybanke Anderson to be the 'women's century'. This optimism flowed from some changes in the legal and political entitlements of Australian white women, the establishment of feminist organisations in each of the colonies, evolving political ideas and a belief by many suffragists in the possibilities of federation.

It also stemmed from a belief that there was support from people in powerful positions in society. Suffragists believed that, with the achievement of the female franchise, they could change the lives of women and children, and make a better, more moral society.



## 1900–1912

- 1900** Marriage Amendment Act passed, giving women the right to claim confinement expenses and maintenance from the father of their children
- 1901** Inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia
- 1902** Commonwealth Franchise Act granted white Australian women the right to vote and to stand for parliament
- 1902** Women in New South Wales granted the right to vote in state elections
- 1903** For the first time in the British Empire, Australian women candidates stood for election to a national parliament; three women (Vida Goldstein, Nellie Martel and Mary Ann Moore Bentley) nominated for the Senate and one (Selina Anderson) to the House of Representatives
- 1903** Tasmanian women granted the right to vote in state elections for the House of Assembly
- 1905** Queensland women granted the right to vote in state elections
- 1908** Victorian women granted the right to vote in state elections
- 1909** Women's Service Guilds, an important feminist organisation coordinating campaigns to improve the status and welfare of Australian women and children, established with Edith Cowan as one of the founders
- 1911** Australian and New Zealand women marched in London in support of suffrage for British women
- 1912** Maternity Allowance Act passed, allowing new mothers, whether married or not, to receive a payment of £5 on the birth of a child; Aboriginal, Asian, Pacific Islander and Papuan mothers were not eligible to receive the maternity allowance
- 1912** Justice Higgins decided that women would be paid the same rate as men when doing male work but nine pence an hour when doing female work (such as fruit packing) even though men were paid one shilling an hour for the same work



### Vida Goldstein (1869–1949)

One of the most active Australian suffragists was Vida Goldstein. Born in Portland, Victoria, she became a political activist, a teacher, a journalist and a peace campaigner. She became an internationalist, travelling overseas to suffrage conferences, and after Australian women achieved the right to vote, she worked with British suffragettes.

Her first entry into politics at 22 years of age was through her mother, an ardent suffragist, who took Vida with her to collect signatures for the 1891 Petition for Women's Suffrage. Knocking on doors and asking women



National Library of Australia/Portrait of Vida Goldstein (picture), [190-?]/nla.pic-an23371660

*continued*

continued

to sign the petition brought her face to face with the hardships of working-class women and increased her interest in social reform.

Between 1899 and 1908, Vida worked primarily for votes for women in the state parliament. In 1900, she became the first paid organiser for the United Council of Women's Suffrage, which had more than 30 affiliated associations that focused on lobbying and education.

She became president of the Women's Political Association (WPA) and formed a network of suburban progressive leagues that discussed women's rights. Through her journal *Woman's Sphere* and public lectures, she educated women about the importance of the vote for them and about their lack of legal rights.

In 1902, she attended the International Suffrage Conference in Washington, USA, as the Australian and New Zealand delegate. She addressed the United States Congress and met with President Roosevelt. While there, the Victorian Government asked her to investigate methods of dealing with neglected and delinquent children.

She stood for election at the first federal election in 1903, and received just over 51 000 votes, not enough to win the seat. She made another four unsuccessful attempts to enter parliament but her independence from formal political parties made it difficult to win enough votes.

Her policies for government articulated her feminism and support for the working class. They included compulsory arbitration and conciliation, equal rights, equal pay, the appointment of women to official posts and the redistribution of wealth.

In 1911, when she went to London to work with the British suffragettes, she said, 'I go to carry on our work in Australia. For it is our work. We suffragists are one all the world over. The principles for which we stand, and of which the vote is only a small symbol, have to be woven into the national life everywhere'.

In 1915, Vida founded the Women's Peace Army with Cecilia John to oppose Australia's involvement in the First World War and urged peaceful means of solving international issues. After the war she attended the Women's International Peace Conference in Zurich in 1919.

Vida Goldstein died at the age of 80, at home in South Yarra, Victoria.

## Questions

- 1 How significant was Vida Goldstein's role in the achievement of the right to vote for women?
- 2 Research the way in which Vida Goldstein is remembered today.

## COMMONWEALTH FRANCHISE ACT 1902

In 1902, white Australian women were given the federal franchise. Indigenous women in some states also got the vote, but only because they were on the state electoral rolls. In other states they had to wait until 1962. Why then, did New Zealand and Australia, both colonised by Great Britain, achieve female suffrage before the 'mother country', before any European country and before America, where the first women's rights convention took place?

The answer lies partly in the fact that Australia and New Zealand were newly settled European societies. Putting aside the issues associated with Indigenous culture, they did not have centuries of tradition to overturn in the way that Great Britain and Europe did. Their politics were evolving and there was greater opportunity for innovation.

An additional factor with Australia was federation, the creation of a nation from a number of colonies. This meant that a new constitution had to be developed and women could argue their case for inclusion in that document. As soon as there was agreement among politicians that no person who had the right to vote in a colonial parliament could be denied a vote in the new federal parliament, then women in South Australia and Western Australia automatically had the right to vote. So did some Aboriginal men and women. Politicians argued that if some women had the right to vote in federal elections, then all Australian women should be given the right to vote.

## Aboriginal women and suffrage

Women's suffrage was achieved with the *Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902* but not all women in Australia were enfranchised. Some Aboriginal women who were eligible to vote in the state elections in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania were entitled to vote in the Commonwealth elections. However, over time, state government officials excluded Indigenous people from voting.



**SOURCE 1.14** In 1905, Laura Harris was one of the few Aboriginal women on the electoral roll. She was deprived of the right to vote in the 1920s and 1930s, but in 1944 her vote was restored to her by the Chifley Government.

## WHAT NEXT?

White Australian women achieved the right to vote and stand for election in 1902 but they did not succeed in accessing parliamentary power for a long time. In 1921, Edith Cowan became the first woman to be elected as a member of the Nationalist Party in the Western Australian Parliament. Another two decades would pass until 1943, when Enid Lyons and Dorothy Tangney were elected to the federal parliament. Women in the first decades of the century chose to stand as independents, not constrained by being a member of a political party, but this made it difficult for them to win.

In the first decade after federation, women turned their attention to developing their maternal citizenship. There were still Australian states where women had not been given the right to vote and there were other social issues to be addressed on a state-by-state basis, such as raising the age of consent. The achievement of a maternity allowance in 1912 for all white women reflected the rewards of female suffrage and maternal citizenship. Indigenous women did not receive the maternity allowance – even those who had the right to vote and so were citizens.

By the 1970s – the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement – memories of what women in the first half of the century had achieved had faded. As a result, misconceptions

arose about what female suffrage had achieved. Significantly, some historians, female activists and members of the public believed that the attainment of suffrage ended with the first wave of feminism. They thought women would have to wait another 60 years for the second wave of feminism to achieve anything more. As the next chapters clearly demonstrate, this was not the case. Throughout the 20th century, Australian women continued to campaign for women's rights. The emphasis of these campaigns, however, was different from those of the suffrage movement and from the later second-wave feminist movement.

## *Conclusion*

The women's movements that emerged in the 19th century were modern rights movements with their roots in the Enlightenment. This was the time when society began to slowly become more democratic, as men used the ideas of natural rights for the individual, and the notion of a social contract, to challenge the authority of religion and the autocratic rule of the Crown.

As men gained more political and legal rights through reforms, including the right to vote, women began to use the same language to claim these rights for themselves. From the middle of the 19th century, women established suffrage societies and planned campaigns to achieve their aims. The first successes at a national level came in the newly settled English societies of New Zealand and Australia, in 1893 and 1902 respectively.

Over the next decades, despite significant opposition, women fought a strong campaign for a maternal citizenship, believing that suffrage was the way to achieve legal, social and economic rights.

## *Chapter summary*

- + The origins of the women's movement lie in the 18th-century debates about 'rights' and the 'individual', and in the 19th-century demands for universal male suffrage.
- + Very few political, legal and social rights existed for women in the mid 19th century.
- + The women's movement emerged first in America at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, New York. A British women's movement emerged shortly after. Prior to that time, individual women advocated for women's rights.
- + During the 1880s, feminist women in Australia began forming suffrage organisations, and associated journals and newspapers. They also began organising campaigns for the right to vote.
- + New Zealand women were the first women in the world to gain the right to vote in their national parliament in 1893.

- + South Australia was the first colony to grant women the right to vote in 1894, followed by Western Australia in 1899.
- + Many Australian feminists regarded the federal movement as the path through which women would achieve suffrage.
- + The Australian women's movements had similar goals, campaigns and tactics to the New Zealand movement.
- + Federation delivered the right to vote and to stand for parliament for all Australian white women. Indigenous women, with some few exceptions, as well as Pacific Islander women and Asian women, did not receive the right to vote.
- + The achievement of the right to vote was followed in Australia by the development of a maternal citizenship, as evidenced by the campaigns of women from 1900 to the outbreak of the First World War.

### Further resources

Michael Adcock, *Nelson Modern History: The Enlightenment*, Cengage Learning Australia, Melbourne, 2014.

*Utopia Girls: How women got the vote* (2012), DVD, ABC Television

### Weblinks

Weblinks relevant to this chapter can be found at <http://nmh.nelsonnet.com.au/women>.



## Chapter review activities

- 1 What are women's rights?
- 2 Which new 18th-century ideas enabled women to argue for the right to vote?
- 3 Name two influential women who argued for women's rights in the 18th century. Select one of them and write a paragraph outlining why she is important.
- 4 Explain the meaning of the two spheres of influence that relate to men and women.
- 5 Why was John Stuart Mill so important to the early Western women's movements?
- 6 There are 30 articles in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights that outline the rights all human beings should have today. In groups, read the articles of the Declaration and select those that would be of interest to feminists. Draw up a table with three columns. In the first column, write down the rights that were guaranteed to women in 1948. In the next column note whether Australian women had those rights in the 19th century. In the third column, write the dates on which the rights were won.



- 7 What were the wider international factors that led to the development of the women's movement? Why were these so important?
- 8 Select one of the Australian women's organisations listed in Table 1.2. Research the organisation and present an illustrated timeline showing its development. Evaluate the effectiveness of the organisation in terms of its aims.
- 9 Briefly list, and then compare, the arguments put for voting rights by Australian women and those of New Zealand. Are the arguments the same? Are there any new arguments? Explain your answers.
- 10 Write a paragraph identifying the similarities between the goals, methods and tactics of the New Zealand and Australian women's movements in their struggle to achieve the right to vote.
- 11 What methods were adopted by the anti-suffragists in both New Zealand and Australia?
- 12 Why was the vote seen as so important in both New Zealand and Australia?
- 13 Assess the historical significance of **one** of the following suffragists: Vida Goldstein, Louisa Lawson, Mary Lee, Emma Miller, Jessie Rooke, Christine Clarke.  
Prepare a multimedia presentation. Use the following criteria as a basis for your position.
  - a) Her success according to her own goals.
  - b) Her success according to the women's movement's goals.
  - c) Her influence at a state, national and international level.
- 14 Why were Australian white women given the right to vote in 1902? Explain why most Indigenous women were not given the right to vote.
- 15 State three gains the women's movement achieved in the first decade after suffrage. Select one of them and research the issue. Present a brief report explaining the background to the issue, the actions of the women involved and how success was achieved.

National Library of Australia/Australian delegation to the International Woman Suffrage Alliance Congress in Rome, 1923, vn3279316



## CHAPTER TWO

### *Citizen mothers*

In 1913, just one year before the outbreak of the First World War, a sense of optimism pervaded the various organisations that made up the Australian women's movement. Having gained the right to vote federally in 1902, well before British and American women, Australian women had begun to define a citizenship based on motherhood. One of their achievements had been the *Maternity Allowance Act 1912*.

When the war broke out, women faced significant obstacles to their efforts to work politically for further rights. They wanted to work in the jobs vacated by men but the government did not believe in women working outside their traditional sphere of influence. The women's movement became divided over Australia's involvement in the war and conscription.

The post-war society was very different from the pre-war one, divided along class, party and religious lines. The right to equal pay became more important as more women joined the workforce. Feminists argued that women's work inside the home as mothers and homemakers deserved to be recognised and paid for.

The international nature of the women's movement became more formalised during the inter-war years; affiliations were formed between international women's organisations and the League of Nations. This enabled women to use the ideas and conventions of the League of Nations to bring national issues to an international forum. The issues included the treatment of Indigenous mothers whose children were being removed.

◀ The Australian delegation to the International Woman Suffrage Alliance Congress in Rome, 1923. Bessie Rischbieth, described as the 'chairman' is seated at the centre front. The women came from Western Australia, Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales. They were the first Australian women to attend an international congress dedicated to the topic of female suffrage.

#### INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- + What was the significance of the First World War and the inter-war years for women?
- + Did the First World War give women the opportunity to move outside their traditional roles?
- + In what ways did the League of Nations affect the status and rights of women?
- + What economic and technological changes occurred during the inter-war years to affect women?

# The significance of the First World War for women

The First World War is often seen in Australian national mythology as a birthing of the nation, the time when Australia came of age through the sacrifice of its young men, and when Australia proved that it was able to take its place on a world stage. This image does not apply to the women of Australia.

## conscription

Compulsory enlistment of a person by the state, usually to serve in the armed forces

The war certainly created new opportunities for women, and volunteer groups sprang up across the nation as women found ways to support the war effort. A very limited number of Australian women also served overseas, mainly as nurses. More significantly, however, the war years fractured the early women's movements into pro- and anti-war groups, and from 1916 into pro- and anti-**conscription** camps. These divisions left a deep and lasting bitterness. Most historians agree that men gained the most through the association of Gallipoli with the birth of the nation, as the quote from *The Lone Hand* below illustrates.

“ The Australian comes out of this Great War looking the most virile thing on earth. The tasks other men could not do, he went into with a laugh, and though the laughter died in the bitter strain of the front trenches in the rush across ‘no man’s land’ his achievements remain ... Australian manhood is our chief asset. ”

*The Lone Hand*, 1 March 1919



1914–1919

1914	4 AUGUST	Britain declared war on Germany
	SEPTEMBER	Australian federal election; Prime Minister Andrew Fisher declared that Australia would defend Britain ‘to the last man and the last shilling’
	OCTOBER	War Precautions Act passed
1915	NOVEMBER	Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) sailed to Egypt
		Women’s Peace Army (WPA) formed by Vida Goldstein, Cecilia Johns and Adela Pankhurst
	APRIL	International Congress of Women (sometimes called the Women’s Peace Conference) held in The Hague, Netherlands
1916	APRIL	Anzacs landed at Gallipoli
	OCTOBER	First conscription <b>referendum</b> failed
1917	DECEMBER	Second Conscription referendum failed
1918		Women’s Legal Status Act NSW passed
1919	MAY	The Women’s Peace Conference in Zurich (with Vida Goldstein and Cecilia Johns as the Australian delegates) rejected the terms of the First World War peace treaty, as enacting revenge on the defeated nations
1920	JANUARY	League of Nations founded

## referendum

Voting by the whole electorate on a specific question or set of questions

## OUTBREAK OF WAR

Great Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914. Consequently, Australia, as part of the British Empire, was also at war. The soon to be elected prime minister, Andrew Fisher, had declared that if war broke out, Australia would ‘stand beside the mother country to help and defend her to the last man and the last shilling’.

Australians were initially enthusiastic about the war and many men flocked to join the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) as volunteers. This enthusiasm was accompanied by unrealistic expectations about the length and severity of the war. There was a general expectation that it would be short and the troops would be ‘home before Christmas’.

## OPPOSITION TO THE WAR

There was some opposition to the war – mainly from socialists, conscientious objectors, feminists and **pacifists**. Women were divided on the issue – not just in Australia but also in the United States, and in Great Britain, New Zealand and Europe. The issue of conscription brought the divisions between women in Australia to an unprecedented level and left a legacy of ongoing bitterness.

**pacifist**

A person opposed to war  
and violence

## MILITARY CENSORSHIP

Although the War Precautions Act was not passed until the end of October 1914, military censorship began as soon as war was declared. The government’s powers of censorship allowed little room for debates about the war. One of the first papers to fall foul of the censor was the suffragette paper *Women Voter* – the newsletter of the Women’s Political Association (WPA). Only a month after war was declared it had published anti-war sentiments, arguing from the position of the mother.

“ Women know the cost of life too well to risk it lightly. Olive Schreiner writes: ‘There is, perhaps, no woman, whether she has borne children, or been merely potentially a child-bearer, who could look down upon a battlefield covered with the slain, but the thought would rise in her “So many mothers’ sons!”’ ”

*Women Voter*, 4 August 1914

The response from the government was immediate, as described by Vida Goldstein below.

“ On 9th inst. An armed guard, with fixed bayonets, a commanding officer, a detective, and police, took charge of the establishment of our printers, Messrs Fraser and Jenkinson, 343 Queen Street, seized the first prints of the *Women Voter* and ... destroyed. We are told that we may publish anything that will ‘stimulate military enthusiasm’ which is explained by the *Military Journal* as developing a “desire to kill”. Our civil liberty and freedom of the press are in jeopardy and we are prepared to fight for both. ”

*Women Voter*, 16 September 1914

## WOMEN'S PEACE ARMY (WPA)

The Women's Peace Army (WPA) was founded in Victoria in 1915 by the suffragettes Vida Goldstein and Cecilia John. It opposed the war in the name of motherhood and aimed to bring together women of all beliefs who were pacifists and against conscription and militarism. The mottoes of the Peace Army were 'We war against war' as well as 'I didn't raise my son to be a soldier'. The WPA was formed in the offices of the Women's Political Association, a feminist organisation that aimed to organise women's votes, promote the interests of women and children, and improve social and industrial conditions.

The Peace Army, with branches in Sydney and Brisbane, adopted the suffragette colours of purple, green and white. Vida Goldstein became president and its membership included Adela Pankhurst, daughter of the British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst. In 1916, Cecilia John established a Children's Peace Army to counteract what she saw as the indoctrination of children into militarism.

The activities of the WPA included organising anti-war rallies, participating in peace demonstrations, supporting peace candidates standing for election, organising petitions to members of parliament and assisting those who were worse off because of the war. A large anti-conscription march organised by the WPA in Melbourne took place in October 1916. It attracted between 4000 and 6000 women and 80 000 onlookers at the Yarra Bank for the speeches.

At rallies and meetings, Cecilia John, who had an exceptionally good voice, would sing the American anti-war song 'I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier'.

“ I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier,  
I brought him up to be my pride and joy.  
Who dares to place a musket on his shoulder,  
To shoot some other mother's darling boy?  
Let nations arbitrate their future troubles,  
It's time to lay the sword and gun away.  
There'd be no war today,  
If mothers all would say,  
'I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier.' ”

Lyrics by Alfred Bryan; music by Al Piantadosi

The song was so effective that the government banned it under the 1915 War Precautions Act on the grounds that it was 'prejudicial to recruiting'.

The Women's Peace Party (WPP) was founded in the United States in January 1915, and it used the same language arguing against war as mothers as the Australian Women's Peace Army; for example, it referred to the 'mother half of humanity' not being able to tolerate the destruction brought about by war. When the United States entered the war in 1917, the American WPP membership divided, as had the Australian women's movement, into those who supported the war effort and those who were against providing any support.

At the Women's Peace Congress at The Hague in the Netherlands in April 1915, women from around the world met and spoke out strongly for women's political rights, calling for mediation of the European conflict as well as votes for women as part of their political platform. In this way suffrage and peace organisations came together.

## PRO-WAR WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

At the same time as some women were establishing anti-war organisations, others were forming pro-war organisations such as the One Women One Recruit League in Victoria. The aim of this group was to encourage each woman who joined the League to get one recruit for the war. When they achieved this task their name would be added to the One Woman One Recruit Honour Roll. The League was formed in Melbourne by Georgina Temperley, organiser of the State Recruiting Committee of Victoria.

Other organisations that enthusiastically supported the war included the powerful, conservative, anti-socialist Australian Women's National League (AWNL), which had been established in 1904. By 1914, it had 52 000 members across three states, and was the largest and most influential of the organisations working to persuade women to vote for anti-Labor politicians and groups. Its aim was to support the empire and monarchy, fight socialism, educate women politically and protect the interests of the home, women and children. The AWNL called upon men to enlist, using the authority of wife and mother as shown in the extracts below.

“ A Mother's Answer to 'a Common Soldier'  
 Sir, - As a mother of an only child - a son - may I say that we women, who demand to be heard, will tolerate no such cry as Peace! Peace! when there is no peace ... There is only one temperature of the British race, and that is white heat. With those who disgrace their sacred trust of motherhood we have nothing in common ... We women pass on the human ammunition of 'only sons' to fill the gaps ... if the men fail, the women won't ... Yours etc, A Little Mother ”

Letter to the editor, *The Morning Post* (London), 14 August 1916

Some of the AWNL's tactics caused bitterness – for example, giving white feathers as a sign of cowardice to men who appeared not to have enlisted. Some of these men turned out to be returned soldiers with injuries.

### Women as mothers

The concept of women as mothers dominated female discourse throughout the war and was particularly important in the 1916 and 1917 conscription debates when the government conducted referendums calling on the Australian public to allow conscription of soldiers. Although both referendums failed, they bitterly divided Australian society. Both sides made extensive use of 'women as mothers' in mounting their campaigns for and against conscription.



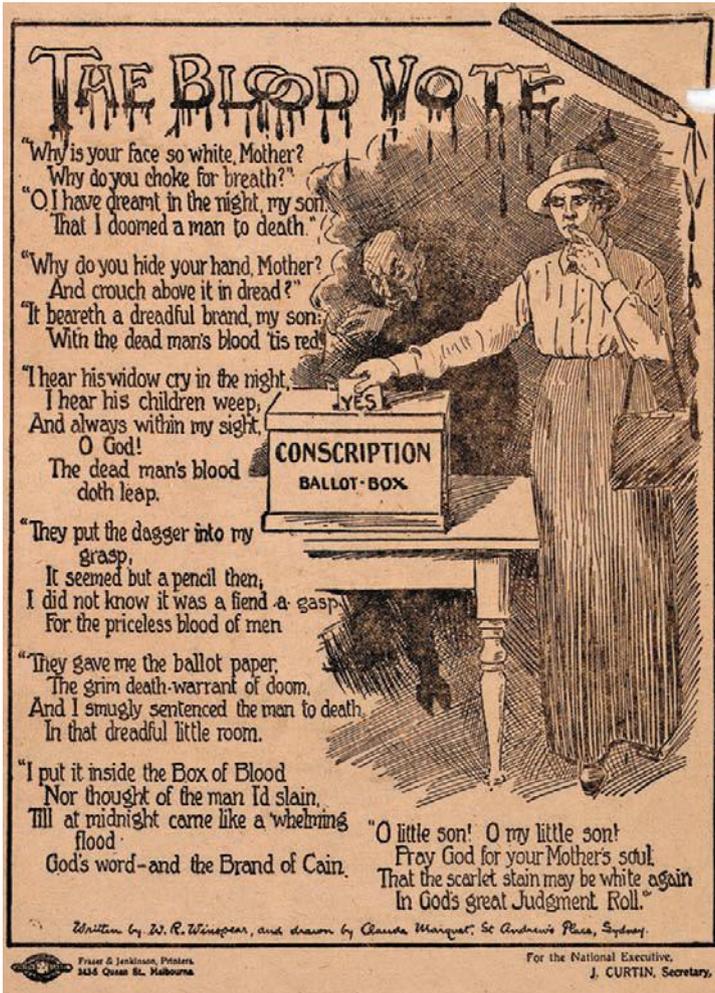
**SOURCE 2.1** A leaflet created by the anti-conscription committee of the Australian Labor Party during the conscription debate in 1916.



**SOURCE 2.2** The child in this 1916 leaflet is urging his mother to vote 'Yes' in the coming conscription referendum.

continued

continued



**SOURCE 2.3** An anti-conscription leaflet published in Melbourne in 1917 before the second conscription referendum. The artist was Claude Marquet and the verse was by WR Winspear. After the first conscription referendum – called by Prime Minister Hughes to force men to enlist – had been lost in 1916, the government decided to have a second referendum on 20 December 1917 but failed to gain enough votes.

## Questions

Sources 2.1 and 2.2 are political propaganda cartoons designed to persuade people to do something. Examine them closely and then answer the following questions:

- 1 What is the historical context of the cartoons?
- 2 To whom are they appealing?
- 3 What is the purpose of the cartoons?
- 4 What is the role of the woman and the boy in the cartoons?
- 5 How does each cartoon convey its message?

Source 2.3 is another example of the use of motherhood to argue a position about conscription. Examine Source 2.3 carefully, and read the verse.

- 6 What is the historical context of this cartoon?
- 7 Who is the man at the back? How has the artist drawn him?
- 8 Explain what the woman is doing and describe the expression on her face.
- 9 In what role is the woman positioned?
- 10 In a paragraph, explain the verse, identifying the speakers and the content.
- 11 Who is the cartoon appealing to and why is it called 'The Blood Vote'?

## *The right to work: women's war work*

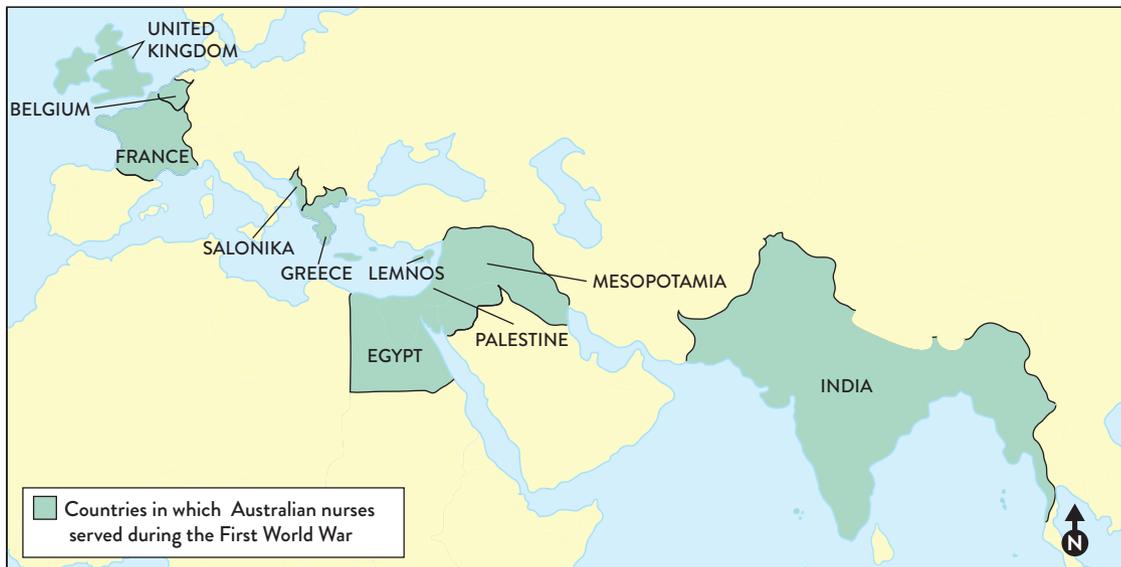
The Australian Government did not support the idea of women working outside the home during the war years. This was a source of frustration to women who wanted to contribute to the war effort. Although Australia was one of the few countries in which women had the right to vote, ideas about the separate spheres of men and women remained the dominant ideology. The primary role of women was seen as domestic, looking after the home and raising children.

Many women wanted to work in non-traditional roles, replacing men who had enlisted. Even the conservative Australian Women's National League (AWNL) declared that its members would gladly contribute to the war effort by working in the production of munitions or in any other jobs vacated by men. Unlike their British and American counterparts, however, Australian women were not allowed to work in any job that was considered to be a man's. There wasn't the same urgency that existed in Great Britain to mobilise society and enable men to enlist.

Women who worked did so in the traditional areas of food, textiles and service industries. However, some new clerical positions opened up for them in banking, insurance and the public service. Trade unions sometimes opposed this.

Many women volunteered for military service overseas as cooks, stretcher-bearers, ambulance drivers and nurses. The only women to be sent overseas by the government were nurses because they were traditionally seen as carers. However, Australian nurses were not initially accorded military rank when they joined the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS).

## THE RIGHT TO SERVE



**SOURCE 2.4** More than 3000 Australian civilian nurses volunteered for active service during the First World War, in countries ranging from Britain to India. Some nurses also joined British and French nursing services.

### Australian nurses during the First World War

- + 2139 Australian nurses served overseas in the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS)
- + 423 AANS nurses served in Australia
- + 25 AANS nurses died
- + 388 AANS nurses were decorated
- + 7 AANS nurses were awarded military medals



**SOURCE 2.5** Sister Alice Ross King was one of four AANS nurses who were awarded military honours for bravery after an artillery attack on their nursing station on 22 July 1917.

According to the Australian War Memorial, more than 3000 Australian civilian nurses volunteered for active service during the First World War. They worked behind the lines in field hospitals, clearing stations, hospital trains and on medical ships anchored offshore.

Nurses suffered extreme hardships through bitter winters and intense heat (depending on their location), very poor work conditions and lack of equipment. This led to sickness, exhaustion through long and difficult work hours, and homesickness. They were known as the 'front-line angels'.

Nurses volunteered, as men had done, for active service and served under similar dangerous and poor conditions. They were not always welcome. Not everyone was glad to work with the nurses or respected their skills. Colonel Charles Ryan, Principal Medical Officer of the Commonwealth Forces in Victoria, viewed nurses as a nuisance on the battlefields. He is reported as saying:

“ ... the average woman could do far greater service for her country by making bandages, pyjamas, warm clothing for the men and by keeping within their own sphere to the best of her own knowledge and ability. ”

Carmel Shute, 'Heroines and Heroes: Sexual Mythology in Australia 1914–1918', *Hecate*, January 1975, p. 7

## What motivated the nurses to serve overseas?



Australian War Memorial/P001.53.057

**SOURCE 2.6** Sister Jessie Tomlins

I have never regretted that I took the notion into my head to take on nursing, for it has opened up opportunities that I would never have had.

Sister Jessie Tomlins, Australian Army Nursing Service

### Questions

- 1 Consulting a range of sources, including the website of the Australian War Memorial, write a short biography of Jessie Tomlins that includes the following information:
  - + her age on enlistment
  - + when she enlisted
  - + where she nursed
  - + any experiences she wrote about
  - + what happened to her
  - + her significance and contribution to the war effort.
- 2 What opportunities do you think she was referring to in the above quote?

## The Bluebirds

“ For many years to come Australian women will be judged by you ... Just as each soldier should fight as if the results of the battle depended upon his individual effort, so each one of you will do her work for something else besides the love of it, for the reputation of our great country. ”

Lieutenant Colonel AB Brockway, diary entry, 24 August 1916

With these words, Lieutenant Colonel AB Brockway of the Army Medical Corps farewelled 20 Australian nurses who were leaving Australia to serve on the western front in France. Although the Department of Defence arranged their passage, they were not part of the Australian Army Nursing Service and would receive neither medals nor any financial help to return to Australia when the war was over.

The French Government had accepted an offer from the Australian Red Cross to send a unit of nurses. The Australian Department of Defence funded their trip to France and retail store David Jones provided their dark blue uniforms with pale blue piping and hatband. The nurses were dubbed the ‘Bluebirds’ because of the colour of their uniforms. The Australian Jockey Club paid their salaries.

### The experience of female doctors

In contrast to the situation with nurses during the war, the Australian army refused to appoint any female doctors, deeming that women were not suited to this type of work. The highly skilled and experienced female doctors were furious. More than 15 women doctors left Australia and enlisted overseas, wanting to use their skills in the war. One of these women was Dr Phoebe Chapple, who, frustrated with the Australian Army’s refusal to appoint female doctors, travelled to England in 1917 to enlist in the Royal Army Medical Corps. Later in the war, she was one of two female doctors sent to the front in France, where her actions during a German air raid earned her the Military Medal, the first such award to an Australian woman.

## Recognition

As the war progressed, both the government and the medical profession came to value the nurses’ work and they gained more respect. This continued after the war and was an improvement on the previous image of nurses as ‘glorified first aid workers’.

## VOLUNTARY WORK – WOMEN’S WORK?

Although Australian nurses and female doctors proved themselves capable of working in a man’s world – the world of war – only about 3000 did so. The bulk of Australian women’s contribution to the Australian war effort was carried out as volunteers on the home front.

There was no planned mobilisation of the civilian population during the First World War, but women were encouraged to join voluntary organisations to raise funds for the war effort and provide items for the soldiers that were not provided by the military. The main organisations were the:

- + Australian Red Cross (ARC)
- + Australian Women’s National League (AWNL)
- + Australian Comforts Fund (ACF)

- + Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD)
- + Country Women's Association (CWA)
- + Cheer-Up Society.

The two largest organisations were the Australian Red Cross and the Australian Comforts Fund. The Australian Government recognised them both for the services they organised for servicemen. A common stereotype of the time was the 'patriotic woman', working tirelessly for nation and empire, but in a voluntary capacity. This reinforced the traditional ideas about men's work and women's work as depicted in the 'separate spheres' ideology. Women who worked in a voluntary, unpaid capacity undertook jobs that were traditionally associated with their gender, such as knitting and sewing, cooking and preparing foodstuffs.

## The Australian Red Cross

In 1914, shortly after war was declared, Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, wife of the Governor-General of Australia, established the Australian branch of the British Red Cross and became its first president. It quickly formed divisions and branches throughout the country with the wives of the governors of each state becoming the state presidents. Within four months, New South Wales had 88 city and 249 rural branches. Thousands of women joined, especially when the wounded soldiers started to return in 1916, their numbers reaching 82 000. Many of the women who joined the Red Cross were also members of the AWNL.<sup>1</sup>



**SOURCE 2.7** A horse and cart laden with boxes bearing the Red Cross insignia. They are held together by a banner with the words 'Special Red Cross wholemeal biscuits' and 'Australian Branch of the British Red Cross Society, 4,000 tins'.

Red Cross volunteers worked tirelessly, knitting socks and rolling bandages. In the bitter winter of 1916, General Birdwood called for help as the Australian soldiers in the trenches in France had run out of socks. The socks could not be washed or dried and the mud was ever-present during the winter months. Nearly 80 000 pairs of socks were knitted in response. It is estimated that by the end of the war, women and children had produced more than one million pairs of socks.

The women also prepared 'comfort' parcels that were sent overseas to sick or wounded servicemen. Altogether 395 695 food parcels and 36 339 clothing parcels were sent between 1914 and 1918. The packages contained medical supplies, soap, cigarettes, food, and items of clothing, including socks, gloves and flannel shirts. The Red Cross also raised funds by organising carnivals,

dances and concert parties. The resulting funds were given to soldiers' families or used to purchase goods to be sent overseas. By the end of the war, more than £20 000 had been raised. Other activities carried out by Red Cross volunteers included nursing, providing meals for soldiers, assisting the families of servicemen and providing support for discharged military personnel.

The war did provide some opportunities for women to show their abilities on the home front. Establishing and running large voluntary organisations gave women the opportunity to demonstrate their efficiency and decision-making skills. However, this work was undertaken voluntarily and involved the traditional nurturing tasks associated with women.

## THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The war ended in November 1918. When the men returned, women were propelled into a new social situation, which for some meant the loss of their jobs and economic independence. Some had to look after men who returned with severe physical and psychological wounds. They also had to adjust to a society infused with bitterness and a sense of loss. An outbreak of Spanish Influenza in 1919, which began in Victoria and rapidly spread to the rest of Australia, took a further 12 000 lives in addition to those lost during the war.

### The Women's Legal Status Act 1918

An important milestone for women in New South Wales occurred with the passing of the *Women's Legal Status Act 1918*. This gave women the legal right to become lawyers and to sit in the New South Wales Parliament.

In response to the Act, two women activists – Angela Booth and Millicent Preston-Stanley – both stood for election to the New South Wales Parliament in order to increase their own political effectiveness. Only Preston-Stanley was successful and was elected in 1925.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WAR FOR WOMEN

The significance of the First World War for women in terms of achievement of further rights is debatable. Below are the views of two Australian feminist historians.

### Marilyn Lake

World War I had contradictory outcomes for gender relations. Women had won a measure of independence and had trodden new paths. A new woman had emerged, posing far-reaching challenges to relations between the sexes ... Yet all agreed it was the men's status that had really been enhanced by the war.

*Creating a Nation*, McPhee Gribble Publishers, 1994, p. 218

### Anne Summers

The First World War did not provide an opportunity for Australian women to step beyond their traditional roles ... Instead the Great War – as it came ironically to be called – had the effect of cementing and consolidating the notion that women's main social function was to bear children and to influence those around them into dutiful civic submission.

*Damned Whores and God's Police*, Penguin Books Australia, 2002, p. 426

### Questions

- 1 Compare the two historians' statements. What are the differences between them?
- 2 Based on the information in this chapter and your own research, do you agree more with the first quote or the second quote? Provide evidence to support your answer.

## *Between the wars, 1918–1939*

While the First World War itself did little to transform the experience and rights of Australian women, it is clear that major changes were brewing in the years immediately following the end of the conflict and into the 1920s. Some of them were international in character, such as the establishment of the League of Nations. There were also local changes, such as the passing of the Women's Legal Status Act. Generally, though, during the 1920s, social and technological changes had the greatest impact on women's lives. New work practices and leisure opportunities helped create the idea of the 'new woman' – a modern, visible and usually single woman – in striking contrast to the then – conventional idealised femininity of the mother citizen, a stereotype that government policy did much to reinforce. The emergence of these new and modern aspects of women's experience altered the focus of the women's movement in the inter-war years.



### 1920s – 1930s

- 1921** Edith Cowan from Western Australia was the first woman elected to an Australian parliament; she suggested that housewives should be paid their own wage
- 1923** Women's Legal Status Act (WA) was introduced as a Private Member's Bill by Edith Cowan
- 1923** Laws were passed to permit the removal of Indigenous children from their families in South Australia
- 1924** Compulsory voting for federal elections was introduced
- 1925** Mary Alice Holman from Western Australia was the second woman to enter an Australian parliament; also first woman to win a seat for the Labor Party
- 1925** Sixth Assembly of the League of Nations was held in Geneva; Australia's delegate was Eleanor MacKinnon, founder of the Junior Red Cross during the First World War
- 1927** Royal Commission into the feasibility and desirability of motherhood endowment and child endowment
- 1929** United Association of Women Workers was formed in New South Wales
- 1933** Lady Millie Peacock was the first female Member of Parliament in Victoria
- 1934** Guardianship and Custody of Infants Act was passed, due in part to New South Wales lobbyist Millicent Preston Stanley
- 1937** Council of Action for Equal Pay was formed by Muriel Heagney

## POST-WAR AUSTRALIA

### The 'Flapper'

The 1920s is known as the period in which the 'new woman' emerged. Known as the 'flapper', she was typically young, single and in paid employment. Wearing short dresses and a short hairstyle known as a 'bob' (or the 'Eton cut'), she went out dancing at night, unchaperoned, and was often seen smoking, swearing and drinking. She wore make-up and lipstick and had her own opinions. She challenged the social norms. She also became a target for advertisers as she was seen as a consumer with money to spend, working perhaps in one of the new and expanding department stores – such as The Myer Emporium or David Jones in Australia. These new department stores employed women in sales, making them more visible in the public sphere. More than 50 000 Australian women were employed in sales in 1933 – double that of 1911. Women also worked in factories, in nursing and in teaching, and they took clerical and secretarial positions in offices and banks.

Advertisers pandered to the anxiety of parents whose daughters went out without a chaperone in order to sell the new gramophone. The message to parents in film advertisements was that 'if you buy a gramophone, your daughter will stay at home and invite her friends around'.

The following limerick published in the *New Triad* magazine in Sydney in July 1928 was a humorous response to the changes in the clothing of women.

“ Half an inch, half an inch, half an inch shorter, The skirts are the same for mother and daughter, When the wind blows each of them shows, Half an inch, half an inch, more than she oughter. ”

*New Triad* magazine, Sydney, July 1928

At the age of 19, Muriel Pearce left her hometown of Adelaide for Sydney, where she became the bandleader of Australia's only all-girl jazz band called 'Lynette and her Six Redheads'. At the age of 106, she recalled in an interview:

“ The men thought we should be at home with the babies but we thought otherwise. We had a wonderful time. ”

Muriel Pearce, 'Happy 106th Birthday', *Sydney Seniors* online magazine, 2007

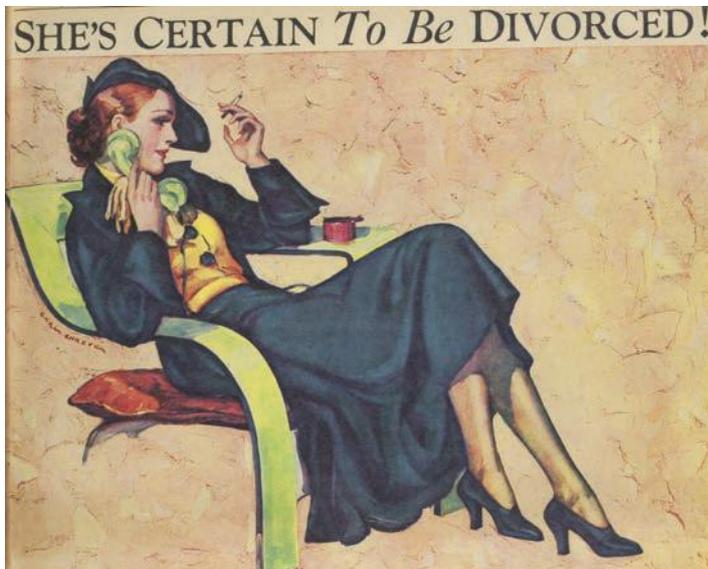


**SOURCE 2.8** Distinguished by their shorter skirts and hair, Flappers embodied the new women of the 1920s.

Alamy/Classic Stock

## Social classification of people

The stronger financial position of women in the paid workforce made divorce easier in the 1930s but social disapproval was strong too. Only a small number of marriages ended in divorce but this story from the 1936 edition of *The Australian Women's Weekly* suggests the 'new woman' was seen as a threat to the social order. The article classified people into types – some of which are more desirable than others. Carl Shreve drew this picture to accompany an article headed 'Types Can Now Be Classified. Lawyers Doctors and Clergymen Know Them'. The woman represents the 'divorce type'. Under the picture are the words 'Our Artist here depicts a woman of the type who is almost a certainty to be divorced, according to the description by legal experts. The editor wrote that it is common to hear about the marrying type of person who is generally steady, domestic and companionable. But the divorce type, like the woman in the drawing, is a type described as "generally childless, between thirty and forty, call themselves modern, are very fond of outside entertainment, and not at all fond of home life and the work involved thereby. They are not very healthy and not very fond of quiet pursuits like reading and sewing, though a number of bridge fiends are divorcees"'.



Retrieved 11 April 2014 from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article65189718>

**SOURCE 2.9** Carl Shreve drew this picture to accompany an article headed 'Types Can Now Be Classified. Lawyers Doctors and Clergymen Know Them'.

### Questions

- 1 What are the rules, or cultural mores, that the woman is breaking?
- 2 What does the story suggest women should be doing?
- 3 Why do you think the word 'childless' is used?
- 4 Would a childless woman today be criticised in the same way as this woman?

Despite the image of the 1920s as carefree and modern, Australia was a divided society after the war and the images of the prosperous, carefree 'twenties' applied only to a small section of society. Many soldiers and nurses returned home severely wounded, needing care and finding themselves in difficult financial circumstances.

## Women and work

**TABLE 2.1** Occupational distribution of Australian female workforce, 1911–1933

Occupational area	1911	1921	1933	Percentage increase/decrease, 1911–1933
Upper professional	3159	5644	2815	-12
Graziers, wheat and sheep farmers	1214	1148	3988	+70
Lower professional	38 933	50 598	70 059	+44
Managerial	12 261	8314	10 188	-20
Self-employed	5021	7032	15 141	+67
Other farmers	13 099	6364	11122	-18
Clerical and related workers	9637	37 750	91 539	+89
Armed services and police force	0	31	31	+100
Craftsmen and foreman	88 531	88 144	53 997	-64
Shop assistants	26 381	37 743	50 760	+48
Operatives and process workers	11 177	20 508	57 597	+81
Drivers	719	1276	14	-5036
Personal domestic and service workers	148 170	160 950	197 752	+25
Miners	57	0	0	-
Farm and rural workers	708	1830	4006	+82
Labourers	4039	10 379	12 511	+68
Not known	4751	6686	16 081	+70
<b>Total workforce</b>	<b>368 457</b>	<b>436 567</b>	<b>599 068</b>	<b>+38</b>

**TABLE 2.2** Changes in female employment, 1911–1933

Date	Females	Females employed	Percentage
1911	2 141 970	368 457	17.2
1921	2 672 874	436 567	16.3
1933	3 262 785	599 068	19.3

In 1921, as the tables above show, the number of females employed dropped with the return of men from war. The number then gradually rose during the 1920s and 1930s.

After the war, women were expected to give up their employment and go back to their homes, leaving the jobs for the returned servicemen. Some women, however, stayed on and many employers were happy to pay less money for the same work. This caused some tension in society.

## The right to equal pay

Equal pay became an issue at the beginning of the 20th century and continued with an achievement in principle but not in practice. At the same time as equal pay debates emerged, legislation was passed in 1904 banning the employment of married women in the public service. This included teaching, an occupation in which women were well represented. The ban lasted until 1966 except in New South Wales, where it was changed in 1948. Muriel Heagney was a long-time equal pay activist, especially during the 1920s and 1930s. She believed in a single 'rate for the job', regardless of whether a man or a woman was doing the job.



### EQUAL PAY

Date	Claims and rulings
<b>1902</b>	Commonwealth Public Service Act included the principle of equal pay for female telephonists and postmistresses, but in 1904 all married women were barred from the Commonwealth public service
<b>1907</b>	Harvester Judgement – Justice Higgins announced the minimum wage for men of 7 shillings a day, which was based on the wage needed by a man to support a wife and children; single men received it but women working and supporting children did not
<b>1912</b>	Fruitpickers' case – Justice Higgins set the basic wage for women workers: if a woman worked in a 'man's' job then she would receive the male rate of pay; if she worked at a job, such as fruitpicking, in competition with men, she would receive the male rate but if she worked in unskilled 'female' work, she would be paid a female rate
<b>1914</b>	Victorian Lady Teachers' Association applied for equal pay but was refused and told that the work of female teachers was not equal to men's work and that the cost of living was less for women than for men
<b>1916</b>	Clerks Union application for equal pay rejected
<b>1918</b>	Separate wage claims submitted for male and female telephonists for the first time
<b>1919</b>	Australian Arbitration and Conciliation Commission set the basic female wage at 54 per cent of the male wage; however, while the basic male wage was set for all men, even if they were single, all working women were paid as though they were single and without family responsibilities
<b>1920</b>	Female teachers received equal pay with their male colleagues after taking strike action
<b>1923</b>	Muriel Heagney drew up a claim for standard wages and conditions for men and women employed in the Victorian clothing trade
<b>1926</b>	Western Australian State Basic Wage set at £4 5s per week and women at £1 5s 11d per week
<b>1935</b>	Muriel Heagney published <i>Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?</i> , revealing that women were limited to jobs regarded as women's jobs in a small number of industries; the book had a national impact
<b>1937</b>	Council of Action for Equal Pay (CAEP) founded by union and non-union women and men as the first movement for equal pay in Australia. Muriel Heagney became honorary secretary/ treasurer from 1939 onwards until it closed in 1948
<b>1937</b>	The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) presented its first equal pay case. It failed and women's wages remained at 54 per cent of the male rate.

## Muriel Heagney (1885–1974)

Muriel Heagney was a writer, a trade union organiser and a Labor Party activist for more than 50 years. She devoted much of her life to working for equal pay and equal opportunity for women, making a significant contribution to the struggle for equality in the workforce. She believed in the concept of a single ‘rate for the job’ – an occupational rate, regardless of the sex of the worker.

Born in Brisbane into a working-class Labor family, Muriel Heagney trained as a primary school teacher but chose to spend her life working for trade unions. After the First World War, she spent two years in Europe, worked briefly for the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva, and in 1925 represented the Melbourne Trades Hall Council at the first British Commonwealth Labour Conference.

During the Depression she was concerned about the situation of unemployed women so she formed the Unemployed Girls’ Relief Movement, setting up sewing centres where women made clothes for the needy in return for a relief allowance.

In 1935, in response to accusations that women were taking men’s jobs during the Depression, she wrote a book called *Are Women Taking Men’s Jobs?*. It showed how women were restricted in employment to a number of traditional female jobs.

She devoted much of her life to the achievement of equal pay for women, believing it would raise the status of women and increase their opportunities. In 1937, Muriel helped found the Council for Action for Equal Pay. She was elected joint president of the Council, and, in September 1939, became honorary secretary, a position she held until late 1947.

After the war, she wrote a book called *Equal Pay for the Sexes* (1948) and continued working in the Labor Party. In 1955, she became ex-officio member of the party’s central executive and secretary of the Women’s Central Organising Committee. She died in poverty in 1974.



Image reprint courtesy of the Australian History Museum



## THE HOMEMAKER AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The 1920s and 1930s continued to be dominated by the idea of separate spheres for men and women. The message that the natural role for women was motherhood and domesticity was reinforced through advertising in the new communication media of radio, newsreels, silent and talking films as well as glossy women’s magazines. The Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry in Australia (1927–1928) found that there were 1250 cinemas and 110 million theatre admissions in Australia in 1928, an impressive statistic for a nation with a population of only 6.2 million at the time.



## Edith Cowan (1861–1932)

In 1921, Edith Cowan became the first woman to be elected to an Australian parliament and only the second woman in the British Empire to hold such a position. As a Nationalist (Liberal) Party candidate, she won the seat of Perth in Western Australia. The following editorial appeared in *The Age* newspaper:

A Parliament composed wholly or mainly of women politicians is not a prospect to be regarded with enthusiasm. Were political office to become the ambition of the fair sex, and were standing for Parliament to become the latest craze of fashion, there would be many dreary and neglected homes throughout the country sacrificed on the altar of political ambition.

*The Age*, 15 March 1921, p. 6



Fairfax Syndication/Fairfax Photo Archive

In her maiden speech to parliament, Cowan argued for child and maternity endowment and stressed the importance of male and female perspectives in parliament. She criticised the Minister for Railways for introducing a one-shilling levy on prams travelling on trains and trams. Although he agreed to withdraw the levy, she was bold enough to suggest he should have to ‘... parade the streets of Perth for the whole of one afternoon with a heavy infant on one arm and a bag of groceries on the other’.<sup>2</sup>

Her second Private Member’s Bill, which became the *Women’s Legal Status Act 1923*, prevented anyone from being excluded by ‘sex or marriage’ from holding any public function, civil or judicial office or from practising law or any other profession. However, the West Australian Premier, Sir James Mitchell, argued to retain the marriage bar on the grounds that that there was a need to preserve ‘the good old custom of the men providing for the women’.<sup>3</sup>

Cowan believed in motherhood endowment, defended the idea of a union for housewives, and advocated sex education in schools.

Cowan was also one of the founders of the Women’s Service Guilds in 1907. Working to raise the status of women and improve the welfare of children, she believed that if women were educated, they would have access to public positions. Guild activities included fundraising, public meetings and lobbying for the establishment of the Western Australian King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women, which was built in 1916.

The inter-war years were a time of economic growth, during which new technologies, especially labour-saving devices in the home and better transport, were introduced. Cars became more affordable. Some houses, though a minority, had running hot and cold water, and gas or electric stoves.

**TABLE 2.3** Changes in domestic appliances

Old technology	New technology
Wood-fired or gas stove	Electric stove
Heavy flat iron heated on the stove	Electric iron
Ice chest, called a 'Coolgardie safe'	Refrigerator
Kerosene lamps and candles	Electric light
Copper stove and manual wringer, or hand-scrubbing	Washing machine
Rainwater tank and water heated in tins or coppers for the weekly bath	Hot and cold water installed in house
Rugs and carpets beaten by hand	Vacuum cleaner
Toast made on the grill or on a fork held close to the flame of a wood-fired oven	Electric toaster

The new appliances for homes were introduced to the cities first and then slowly introduced into country areas. Only wealthy or better-off families could afford these appliances. Wood-fired stoves and coppers were still in use into the 1950s.

The new appliances were sold with the promise that they would save time, and remove the drudgery of scrubbing clothes, beating rugs and carpets, and chopping wood for the stove. However, they also imposed new standards for women in housekeeping and glamour.

## Women as household managers and homemakers

By targeting women, advertisers inflated the importance of the role of mother and wife in the household, simultaneously increasing the pressure on women to achieve the new standards. Advertisements promoted the role of the homemaker, highlighting the need for women to understand the science of household management and apply it to homemaking and child-rearing. Part of an education in domestic science and home economics was to obtain information about the new techniques and appliances that were the focal point of advertisements. The message was also conveyed through radio, cinema and gramophone records.



**SOURCE 2.10** Married Women's Cooking class at Emily Macpherson College of Domestic Economy, in Melbourne, c. 1920

Slate Library of Victoria, b51646

## Radio

In 1923, the first Australian radio station – 2SB – began transmitting, and by 1925, 60 000 people had subscribed to the radio. By 1929, more than 300 000 people had a radio licence.

Among the early radio programs were those that taught housewives how to manage household tasks and provided information on motherhood. Domestic responsibilities that were previously thought to be natural now became an area in which women needed instruction.

There were experts to advise the new mother. Radio programs such as *Women's Session* and *Banish Drudgery* were run in the mornings and contained ideas on health, mothercraft, cooking and cleaning.

### eugenics

The science of, and a social movement for, improving the race by deciding which people could become parents, thereby supposedly controlling hereditary traits and defects through selective human mating. Eugenics lost its credibility when it became associated with Nazi programs killing people deemed to be 'defective'.

The strength of the domestic economy movement was reflected in the opening of the refurbished Emily Macpherson College of Domestic Economy in 1927 in Melbourne. It became the main centre for the teaching of domestic science in Victoria. The college's prospectus presented its aim to develop and strengthen the 'higher scientific aspect of household economics'.

## FALLING BIRTH RATES

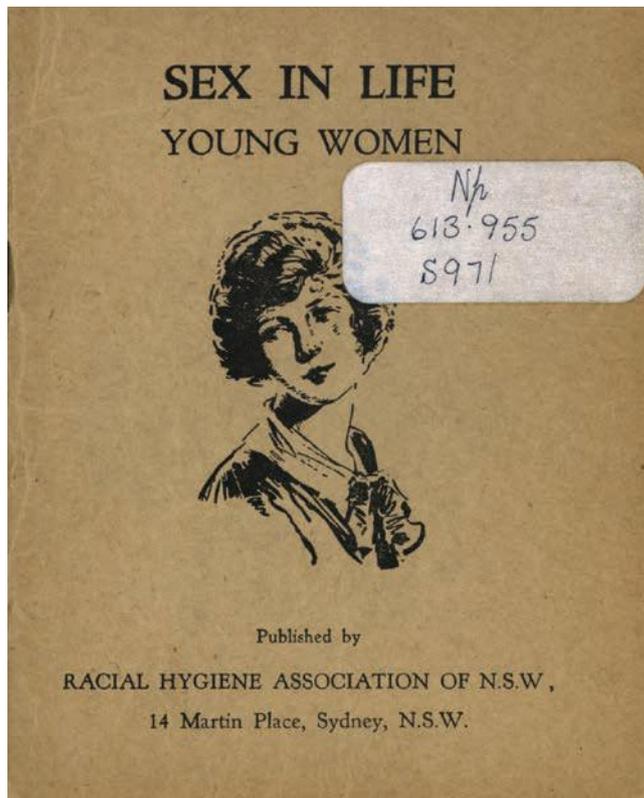
During the inter-war years there was public concern about Australia's falling birthrate. In the 1920s, the birthrate was about half that of the 1880s. The declining birthrate occurred at a time when there was a high maternal mortality rate, concern about birth control and venereal disease. The declining birthrate was sometimes attributed to venereal disease and was at an all-time low in 1934 during the Depression. Men left for the bush in search of jobs and many

couples postponed their marriages. Contraceptives of all types were used, and women sometimes used abortions for birth control. There were many suggestions about how to reverse this downward trend.

Feminist activist Jessie Street suggested that it should be compulsory for couples to exchange health certificates before they married. The Racial Hygiene Association (RHA) of New South Wales suggested that couples should have a physical examination before they married. The RHA also called for the teaching of sex education, the eradication and prevention of diseases, and education of the public about **eugenics**. In the 1930s, it published and distributed booklets entitled *What Parents Should Tell Their Children* and *Sex in Life – Young Women*.

### High maternal mortality rate

In 1925, the Royal Commission on health stated that the high maternal mortality rate posed 'a grave national danger'. At the 1923 Imperial Economic Conference, Prime Minister Stanley Melbourne Bruce said that 'Australia's aim above everything else is to populate her country and advance from her position of a very small people occupying a vast territory'.



**SOURCE 2.11** Booklet produced by the Racial Hygiene Association of New South Wales

According to the historian Marilyn Lake, the high maternal mortality rate became, at this time, a major feminist issue in Australia. Feminists argued for more education on the issue. Millicent Preston Stanley campaigned successfully for a Chair of Obstetrics at the University of Sydney, and for an increase in maternity hospitals and post-natal clinics. Women's organisations – including the Feminist Club, the Women's Union of Service, the Housewives Association, the Country Women's Association and the Racial Hygiene Association – formed a standing committee for the Reduction of Infant and Maternal Mortality. They gathered more than 4000 signatures for a petition requesting a royal commission to investigate causes contributing to maternal mortality.

Many doctors attributed the high mortality rate among mothers to large families, exhaustion and the dangers associated with childbirth. They argued that birth control would give mothers a chance to recover after giving birth, before conceiving again. However, the government resisted attempts to promote birth control among married women because of the effect it would have on the low birthrate.

### Birth control

In an attempt to raise the low birthrate, the government decided to ban the advertising and importing of contraceptives. This was a departure from previous policy in the 19th and early 20th centuries that allowed information to be freely available. However, the manufacture of contraceptives was not banned and they were widely used. This lasted for the period between 1923 and 1942.

In 1933, the Racial Hygiene Association established a birth control clinic in Sydney, providing women with a variety of devices. It saw only married women, and opposed abortion, which was a traditional method of birth control. The Association was criticised by the Catholic Church and the Protestant Council of Churches.

The Institute of Family Relations was established in 1931 in Sydney, with approval from the government. Its goal was to eradicate promiscuity and venereal disease. It provided contraceptives and classes for parents and teachers, and even for girls and boys.

## THE RIGHT TO ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

Economic independence for women was the central issue through the inter-war years, crossing class and party lines.

“ As long as each woman is economically dependent on some one man he stands as the gateway between her and the rest of the world. It is through him that her necessities, her pleasures, her opinions must come ... [T]he very essence of dependency is irksome and degenerating. ”

Gwendolyn Jones, *The Dawn*, Conference paper, 1927

“ The economic dependence of woman on man is sex slavery ... Women will be a sex slave ... until such time as there is Childhood and Motherhood Endowment. ”

Nelle Rickie, 'Labor Call' in *Getting equal, the history of Australian feminism*, Marilyn Lake, Allen & Unwin, 1999, p. 93

The fear of falling birthrates and subsequent population decline in a vast, unpopulated country, so close to increasing populations in Asia, provided women with an argument for improved maternal rights. Their campaign for mothers to be paid highlighted the cost and danger associated with childbirth and child-rearing, which they equated with the danger of a man being injured in war, and having to be cared for. Feminists argued that mothers were performing essential national work for which they had a right to an income, ensuring the economic independence that many had experienced prior to marriage.

As early as 1919, Lilian Locke-Burns had lobbied for a state income for mothers. She argued that if a woman chose motherhood then she should be as economically free as a woman who chose a career.

## Motherhood and child endowment

The women's movement fought for women's right to economic independence. Through organisations such as the National Council of Women (NCW), the Australian Federation of Women Voters (AFWV) and the United Associations of Women, women advocated for a motherhood endowment, child endowment and equal pay. Prominent individuals in the campaign included Bessie Rischbieth and Jessie Street, who were not aligned with any political party; Muriel Heagney and Nellie Rickie from the Labor Party; and Edith Cowan and Irene Longman from the Nationalist Party.

“ The most important function performed by any person for or on behalf of the State is that performed by the working mothers of the community in bringing into the world and rearing children. ”

Millicent Preston Stanley MP, speech in parliament, 1927

In 1927, the government appointed a royal commission to look into the feasibility of introducing a federal scheme of motherhood, or child, endowment. Future prime minister John Curtin was appointed one of the royal commissioners, as was Mildred Muscio, president of the New South Wales branch of the National Council of Women.

Muriel Heagney, a Labor activist who fought for equal pay for women all her life, appeared before the commission. Her evidence was important because it broke the link between a mother's payment and men's wages. She argued for greater independence of women and not just for greater support of children. Other feminists, including Jessie Street, pointed out the unfairness of the system that gave single men the same family wage as married men.

The three sources below present clear ways to provide women with economic independence.

“ I think that the family income should be based on individual needs ultimately, that the mother would ultimately draw an income for her services as home-maker and not as wife. ”

Muriel Heagney quoted in Marilyn Lake, *Getting equal: the history of Australian feminism*, Allen & Unwin, 1999, p. 104

“

United Associations of Women

Since 1912 ... the male basic wage has been calculated to provide for a man, wife and a child or children, and so we can say that each man's earnings represent:

(a) his wage (b) the amount paid to him to keep a wife, i.e. marriage endowment (c) the amount paid to him to keep a child, i.e. child endowment. So since 1912 we have actually had marriage and child endowment in operation in Australia.

It would be quite a simple matter from the point of view of legislation to make wives legally entitled to that portion of the basic wage which is allotted for their keep.

”

Kay Daniels and Mary Murnane, *Australia's women, a documentary history*, University of Queensland Press, 1989, p. 119

EW Baker, General Secretary of the Western Australian branch of the Labor Party, told the royal commission that if there was a suggestion that married women would receive a portion of their husband's salary, the single men of Australia would not stand for it.

Irene Longman, president of the National Council of Women in Queensland, surprised the commissioners by arguing that both working women and housewives had a right to economic independence. The exchange between Longman and the commissioners follows.

“

Your theory is that the State should pay the wife for the services rendered to the State?

Yes, we say that her services to the state are as great as those of the man; and, therefore, that those services should be paid for as an independent economic unit.

Women could live apart from their husbands? That is an alteration of existing conditions?

Yes, absolutely. It is revolutionary, and that is what we wish.

”

Australian Royal Commission on Child Endowment or Family Allowances, Minutes of Evidence, Parliamentary Paper, 1929, vol II, pp. 7–8

Two commissioners, John Curtin and Mildred Muscio, wrote a Minority Report recommending a system of child endowment whilst retaining the family wage. They did not recommend a motherhood endowment, rejecting the idea of woman as an individual entity separate from the husband.

The Majority Report, from the remaining commissioners, would not agree to any form of endowment.

## *Internationalism*

At the end of the 'war to end wars', 8.5 million soldiers had died, 21 million were wounded and there had been 10 million civilian deaths. Cities were ruined, agricultural land bombed and destroyed, and political and economic systems broken. Hunger, famine, dislocation, homelessness and unemployment were the major legacies of the First World War.

People believed that a new way had to be found to prevent such a war happening again and hoped that a League of Nations could provide this. This first international organisation dedicated to peace was founded in 10 January 1920 as a direct result of the war. Its main aim was to stop wars by providing a mechanism for solving disputes between nations. The League's headquarters were in Geneva, Switzerland.

Although the prime minister of Australia, WM Hughes, was totally opposed to the idea of a League of Nations, he nevertheless demanded that Australia be given the status of an independent

nation. Under pressure from women's organisations, Hughes accepted the principle that women could be delegates to the League of Nations.

The League of Nations received considerable support from women because of its aim to achieve peace between nations and because the organisation itself was based upon the equality of men and women (Article 7) and for its concern for women and children (Article 23 B) specifically mentioning the trafficking of women and children. In doing so the League recognised that the status of women was an international concern.

Women's organisations and feminists had long been collaborating internationally. Now the opportunity arose to work with a world organisation as the British writer, feminist and pacifist Vera Brittain argued.

“ The time has now come to move from the national to the international and to endeavour to obtain by international agreement what national legislation has failed to accomplish. ”

Vera Brittain quoted in Carol Miller, 'Geneva—The key to equality: inter-war feminists and the League of Nations' in *Women's History Review*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1994

## Australian Federation of Women Voters

The Australian Federation of Women's Societies for Equal Citizenship was formed in 1921 with Bessie Rischbieth as its president. She was instrumental in changing the name in 1924 to the Australian Federation of Women Voters (AFWV) and remained president until 1942. The AFWV was affiliated with state leagues (New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia) as well as international bodies including the British Commonwealth League and the International Alliance of Women. The AFWV's aims were:

- + equality of opportunity status, responsibility and reward between men and women
- + furthering the interests of women, children and the family
- + equal citizenship between women and men
- + election of women to federal and state parliaments.

The AFWV's paper was *The Dawn*. Due to the efforts of the AFWV, each Australian delegation to the League of Nations General Assembly included a woman member.

The AFWV's achievements include:

- + appointment of the first Australian woman delegate to the League of Nations in 1922
- + appointment of its affiliated groups to the League of Nations Assembly in 1928, 1935 and 1936
- + preparation of a *Memorandum on the Status of Women* that revealed that sex discrimination was endemic in Australian law.

Margaret Dale was the first woman appointed as a member of the Australian delegation in 1922. The Australian Federation of Women's Societies (AFWS) had nominated her for the position.

Margaret Dale's first task was to become a member of a committee that dealt with questions of social purity, including the white slave traffic. This was an important issue for feminists. The League of Nations raised the status of women by focusing on the suppression of slavery and the trafficking in women and children, including it in an article in its Covenant.

## AUSTRALIAN WOMEN AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

During the inter-war years, members of women's organisations and individuals such as Mary Bennett campaigned against the removal of Aboriginal children from their mothers, and for the reform of the administration of the government's Aboriginal policy.

In 1926, the Australian Government ratified the Covenant of the League of Nations and its Anti-Slavery Convention. Mary Bennett and Bessie Rischbieth used this convention to challenge Australian Government policies on the removal of Indigenous children from their families and the lack of rights for Indigenous women. They campaigned both in Australia and overseas.

Members of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, including Bessie Rischbieth, Edith Jones, Constance Cooke and Mary Bennett, used the international platform to publicise the plight of Aboriginal women. Mary Bennett published *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being* in 1930, in which she denounced the removal of Aboriginal women and girls as contravening the Anti-Slavery Convention of the League of Nations, describing it as being 'very like slavery'. The Australian women's campaign received publicity and was headline news, and Australian state and federal governments were motivated to act.

“ If a woman, whether black or white, has not the control of her body, she is a slave. ”  
Mary Bennett

### 1934 Royal Commission

One important outcome was the 1934 Royal Commission (Moseley) into Aboriginal Status and Conditions in Western Australia. At this commission, Mary Bennett, Bessie Rischbeith and Ada Bromham presented evidence of the need for reform of Aboriginal policy. These women strongly opposed policies of assimilation such as child removal and institutionalisation, particularly for girls of mixed descent.

Mary Bennett criticised the Western Australian Government for its policy of Aboriginal child removal, saying:

“ No department in the world can take the place of a child's mother and the Honorable Minister does not offer any valid justification for the official smashing of native family and community life. ”

In her arguments against the removal of Aboriginal children, Bessie Rischbieth used the state's duty to support motherhood to argue that the system needed to be improved and Aboriginal women given the economic means to care adequately for their children.

These women activists envisaged a future society in which Aboriginal mothers would have the right to family life, to care for their own children and to paid employment.

## *Conclusion*

There were no formal gains for women's rights during the war or in the inter-war years. Politically, in New South Wales and Western Australia, women did gain the right to a career in law and to sit for parliament through the Women's Legal Status Act.

The war did not advance women; instead, it entrenched them in their traditional roles. Women were not admitted into most men's occupations, nor allowed to work in industries supporting the war. However, some women obtained a new type of work – such as typists, bookkeepers, and clerks in banks and in insurance.

During the 1920s and 1930s, women continued to strive for a maternalist welfare state and maternal citizenship, as they had before the war. They used political action to lobby for the broadening of mothers' rights. Campaigns were organised to bring to the nation's attention the importance of motherhood, in the hope that mothers would gain motherhood and child endowments and, thus, economic independence. Some argued in their state parliaments that these rights should be accorded to women regardless of colour.

During this period the women's movement focused more strongly on increasing the number of women in the workforce. The right to equal pay became an important political demand. Only slowly, through the equal wage debates in the 1930s and the work of Muriel Heagney, did the connection between women and motherhood in arguments about rights begin to weaken.

Australian feminists showed themselves in this period to be unafraid to 'go international' with their views and their political demands, taking advantage of the new international forum of the League of Nations to argue their case.



## Chapter summary

- + The First World War entrenched the idea of separate spheres where women were restricted to traditional female jobs and not allowed to work in auxiliary jobs in the military forces.
- + War split the women's movement, especially the conscription campaigns in which the idea of motherhood was used by both sides of the debate to appeal to the public and argue a case for or against conscription.
- + In the 1920s, new technologies enabled labour-saving devices for the home to be developed, but the effect was to reinforce the separate spheres.
- + Campaigns for the economic independence of women through child endowment, motherhood endowment and equal pay for women in the workforce were unsuccessful.
- + Concern arose about the decline in the birthrate, about birth control, the high maternal mortality rate and venereal disease.
- + The existing internationalism of the women's movement was strengthened through its access to an international forum, the League of Nations.

### Weblinks

Weblinks relevant to this chapter can be found at <http://nmh.nelsonnet.com.au/women>.

### Endnotes

- 1 AA Alexander, *A Wealth of Women*, Duffy and Snellgrove, 2001, p. 99
- 2 Edith Cowan: A Woman for Our Time, a speech by Dr Elizabeth Constable, MLA, 7 November 2011, <http://www.ecu.edu.au/about-ecu/vice-chancellor/distinguished-orator>, accessed 18 July 2014
- 3 Edith Cowan: A Woman for Our Time, a speech by Dr Elizabeth Constable, MLA, 7 November 2011, <http://www.ecu.edu.au/about-ecu/vice-chancellor/distinguished-orator>, accessed 18 July 2014



## Chapter review activities

- 1 During the First World war, what work opportunities existed for Australian women to contribute to the war effort? Provide evidence. Why do you think Australian women were not able to take on non-traditional jobs as women in Great Britain and the United States were?
- 2 Evaluate the effect of the First World War on the women's movement. In your answer, consider the different attitudes women had to the war and to conscription, as well as the consequences of these differences for the women's movement.
- 3 Why were women the preferred employees in the 1920s and 1930s?

- 4 Soon after Edith Cowan was elected to parliament in 1921 the cartoon on the opposite page appeared in *The Bulletin*. Look at it carefully and answer the following questions.
  - a What work is Edith Cowan associated with in this cartoon?
  - b What is the message of the cartoon?
  - c What does the cartoon suggest about the role of women in parliament?
  - d Compare this cartoon about Edith Cowan with information you will find about her life in this book or on the internet. Draw up a list of her achievements in parliament and comment on their significance.
  - e Would this sort of cartoon about a female politician be published today? Give reasons for your answer.
- 5 Why was the League of Nations set up after the First World War? Why did the women's movement support the League of Nations? What rights did it give them? Give an example of the way in which Australian women's movements used the League to the benefit of women?
- 6 New technology was introduced in the 1930s with claims that it would save women time on housework and cooking. What new expectations were placed on women at the same time that increased their workload?
- 7 Economic independence for women was something that the women's movement campaigned for over the 20th century. What were some of the suggested ways to give women economic independence? Why was this so important to women?
- 8 Research the work of Muriel Heagney and prepare a multimedia presentation covering her efforts for equal pay for women in the 1920s and 1930s. How and why did she challenge the existing views about women's pay?
- 9 Equal pay was one of the big issues of the 1930s. Create a poster advocating equal pay for women.
- 10 What were the government's motives for banning advertisements about birth control in the 1920s and 1930s? What effect did birth control have on women's lives in the 1920s and 1930s?

Westralia having secured a lady M.L.A., we look forward to interesting developments



Possibly the house-wifely instincts of the female member will survive.



It is high time a woman's refining influence made itself felt in this wretched place!



Bless my soul whatever did you do before securing a decent house-keeper!



"I do love to see the place looking tidy"

"Never did I see a lot of poor men so shamefully neglected."



"It's a pity we have such a bone-idle lot of waiters in this chamber. Can't you do as I do - talk and work?"

"There now, don't let me have to speak to you again, I will not have your litter on my clean floors"



THE NEW "HOUSE"-WIFE.

National Library of Australia. Reproduced with permission by Max Leason, the estate of Percy Leason.

SOURCE 2.12 'The New "House" Wife', The Bulletin, 31 March 1921



This is "THE HOUSE" that man built,  
 And these are a few of the Ladies of Fame  
 Anxious to write M. P. after their name,  
 With each sex on a par, why put up the bar?  
 For M. P. means either Mama or Papa,  
 Quoth the sweet Suffragette we're entitled to get  
 Into "THE HOUSE" that man built.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *The rising tide: How British women fought for the right to vote*

British women had few political and legal rights during the first half of the 19th century. They could not vote or stand for election in the national parliament. Neither did they have equal rights with men in marriage and property ownership. Gradually, over the course of the 19th century, women began to question their role and place in society and call for reform of the laws.

Social changes brought about by the industrial revolution, increasing democratisation of British society and improved access to education created the preconditions for the women's movement that commenced with the establishment of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) in 1897.

It took nearly a century from the first legislation that specifically excluded women from voting in 1832 to the granting of female suffrage in 1928 – a long and hard-fought campaign to change the attitudes towards gender that were taken for granted by the majority of the population during the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century.

◀ A pro-suffragette postcard produced c. 1912 in response to similar anti-suffrage postcards of the the same period.

#### INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- + What did suffragists want to change in the existing social and political order?
- + In what ways and through which organisations did the suffragists challenge the existing political structure?

## Women in 19th-century Britain

“ Man for the field and woman for the hearth  
 Man for the sword and for the needle she  
 Man with the head and woman with the heart  
 Man to command and woman to obey  
 All else confusion. ”

‘The Princess’, Alfred, Lord Tennyson

British women had few political and legal rights during the first half of the 19th century. They could not vote or stand for election in the national parliament. Nor did women have equal rights with men in marriage and property ownership, legal ‘ownership’ of their bodies or equal access to education and the professions. Gradually, over the course of the 19th century, women began to question their role and place in society and call for reform. They did this through the suffrage societies they established at both the local and national level.



### FROM REFORM TO SUFFRAGETTES

- 1832 Great Reform Act
- 1867 Reform Act – John Stuart Mill’s proposed amendment to grant women householders the vote on the same terms as men defeated
- 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act
- 1882 Married Women’s Property Act
- 1894 Local Government Act – married women allowed the franchise at this level, joining their single and widowed sisters
- 1897 National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) founded
- 1903 Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) established by Emmeline Pankhurst, Christabel Pankhurst and members of the Independent Labour Party
- 1907 Mud March from Hyde Park Corner to Exeter Hall took place, with 3000 women from 40 suffrage organisations participating
- 1907 Artists Suffrage League founded
- 1908 Women’s National Anti-Suffrage League formed
- 1908 NUWSS March – seven processions marched through London to Hyde Park
- 1908 Women’s Sunday on 21 June – 30 000 marched through London calling on government for a women’s suffrage Bill; organised by the WSPU

### GRADUAL CHANGE

A long period of political agitation for electoral reform in the early 19th century led to the *Great Reform Act 1832*. But still most people did not have the right to vote and had no say in how the country was run. The new Act gave the vote to about 18 per cent of men in England and Wales based on the value of property they owned or the amount of tax they paid. It also

enfranchised urban populations but explicitly denied women the right to vote by using, for the first time, the term ‘male’ in the Act when referring to voters. This significant obstacle for women wanting to vote had not existed before. This excluded all women from participation in the political process as voters.

As the 19th century progressed, more men became enfranchised, thus gaining the right to vote and stand for parliament. Women increasingly questioned their exclusion and began to demand equal voting rights with men. These demands led to discussions from 1860 onwards about the ‘Woman Question’ and to the foundation of a number of local organisations calling for women’s political rights. The foundation of these groups provided the basis of the women’s movement.

**TABLE 3.1** Political and legal reforms in Great Britain that affected women’s position during the 19th century

Date	The Act	Changes
1832	Great Reform Act	Gave the vote to 18 per cent of the men in England. Specifically excluded women from voting for the first time.
1857	Matrimonial Causes Act	Divorce allowed in civil courts for the first time but men could obtain a divorce simply on the grounds of adultery. A woman had to prove her husband’s adultery as well as his cruelty, desertion, incest or bigamy.
1870	Married Women’s Property Act	Married women allowed to keep their earnings. Everything else belonged to the husband, whether she acquired it before or after the marriage.
1878	Matrimonial Causes Act	Married women allowed a legal separation on the grounds of assault and abuse.
1882	Married Women’s Property Act	Women allowed to maintain ownership of any property acquired before they were married.
1883	The Infants Custody Act	For the first time, women granted the right to custody of children up to 16 years of age.
1893	Married Women’s Property Act	Women had the right to keep any property they acquired during a marriage, such as an inheritance.
1894	Local Government Act	All women granted the right to vote and stand for election to parish councils, district councils and school boards, and as Poor Law Guardians.

Although women continued to be denied equal voting rights with men, there were some significant legal and political changes during the second half of the 19th century. From 1894, all women, for example, were granted the right to vote in local government elections. Other aspects of the law also changed. Married women, but not single women, gained more rights to property and earnings. Changes to marriage and divorce laws also meant that women gained child custody rights. Education was another area of change in late 19th-century Britain. In 1869, a government report established that there were only 13 secondary schools for girls in the whole of England. Two government Acts introduced school for all children between the ages of 5 and 13. By 1891, there were 150 000 women teachers, but women, even in 1900, were not permitted to study at university. Women of the working classes were employed as domestic servants or in factories and cotton mills. This was usually at rates of pay far lower than for men. Women’s

employment in professions, however, was very limited. In 1881, there were only 25 registered female medical doctors. By 1901, this had increased to 212 female doctors, compared with 22 000 males. Women were not able to practise as solicitors or barristers.

**TABLE 3.2** Political and legal rights denied to women in 1900

Category of rights	
Political	No voting rights in national elections
Divorce	Divorce grounds for women different to men's
Educational	University entrance denied to women
Economic	No equal pay
Economic	Limited range of jobs open to women

## *Women's suffrage movements in Britain*

The gradual, but often limited, changes to women's political, legal and social status during the 19th century meant that many British women began to campaign for reform. The first female suffrage societies were set up in the second half of the 19th century and increased in number during the first decade of the 20th century. They were organised at both local and national levels across the country. The women in these societies were from different class backgrounds;

they had different ideas and strategies, but they were united in the belief that women should have the right to vote and be able to participate in the political life of the nation.

The three main suffrage societies in **Edwardian** Britain were the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), the militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the Women's Freedom League (WFL), with branches over the whole country.

There were also many much smaller local suffrage societies throughout England, Scotland and Ireland, often emerging out of trade unions or linked with an occupational group. One example of these is the suffrage society set up in 1903 by Eva Gore Booth and Esther Roper, called the Lancashire and Cheshire Textile and Other Workers Representation Committee.

### **NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES (NUWSS)**

In 1897, some 16 of the suffrage societies that had sprung up in the latter part of the 19th century joined to become the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). This became the largest and one of the most influential of the suffrage societies, led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett between 1897 and 1919. Membership rose to more than 100 000 members in more than 400 branches in 1914. It was not affiliated with any political party. Millicent Fawcett believed strongly in peaceful protest. Fearing that any violence would harm their campaign, she wanted to show that women were rational creatures. The NUWSS set up local branches throughout the country to achieve a national constituency. Men were welcome to join the organisation. Its newspaper was the *Common Cause*. The NUWSS did not advocate for all women to get the vote, rather for the right to vote for women on the same conditions as men. This meant that suffrage came with a property qualification. Women would have to own property to vote as men did.

#### **Edwardian**

Related to the period of reign of King Edward VII, which was from 1901 to 1910

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## Early strategies

The early strategies of the NUWSS were to hold public meetings and discussions, petition parliament and create an enlightened public through education. Its aim was to persuade sympathetic Members of Parliament to put forward Private Members' Bills for female suffrage.

### Private Members' Bill

All Members of Parliament had the right to present a Bill of their own to parliament. When a women's suffrage Bill came before parliament in 1905 anti-suffrage members of the parliament deliberately continued the debate about the previous Bill until there was little time left in the session. Thus the Bill was introduced but there was no time for discussion or debate and the Bill lapsed. On another occasion, the government persuaded members to vote against a female suffrage Bill, promising that they would introduce their own Government Suffrage Bill in the future.

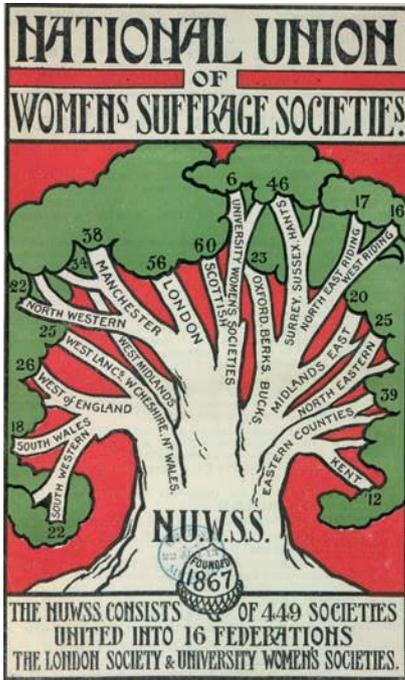
The first open-air march and large-scale public demonstration of these non-militant suffragists took place in February 1907. It became known as the Mud March due to the wild weather on the day, resulting in mud and slush on the ground. More than 3000 women from at least 40 organisations marched from Hyde Park to Exeter Corner, led by Millicent Fawcett. The excitement of the day is captured in the diary of a young suffragist – Kate Frye.

“ Miss Gore Booth said it was coming and we were fearfully excited and I was so anxious not to miss our lot. The crowds to see us – the man in the street – the men in the Clubs, the people standing outside the Carlton – interested – surprised for the most part – not much joking at our expense and no roughness. The policemen were splendid and all the traffic was stopped our way. We were an imposing spectacle all with badges – each section under its own banners. Ours got broken, poor thing, ... I felt like a martyr of old and walked proudly along. I would not jest with the crowd – though we had some jokes with ourselves. It did seem an extraordinary walk and it took some time as we went very slowly occasionally when we got congested – but we went in one long unbroken procession. There were 3,000 about I believe. The mud was awful. Agnes [her sister] and I wore galoshes so our feet were alright but we got dreadfully splashed. It was quite a business turning into the Exeter Hall. A band was playing merrily all the time.

Diary of Kate Frye, 9 February 1907, Extract from Elizabeth Crawford (ed.) *Campaigning for the Vote: Kate Parry Frye's Suffrage Diary*, Francis Boutle Publishers, 2013

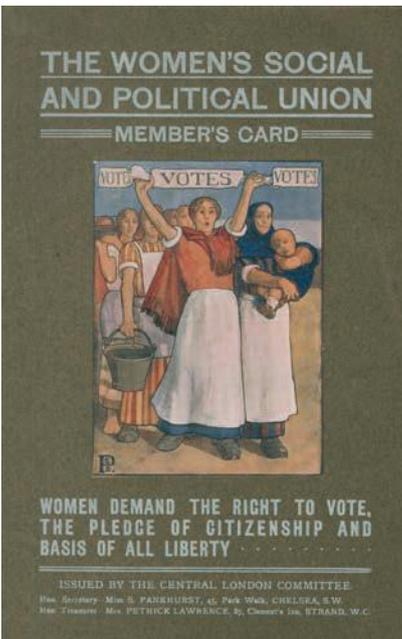
This was the first of many marches, pageants and demonstrations at which the suffragists were able to display their banners and costumes, which were aimed at getting public attention and creating a memorable experience.

The NUWSS membership increased steadily, reaching 50 000 by 1913.



British Library Board 12/05/2014, 066946

**SOURCE 3.1** A 1913 leaflet that uses the metaphor of the tree with a giant trunk dividing into many different branches, indicating that the NUWSS was a national body with 449 member societies.



International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, socialhistory.org

**SOURCE 3.2** This membership card of the WSPU features working-class women and was used only for a short period. After 1906, the WSPU was less closely associated with the working class labour movement and recruited more middle- and upper-class women to its campaign.

The members of the NUWSS became known as the ‘constitutionalists’ – a term coined by *The Daily Mail* in 1906 to differentiate between them and the militant groups who would be known as suffragettes. The term ‘suffragette’ was intended to be a derogatory reference to women who wanted female suffrage, and became the term used to refer to the militants, especially those belonging to the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). In the early years of the militants’ activities, the NUWSS offered support and on occasions joined in the militants’ celebrations. But as the activities of the WSPU became violent and involved the destruction of private property, the NUWSS distanced themselves from the militant groups and eventually broke with them completely.

## WOMEN’S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNION (WSPU)

By 1903, there was dissatisfaction among some women in the NUWSS because little progress was being made towards the achievement of female suffrage with the peaceful methods used by the NUWSS. These women were also disappointed by the lack of strong support from the Independent Labour Party (ILP).

Some NUWSS members wanted to build a more militant organisation. A breakaway group led by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters – Christabel, Sylvia and Adela Pankhurst – formed the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in Manchester, their home town. Its motto was ‘Deeds Not Words’ and its newspaper was *Votes For Women*. This was renamed the *Suffragette* in 1912 and was replaced by a new journal entitled *Britannia* in 1915.

Apart from an initial brief period, the WSPU was not linked to any political party, although both Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst remained members of the Independent Labour Party until 1907. Both the WSPU and the NUWSS wanted female suffrage on the same terms as men.

### Towards militancy

The WSPU only became significant from 1905 when it adopted militant tactics, the first suffrage organisation to use this method of drawing attention to its cause. Frustrated by the lack of media attention and progress, Emmeline Pankhurst decided to shift the focus from gaining the support of individual Members of Parliament (MPs) to gaining public attention through public meetings and turning women’s voting rights into an election issue.

The suffragettes’ new militant approach and dramatic spectacles were initially effective and attracted new recruits to the WSPU. But conflict arose over the autocratic leadership of the Pankhursts and Frederick and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, splitting the organisation and causing its numbers to decline.

## Conflict from within

The first split came after the WSPU shifted its headquarters to London in 1906. It had moved from Manchester to the capital, London, to be closer to the parliament. In London, its demonstrations would be more visible to a bigger public.

Another reason for the move was that after the 1906 General Election, there had been a change of government from the Conservatives to the Liberals. The suffragettes thought the new Liberal Government might support their cause, given its liberal philosophy. At this time, there was considerable support among MPs for some form of female suffrage. Many candidates had promised to support female suffrage, and the socialist Keir Hardie (from the Labour Party) had published a book in September 1906 called *The Citizenship of Women*, calling for women's suffrage. However, the government did not see women's suffrage as urgent and chose to focus on other issues.

There were disagreements in the WSPU over strategies, and these came to a head in 1907 with the announcement that the society would be organised along military lines with Emmeline Pankhurst as permanent Commander in Chief.

From 1907 to 1914, there were several splits in the membership, with women leaving to join other suffrage societies or establish new ones such as the Women's Freedom League.

## WOMEN'S FREEDOM LEAGUE (WFL)

In 1907, members of the WSPU were unhappy about the increasingly violent tactics used by the Pankhursts as well as their autocratic style of leadership. They objected to decisions being made by only a few without any consultation with members. The Pankhursts believed that the use of militant tactics required an autocratic leadership. Some members also disliked the influence of wealthy women in the Union. As a result, Charlotte Despard, Teresa Billington-Grieg and Edith How-Martyn left to form the Women's Freedom League (WFL) with about 70 other WSPU members. The WFL published a newspaper called *The Vote*.

Although its members saw themselves as militant, the WFL was against violence and strongly supported a suffrage society organised along democratic lines. It held annual conferences to decide policy and elect a national executive. Within a year of splitting from the WSPU, the League could claim 53 branches in Scotland and England, but remained a small organisation with membership at just over 4000 in 1914.

## Tactics used by the Women's Freedom League

Although the League opposed violence, its militant actions included breaking the law. During 1908, a number of militant actions took place:

- + Muriel Matters, Violet Tillard and Helen Fox chained themselves to a grille of the Ladies' Gallery in the parliament in 1908.
- + Members protested in and outside the House of Commons.
- + The League took part in the Hyde Park procession of June 1908.
- + The League attempted to present petitions to King Edward VII in 1908.
- + WFL members refused to pay their taxes and one member (Lilian Hicks) twice had her possessions seized for not paying her taxes.
- + WFL members refused to complete the 1911 census forms.

## Foundational documents of the NUWSS and WFL

The NUWSS documents below argue the case for female suffrage. They were written at different times but represent the views of the organisation. The first leaflet is written in a more formal and abstract style and focuses on principles.

The second leaflet is concerned with making it clear that the societies belonging to the NUWSS do not approve of violent tactics – a reference to the violent actions of the Women’s Social and Political Union. This document specifically states that the NUWSS is not arguing for women to have the right to stand for parliament.

The third document is the constitution of the Women’s Freedom League, which sets out its aims and methods. This document goes beyond asking for the vote.

The fourth document is a personal statement made by suffragette Maud Arncliffe Sennett, giving the reasons why she should have the right to vote.

## Female suffrage documents

### FOURTEEN REASONS FOR SUPPORTING WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE

1.—Because it is the foundation of all political liberty that those who obey the Law should be able to have a voice in choosing those who make the Law.

2.—Because Parliament should be the reflection of the wishes of the people.

3.—Because Parliament cannot fully reflect the wishes of the people, when the wishes of women are without any direct representation.

4.—Because most Laws affect women as much as men, and some Laws affect women especially.

5.—Because the Laws which affect women especially are now passed without consulting those persons whom they are intended to benefit.

6.—Because Laws affecting children should be regarded from the woman’s point of view as well as the man’s.

7.—Because every session questions affecting the home come up for consideration in Parliament.

8.—Because women have experience which should be helpfully brought to bear on domestic legislation.

9.—Because to deprive women of the vote is to lower their position in common estimation.

10.—Because the possession of the vote would increase the sense of responsibility amongst women towards questions of public importance.

11.—Because public-spirited mothers make public-spirited sons.

12.—Because large numbers of intelligent, thoughtful, hard-working women desire the franchise.

13.—Because the objections raised against their having the franchise are based on sentiment, not on reason.

14.—**Because**—to sum all reasons up in one—**it is for the common good of all.**

National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, Bradbury, Agnew & Co., London

**SOURCE 3.3** Fourteen reasons for supporting women’s suffrage

### What does Women’s Suffrage mean?

Some people think that Women’s Suffrage means breaking windows and spoiling other people’s property.

This is a great mistake. Only a small number of women do these violent actions.

Thousands and thousands of quiet, law abiding women are asking for the vote.

Why do they want it?

Not in order to sit in Parliament. It would not give them the right to do that.

They want it in order that they may be able to help choose the men who make the laws.

What are these laws about?

Many of them are about children, houses, wages, taxes, insurance, old-age pensions, and lots of other things which matter to women just as much as men.

Don’t you think it fair that a woman should be able to help decide how her children are to be educated, and what kind of home she is to live in?

Women want to help men to make this country a better place than it is for all the men and women and children in it.

In order that they should be able to do this, women ask men to help them get votes.

If you think it is fair that women should have votes, will you sign a card and become a ‘Friend of Women’s Suffrage’?

There is nothing to pay and your name will not be printed or used in any public way. We just want to know that you are a Friend in order that we may let you know when we have meetings and send you some of our papers.

Remember that we are a law-abiding, non-militant society, and that our work depends on Public sympathy.

**You can help us if you will!**

Published by NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES

**SOURCE 3.4** What does Women’s Suffrage mean? Published by the NUWSS in 1913.

*continued*

continued

## VOTES FOR WOMEN

### Women's Freedom League

#### CONSTITUTION

**NAME.**—The Women's Freedom League

**OBJECTS.**—To secure for Women the Parliamentary Vote as it is or may be granted to men; to use the power thus obtained to establish equality of rights and opportunities between the sexes, and thereby to promote the social and industrial well-being of the community.

**METHODS.**—The objects of the League shall be promoted by:—

1. Action entirely independent of all political parties
2. Opposition to whatever Government is in power until such time as the franchise is granted.
3. Participation in Parliamentary Elections; at Bye-elections in opposition to the Government candidate and independently of all other candidates.
4. Vigorous agitation upon lines justified by the position of outlawry to which women are at present condemned.
5. The organising of women all over the country to enable them to give adequate expression to their desire for political freedom.
6. Education of public opinion by all the usual methods, such as public meetings, demonstrations, debates, distribution of literature, newspaper correspondence, and deputations to public representatives and other bodies and their members.

**MEMBERSHIP.**—Women of all shades of political opinion who approve the objects and methods of the League, and who are prepared to act independently of party, are eligible for membership. All members must approve, though they need not actually participate in militant action.

British Library

**SOURCE 3.5** Constitution of the Women's Freedom League (WFL)

### 'WHY I WANT THE VOTE'

I want the Vote because Lord Curzon says 'it is the imperishable heritage of the human race', and therefore it belongs to me.

I want it because the young workmen over the age of twenty-one whom I employ are going to the polls to proudly register their Imperial views on the Budget and Tariff Reform, while I, a middle-aged woman, sit in my office and construct the means by which they earn their living, yet am shut out myself.

I want it because I do not see why the women I employ – skilled workers, the chief or sole supporters of their humble homes – should not, the same as men, protect their labour and their other interests at the polls.

I want the Vote because I pay to educate the children of my older workmen, yet they, who pay no rates or taxes, are marching to the ballot-box, and the Government, which impudently robs me of my hard-earned money, would send me to prison as a third-class criminal were I to walk to St. Stephen's and importune for a hearing to redress my grievances.

I want the Vote because Mr. Lloyd George received a deputation of footballers who, in order to protect their playgrounds, claimed exemption from the land taxes in the proposed Budget; yet deputations of women desperately claiming protection for their livelihood and lives are derided and declined a hearing!

I want it because of the ever-increasing numbers of poor women who are annually murdered in this country, and because of the horrible apathy with which Parliament and Society meet the wholesale destruction of these girls and the hideous system revealed in such cases as the late Brixton one.

I want it because Daisy Lord is being detained for the term of her natural life, while the author of her agony, who abandoned her to her fate, is still at large – a voter.

British Library

**SOURCE 3.6** Maud Arncliffe Sennett (1862–1936) was a member of the London Society of Women's Suffrage, the Women's Freedom League and the Hampstead branch of the WSPU. She founded the Northern Men's Federation for Women's Suffrage in 1911. 'Why I Want the Vote' was originally published in *The Vote*, the newspaper of the Women's Freedom League, in 1910.

## Questions

Read and compare the four sources above.

- 1 Create a table with four columns, labelled Document 1, 2, 3 and 4. In each column write the reasons given for female suffrage in each of the documents.
- 2 What differences are there between the two NUWSS documents? The tone of the second leaflet is very different from the first. What is the author trying to highlight about the NUWSS in this leaflet?
- 3 'Why I want the vote' is a personal list of reasons for the vote. How is it different from the other three documents?
- 4 Do you think that the public responds more positively to personal stories and reasons than to abstract principles?
- 5 Which of the four documents do you think would have been best at persuading people to support women's right to vote? Provide evidence for your choice from the documents.



Getty Images/Popperfoto

**SOURCE 3.7** Muriel Matters, one of a number of Australian suffragettes to work with the British suffragettes, was the main organiser for the Votes for Women caravan that toured south-east England during 1908. This campaign focused on educating people about the need for the enfranchisement of women and worked to establish new WFL branches.

All of their activities were non-violent protests – a form of peaceful law breaking. None of their activities included vandalism or the destruction of property.

The League was closely associated with The Women's Tax Resistance League (1909–1918) whose motto was 'No taxation without representation'. Its members refused to pay their taxes until they became enfranchised. Dora Montefiore, a suffragette who had been active in Australia, argued that if women had not participated in making the laws then they did not have to obey them. This was an action of civil disobedience. The tax resisters were threatened with having their goods seized and sold at public auction. More than 100 members were gaoled as a result of refusing to pay their taxes and many, such as Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, lost all their goods as well. Pethick-Lawrence's goods were sold off to pay his tax.



### Muriel Matters (1877–1969)



AAP/Mery Evans

**SOURCE 3.8** Muriel Matters aboard her airship in 1909.

Muriel Matters was an actress, elocutionist, suffragette and social activist born in Adelaide in 1877. She stood for parliament in England in 1924 in the seat of Hastings where she also spent her retirement. She is most famously known for chaining herself to the grille of the Ladies' Gallery of the House of Commons in 1908 because it blocked the view of parliamentary debates. Women could listen to debates but their view was obscured. Matters regarded this as a symbol of women's oppression.

As House of Commons officials were trying to free her, Matters gave speeches calling for female enfranchisement. She is now acknowledged as the first woman to speak in the House of Commons. Matters worked in east London in Sylvia Pankhurst's school.

One of the more adventurous feats that Matters attempted was to fly in an airship over London on the opening day of the parliamentary year in 1909. Her intention was to throw WFL leaflets over the Houses of Parliament, thus drawing attention to her cause.

She undertook a lecture tour of Australia in 1910, during which she worked with Australian suffragettes to encourage the Australian Parliament to grant British women the right to vote. Matters died in 1969 in England.

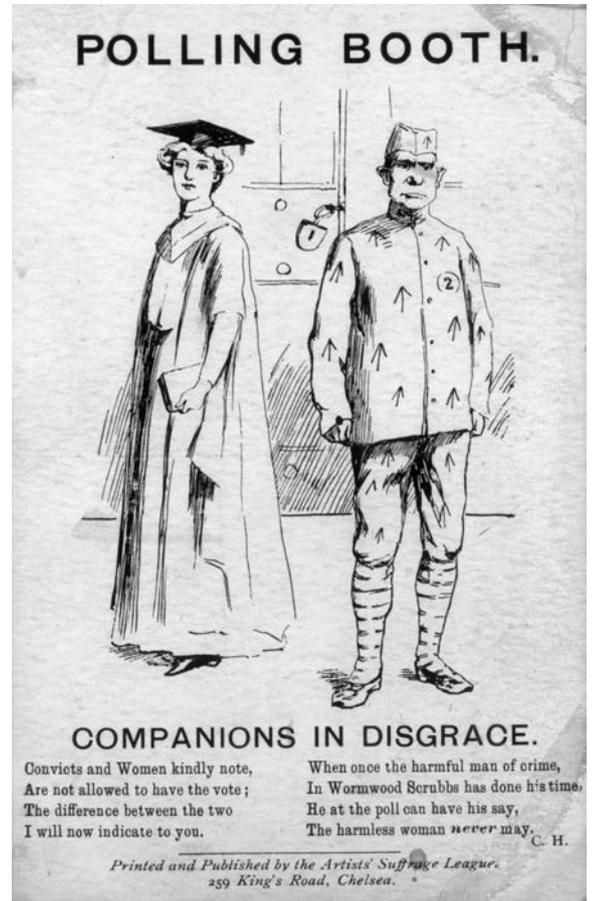
## IMPORTANCE OF THE VOTE

It must have been a shock for late **Victorian** and early Edwardian society to be confronted by women demanding equal rights with men, particularly upper- and middle-class women who were visibly out of the female domestic sphere and in the traditionally male public sphere. The women were also entering the public space of politics. In arguing for political participation through voting, the women had crossed the line – the line between the public, political world of men and the domestic world of women and children.

Suffrage societies by their very existence and with their aim to achieve the right to vote (but not the right to stand for parliament) challenged the political status quo of society. With the achievement of the right to vote came the means by which other social reforms could be achieved, such as:

- + raising the age of consent
- + addressing the **double standard** in terms of sexual morality applied to women and men
- + changing laws to ensure equal pay and better work conditions
- + providing better access for both men and women to education
- + providing access for women to the professions such as law and medicine.

The underlying vision of some of the suffragists was to overturn the relationship between men and women and raise the public sphere to a higher moral plane.



**SOURCE 3.9** A pro-female suffrage postcard published by the Artists Suffrage League, c. 1907–1914. It shows a female university graduate and a convict. The text at the bottom of the page describes how neither women nor convicts can vote. Once the convict has served his time he will be able to vote, but women can never vote, no matter how educated they are.

Artists Suffrage League, supplied by Alice Hawkins Suffragette - A Sister of Freedom, <http://www.alicesuffragette.co.uk/>, © Copyright Peter Barratt 2009-13

## THE ANTI-SUFFRAGISTS

At least 60 years of campaigning took place before a limited suffrage occurred. The *Representation of the People Act 1918* granted female property owners over the age of 30 the right to vote. It took another ten years before full female suffrage was granted. Yet there were supporters in the House of Commons in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Many Bills for female suffrage were presented to parliament by individual MPs, including the respected thinker John Stuart Mill and Labour MP Keir Hardie. But the opposition was too strong. Many men were frightened of the consequences for them if women could vote. The cartoon in the box below depicts some of those fears.

### Victorian

Related to the period of Queen Victoria's reign, from 1837 to 1901

### double standard

A rule or principle applied unfairly in different ways to different people or groups; often used to refer to the double standard of sexual morality that applies different standards of sexual behavior to women than to men

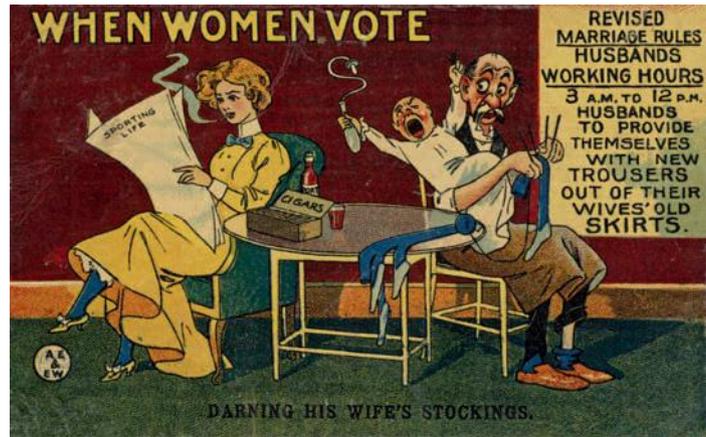
## When Women Vote

This postcard illustrates what those who opposed women's suffrage believed would happen when women achieve the vote.

### Questions

Carefully examine the postcard, reading the title and the notice on the wall.

- 1 Discuss in class the activities of the husband and wife with reference to the notice on the wall.
- 2 What is the message of the cartoon?
- 3 How is the message conveyed?
- 4 From whose perspective is this scene presented?
- 5 What impact do you think this postcard would have had on its female audience?
- 6 Is it a pro- or anti-suffrage postcard?



SOURCE 3.10 When Women Vote, 1906

## The Women's National Anti-Suffrage League

By 1908, two anti-suffrage MPs, William Cremer and George Curzon, concerned about the publicity and support for the suffragettes, asked Mary Humphrey Ward to become the president of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League. The League published its manifesto, which included the following statement.

“ It is time that the women who are opposed to the concession of the parliamentary franchise to women should make themselves fully and widely heard. The matter is urgent. Unless those who hold that the success of the women's suffrage movement would bring disaster upon England are prepared to take immediate and effective action, judgement may go by default and our country drift towards a momentous revolution, both social and political, before it has realised the dangers involved. ”

National Women's Anti-Suffrage League Manifesto, 1908

As well as being president of the League, Mary Ward was also editor of its journal – the *Anti-Suffrage Review*. The organisation claimed that in June 1909, 320 000 people had signed its petition against female suffrage. Meetings were held and anti-suffrage cartoons for postcards and posters were produced.

## Mary Ward (1851–1920)

Mary Augusta Ward was a British novelist born in Hobart, Australia. At the age of five, Mary returned with her family to England, and after schooling she married and became a novelist. Writing under her married name of Mrs Humphry Ward, she became the highest earning novelist in England in 1888. Nicknamed ‘Ma Hump’, she toured the countryside in 1908 speaking against votes for women and encouraging women to sign an anti-suffrage petition. Her son, who was a Member of Parliament, introduced anti-suffrage amendments designed to block any reform. Although she opposed votes for women, she was socially progressive in other areas, setting up legal services for the poor, adult education classes, a day school for physically disabled children and a variety of other services for the unemployed and for working mothers. All of this took place in what later became known as the Mary Ward Centre and it still functions today.



Alamy/Lebrecht Music and Arts Photo Library

Two years after the Women’s National Anti-Suffrage League was formed, it merged with the Men’s Committee for Opposing Women’s Suffrage, bringing the total membership to 42 000. The sheer size of this membership reveals how important an issue female suffrage had become.

### Men for and against female suffrage

Lord Curzon was one of the most well-known male anti-suffragists. Many others were members of the Men’s Committee for Opposing Woman Suffrage, which was founded in December 1908, followed by the Men’s League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, which evolved as the female suffrage campaign became more militant.

The National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage was formed in 1910 with the amalgamation of the Women’s National Anti-suffrage League with the Men’s League for Opposing Woman Suffrage. Its first president was Lord Cromer. Lord Curzon and Lord Weardale followed Cromer as joint presidents. The National League was the main focal point of anti-suffragism in Great Britain after 1909. It worked through influencing or putting pressure on members of parliament and persuading the electorate, especially males, through all forms of **propaganda**.

There were many men, both in parliament and among the general public, who supported granting women the right to vote. At times there was a majority in the House of Commons who supported some franchise for women. Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, for example, joined the WSPU and edited and funded their newspaper *Votes For Women*. Trained in the law, he appeared in court for the suffragettes and became joint treasurer of the WSPU. Frederick and his wife were arrested in 1912 and sentenced to nine months’ gaol for inciting suffragettes to smash windows. Frederick Pethick-Lawrence and his wife disagreed with the smashing of windows so they would have been unlikely to have encouraged anyone to do so.

#### propaganda

Systematic production of ideas in any form to persuade people of a cause

continued

continued



Getty Images/Buyenlarge

**SOURCE 3.11** Lord Curzon was a senior Conservative Party leader. He became President of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage in 1912.



Getty Images/Hulton Archive

**SOURCE 3.12** Frederick Pethick-Lawrence (1871–1961), a suffragist and radical lawyer. He was also a conscientious objector during the First World War. He was born Frederick Lawrence but added his wife's name to his own when they married. This was highly unusual at the time.

During his time in prison Frederick Pethick-Lawrence went on a hunger strike and underwent force-feeding. Five weeks later he was released after a public protest. Mrs Pankhurst expelled him and his wife from the WSPU after their release from prison as they were critical of her violent tactics. He had wanted to concentrate on rebuilding the Union after it had suffered a decline in membership and general support due to these violent tactics.

Frederick and his wife Emmeline went on to establish a new suffrage association called the Votes for Women Fellowship. Its motto was 'To spread the Light' and its emblem a lady with a lamp. Their newspaper *Votes For Women* declined in circulation and Frederick and Emmeline gave the newspaper to the United Suffragists. *Votes For Women* only ceased publication in 1918 when limited female suffrage was granted.

Men also set up organisations to support female suffrage that included the:

- + Men's League for Women's Suffrage
- + Men's Political Union
- + Church League
- + Free Church League
- + Cambridge University Men's League.

## Other tactics

Cartoons were used in the political campaigns both for and against female suffrage in Australia and New Zealand. The same themes used to ridicule and pour scorn on the suffragists in New Zealand and Australia also appeared in Great Britain. Suffragettes were featured as either nagging or domineering, having masculine features, or with husbands who were hen-pecked or cowed; or they were presented as sharp-faced, embittered spinsters with shabby clothes, or as shrieking, hysterical women. Another common theme was that suffragettes would cause the disintegration of the home and the neglect of children by going off to meetings. These fears are represented by the postcard below.



Private collection © Look and Learn/Elgar Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library

**SOURCE 3.13** Anti-suffragette postcard, 1909

### Mummy's a Suffragette

This anti-suffragette postcard was produced in 1909. Its author is unknown. A poem written on the back of the postcard reads: *Mummy is a suffragette / And I am no one's pet / Oh! Why am I left all alone / To cry and suffer yet.* The postcard plays on the notion current among those who opposed the vote for women that any woman who was a suffragette campaigning for the right to vote was neglecting her household duties and hence was a bad mother.

#### Questions

- 1 What message is the illustrator trying to get across?
- 2 How effective is the postcard?

### Fear of women voters

One of the fears of both parliamentary parties was that women would vote for the other party. Therefore, they believed that it was not to their advantage to give women the right to vote. Another reason is shown in the words that MP William Cremer delivered in the House of Commons in 1906.

He asserted that, if they once admitted any section of females to the right to the Parliamentary vote, it must ultimately lead to adult suffrage. (Hear, hear.) As, according to the last census, there were three-quarters of a million more female than male adults, and as, to that number, must be added perhaps a quarter of a million of men who were always unable to record their votes by reason of the nature of their occupations, adult suffrage meant handing the government of the country over to a majority of the electorate who would not be men but women. (Laughter.) He had too great a respect for women to ask them to undertake obligations and discharge duties that they did not understand, and, what was more, they did not care for.

*The Times*, April 1906

#### Questions

- 1 What does Mr Cremer fear will happen if female suffrage is granted to any section of women?
- 2 Provide evidence of Cremer's perspective on women's suffrage.
- 3 What reason does Cremer give for thinking that women are not capable of voting?
- 4 How useful is this source in understanding the attitudes of anti-suffragists at the time?

## *Evolving suffrage tactics*

From 1903 to 1905, the campaign for women's suffrage focused on petitions, meetings, writing pamphlets, and encouraging MPs to present Private Member's Bills for female suffrage to parliament. A second reading in 1905 of a Private Member's Bill – the Women's Enfranchisement Bill – was prevented from being discussed due to the tactics of anti-suffrage MPs. Each Bill had to be discussed for a minimum of two hours, so the anti-suffrage MPs discussed the previous Bill until they were sure there was not enough time for the franchise Bill to be discussed. The Bill therefore was disqualified. This caused much anger and resentment among the suffragettes as it was the first suffrage Bill to come before parliament in eight years and they were hopeful for success.

After this failure, many of the women who had come to parliament that day adopted a motion condemning the government for not allowing enough time for the Bill to be considered. Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the WSPU, considered this the first militant action of the organisation.

### **New targets and tactics: 1905**

The WSPU decided it was time to change tactics before the upcoming election. Emmeline Pankhurst realised that for female suffrage to succeed it had to be put forward as part of the government's own program. In order to persuade the government that it should sponsor a Bill in favour of suffrage the WSPU focused on making the women's vote an election issue and on challenging political leaders about their attitude to the women's vote.

Members of the WSPU decided they would bring the question up at every opportunity and by doing so draw attention to their cause. Until this time there had been very little publicity about the suffrage movement. The press had ignored them. They were about to break what some historians have called a 'conspiracy of silence' from the press. The suffragettes understood that publicity is power. As Emmeline Pankhurst noted:

“ Now, repeated experiences had taught us that the only way to attain women's suffrage was to commit a Government to it. In other words, pledges of support from candidates were plainly useless. They were not worth having. The only object worth trying for was pledges from responsible leaders that the new Government would make women's suffrage a part of the official programme. ”

Extract from Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, Book 1, Hearst's International Library Co., Inc., 1914

Emmeline Pankhurst's daughter Christabel and Annie Kenney (a mill girl and trade unionist from Lancashire) were the first to attempt this new approach. They were given the task of questioning Liberal politician Sir Edward Grey at a Liberal Party meeting in Manchester during the campaign leading up to the 1906 election, which the Liberal Party was expected to win.

### **Crossing the line**

When Annie Kenney asked Sir Edward Grey if a Liberal Government would give the vote to working women, there was an immediate outcry of protest from the audience. She did not receive an answer and neither did Christabel Pankhurst, who asked the same question. In response, the two women unfurled a banner on which was written 'Votes for Women'.

As women, Annie and Christabel had crossed a line. They had broken into the male sphere – the world of political meetings and political discussions. After being arrested, they were charged with spitting at a policeman as they were being ejected from the meeting and were sentenced to prison.

## Response to daring to enter the political world

Even before the suffragettes resorted to violence, they had met with significant levels of physical abuse. At public meetings they were ejected or arrested, and, in the process, manhandled and roughly treated. Rats and mice were let loose in their meeting halls and when suffragettes were speaking on street corners they were often subjected to objects being hurled at them – rotten eggs, garbage and on occasions even cayenne pepper. A few suffered broken limbs and bruises from rough handling by the police. According to historian Mary Turner, a file in the national archives shows that on Black Friday in 1910, when 300 suffragettes marched to the House of Commons and were attacked by the police, two of them – Henria Williams and Mary Clarke – died as a result of the physical abuse they received. Christabel Pankhurst later observed, ‘Next morning we found that the long, long newspaper silence as to woman suffrage was broken’.

Up to this point, the press had ignored the votes for women campaign. It had not reported any of the activities of the suffrage societies, such as their meetings; nor did it publish their articles and letters to the newspapers. This incident received more attention than any other previous action and brought in new members to the societies. This was the beginning of a campaign to heckle and interrupt politicians during their speeches in order to gain more interest in the cause. It has been called the ‘politics of disruption’.

### Annie Kenney (1879–1953)

Annie Kenney was born into a poor working class family in Lancashire, the fourth of 12 children. She began work part-time at the local cotton mill when she was 10 years old and was working full-time by the time she was 13. The working day was long. Annie worked a 12-hour shift as a weaver’s assistant. She worked at the mill for 15 years, becoming a trade unionist and educating herself on her own. She joined the WSPU in 1905 after hearing Christabel Pankhurst speak about female suffrage. She was sacked from her mill job for her political activism and became a full-time worker for the WSPU and eventually one of its deputy leaders. She was the only working-class woman to be in a senior position in the union; its members were mainly from the middle and upper classes.



AAP/Mary Evans

## Conclusion

The right to vote is the basis of the political citizenship British women enjoy today. However, during the 19th century women were explicitly excluded from political life in Great Britain by the *Great Reform Act 1832*.

When they began campaigning to achieve the basic right to vote, they initially used peaceful methods such as reasoned argument and debate, petitions and public meetings, lobbying individual Members of Parliament and influential men in public life.

Most women continued with this approach, extending it to include rallies and marches, but a small minority crossed the line into men's political world by interjecting at meetings and demanding to be heard. Only then did the press and the politicians take notice.

## Chapter summary

- + The *Great Reform Act 1832* explicitly denied women the right to vote and thereby denied them political citizenship.
- + British women began to question their lack of political and legal rights. This included the lack of access to higher education and the professions.
- + Women started to organise through suffrage societies to gain the right to vote.
- + The right to vote was also seen as a means to address other social issues.
- + Initially, the peaceful methods of campaigning were not successful.
- + An anti-female suffrage society was formed.
- + The main suffrage organisation – the NUWSS – divided and a new more militant society formed – the WSPU.
- + The new militant methods – initially non-violent – gained the attention of the press and public. The WSPU knew how important publicity was in raising awareness of its ideas and demands and it understood how to get publicity.

### Weblinks

Weblinks relevant to this chapter can be found at <http://nmh.nelsonnet.com.au/women>.



## *Chapter review activities*

- 1 What political and legal rights did women have in Great Britain in 1850?
- 2 Explain why the Great Reform Act was so disastrous for women who wanted the right to vote.
- 3 Examine Table 3.1. Summarise briefly the political and social changes for women between 1832 and 1894.
- 4 Both the NUWSS and the WSPU believed in votes for some women. Who did they want to see get the right to vote? Why was it not for all women?
- 5 Do you think many working-class women would have joined either of the main organisations campaigning for women's rights? Give reasons for your opinion.
- 6 Examine Sources 3.1 and 3.2.
  - a What is the purpose of each image?
  - b Has the purpose affected the type of publication?
  - c How has the artist constructed the message in each image?
  - d Are both images effective in conveying their message?
- 7 Examine the strategies used by the first women's suffrage society, the NUWSS. How successful were these strategies in promoting and achieving female suffrage?
- 8 Many men feared the consequences of women voting. Using the information in this chapter, make a list of the consequences they feared. Do you think men's fears were real?
- 9 Investigate the role of Mary Ward (Mrs Humphry Ward) in the anti-suffragist movement and her reasons for opposing female suffrage. Write a letter to her outlining your objections to her arguments.
- 10 Imagine that you are a reporter attending the Liberal Party meeting at Manchester at which Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney of the WSPU introduced new tactics. Write a short report for your newspaper describing what happened.
- 11 List the different tactics of the suffragettes and suffragists. Evaluate the success of their methods in achieving their aims.
- 12 Prepare a short biography of Annie Kenney, including her family background, her education, her work as a young girl, her role in the WSPU, and an evaluation of her contribution to the votes for women cause.



**SOURCE 3.14** This is one of a series of six anti-suffrage postcards called 'This is "The House" That Man Built'. It is based on the children's nursery rhyme 'This is the House that Jack built'. The 'House' in this case refers to the Holloway Prison, where many suffragettes were detained, and the postcard depicts a policeman in the process of arresting a suffragette.



- 13 The postcard in Source 3.14 was based on the nursery rhyme ‘This is the House that Jack Built’. It was part of a series of six postcards that each used the rhyme. Conduct a search for the rest of the series and select another example from the series.
- What is the ‘The House’ that is referred to in Source 3.14?
  - Compare the two postcards, noting how the following are represented:
    - the woman/women
    - the setting
    - the texts of the rhyme.
  - Explain the message of each postcard and how it has been conveyed to the viewer.
  - In your opinion, which of the two postcards is the more effective? Provide evidence for your choice.
  - Compare these anti-suffrage postcards with the pro-suffrage postcard at the beginning of this chapter. Why might anti-suffrage campaigners have adopted an almost identical method for campaigning against women’s rights?
- 14 Design a political poster promoting equal rights for women.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Rising militancy, surveillance and victory 1907–1928*

The previous chapter examined the beginnings and growth of the early women's movement in Great Britain. It focused on the period from the time of the *Great Reform Act 1832*, which explicitly denied women the right to vote, to the middle of 1908, when the suffragettes of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) changed their tactics.

The first section of this chapter examines the rising militancy and change in tactics of a small minority of suffragettes, from peaceful protests to attacks on public and private property as well as the effect this had on the suffragette movement.

The second section examines the increasingly harsh measures put in place by the government to counteract these acts committed by the suffragettes, including imprisonment, force-feeding, secret photo surveillance, and the infamous Cat and Mouse Act of parliament.

The third section considers the roles of Emmeline Pankhurst and of the WSPU, and the way in which the suffragette movement represented its ideas through a variety of media including art, literature, songs and the spectacles of demonstrations, marches and funerals.

The fourth section analyses the effect of the war on the campaign for votes for women, the achievement of limited suffrage in 1918 and full suffrage in 1928.

The last section considers how the suffragettes are remembered today.

◀ Emmeline Pankhurst being arrested by Superintendent Rolfe while trying to present a petition to King George V at Buckingham Palace on 21 May 1914.

#### INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- + Why did the militant action increase from 1907 to 1914?
- + What effect did the war have on women and the women's movement?
- + What was Emmeline Pankhurst's contribution to the success of the campaign?
- + Did the increasing violence help or hinder the campaign for votes for women? How have the suffragettes been remembered?

## *Escalation of militant action, 1907–1911*

Between 1907 and 1910, the militancy of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) escalated. This split the suffrage movement. Those who supported peaceful action feared that militancy would be counter-productive. The more militant advocates of reform left the WSPU and formed the Women's Freedom League in 1907.

**TABLE 4.1** Key suffrage events, 1907–1911

Dates	Events	Organiser	Description
February 1907	Mud March	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS)	First large march organised by the NUWSS. About 3000 women from 40 organisations took part. They were women from a mix of classes from across the country.
February 1907	March on parliament	Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)	Hundreds of women marched from Caxton Hall to parliament to protest the omission of women's suffrage from the coming parliamentary sessions. Police rough-handed and arrested 51 women. Many women injured.
1907	Women's Freedom League (WFL) formed	WFL	About 70 members of the WSPU left to form the WFL in protest against the autocratic leadership of the Pankhursts.
January 1908	Suffragettes chain themselves to railings	Two WSPU members	Edith New and Olivia Smith chained themselves to 10 Downing Street, the prime minister's residence, shouting 'Votes for Women'.
June 1908	Stones thrown through prime minister's windows	Two WSPU members	Edith New and Mary Leigh threw stones through the prime minister's windows. This was the first incidence of suffragettes smashing windows.
June 1908	Mass Hyde Park women's demonstration known as Women's Sunday	WSPU	Seven processions marched to Hyde Park where the largest mass meeting held so far took place in London with an estimated 250 000 people attending, including spectators and marchers. The official program was printed on paper table napkins.
1909	March in Scotland	WSPU	Flora Drummond organised a mass march of more than 1000 women through Edinburgh. She led the march on horseback dressed in military uniform. Others came as historical characters.
1909	Hunger strike	Marion Wallace Dunlop	Gaoled for breaking a window and refused recognition as a political prisoner, Marion Dunlop began a hunger strike.
1910	Conservative, Liberal and Labour Parties polled on their intention regarding women's suffrage	NUWSS	Only the Labour Party pledged to support women's suffrage. Women's suffrage became part of its political platform.

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO MILITANT ACTION

In 1908, Herbert Asquith was appointed as prime minister. A determined opponent of votes for women from as early as the 1880s, he stated that it was his intention to further extend the franchise to men, with no franchise at all for women. He acknowledged that the majority of his cabinet and party favoured women's suffrage but he did not change his own views about women's right to vote.

Initially members of the WSPU restricted themselves to disrupting parliament, interrupting meetings and chaining themselves to rails in the **House of Commons**. At this point the NUWSS supported their actions, realising that they were drawing attention to the cause.

Millicent Fawcett, as leader of the NUWSS, withdrew her organisation's support for the breakaway WSPU when its members attacked property. She wrote a letter to Members of Parliament in November 1908 condemning any violent actions. This did not deter the militants of the WSPU, who increased their activities, smashing windows and throwing stones through the windows of the prime minister's house.

The government began to imprison women for acts such as window smashing. In prison they were treated as common criminals, rather than as political prisoners. This distinction was significant: as political prisoners they would have had a different status in the prison system and been entitled to wear their own clothes and receive better quality food. In June 1909, this led to the first hunger strike.

Marion Wallace Dunlop, a member of the WSPU, who had been imprisoned for using an indelible rubber stamp to print a passage from the Bill of Rights on the walls of the House of Commons, decided to go on a hunger strike. She refused food and drink and after nearly four days was released on medical grounds. The government was concerned that she might die and become a martyr. Other suffragettes followed her example and by December more than a hundred of them were on hunger strikes. In response the government introduced force-feeding.

### Force-feeding

The controversial force-feeding of suffragettes on hunger strike in prison was considered as an abuse of prisoners' rights to non-violent protest. Some women were force-fed more than 200 times. The use of a steel gag to keep their mouths open was particularly painful. The effect on the women's health from such violent treatment lasted, in some cases, for the rest of their lives. HN Brailsford and Henry Nevison, well-respected journalists and suffrage sympathisers, noted that the government's decision was problematic, and questioned how Britain could 'denounce torture in Russia and support it in England, nor can we advocate democratic principles in the name of a party which confines itself to a single sex.'<sup>1</sup>

According to historian Lisa Tickner, some 116 surgeons and physicians signed a memorial, a formal statement of facts against force-feeding, that was presented to the prime minister. In 1912, the medical journal *The Lancet* described the experience of force-feeding as torture.

#### Liberal Party

One of the two political parties in 19th- and early 20th-century England

#### Labour Party

Founded in 1900 as the centre-left political party in England

#### House of Commons

Lower House of the British Parliament

“ Force-feeding involved a rubber tube being passed through the mouth or more often down the nostrils and into the stomach. Liquid was then poured down the rubber hose. ”

In 1909, political activist and WSPU member Mary Leigh Mary Leigh described her experience of force-feeding:

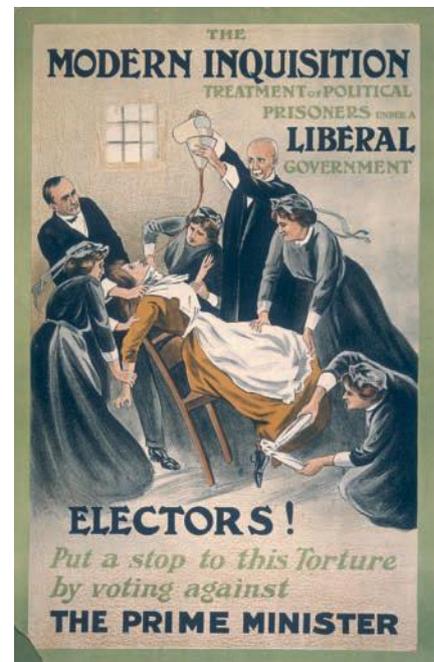
“ On Saturday afternoon, the Wardresses forced me onto the bed and the two doctors came in with them, and while I was held down a nasal tube was inserted. It is two yards long with a funnel at the end – there is a glass junction in the middle to see if the liquid is passing. The end was put up the nostril, one day and the other nostril, the next day. Great pain is experienced during the process ... the drums of the ear seem to be bursting, a horrible pain in the throat and the breast. The tube is pushed down 20 inches. ”

### The Modern Inquisition

This poster was created by Alfred Pearse for the Women’s Social and Political Union prior to the 1910 election. It graphically illustrates a woman undergoing force-feeding.

#### Questions

- 1 What was the purpose of the poster?
- 2 How does the poster convey its message?
- 3 Analyse the symbols and text of the poster. What is the title of the poster? To which historical event is the creator trying to link the actions in the poster?
- 4 How did various groups in British society react to the poster?



SOURCE 4.1 'The Modern Inquisition'

### The Conciliation Bill

#### second reading

The stage in the process of a parliamentary Bill in which it is debated or read for a second time

Pro-suffrage supporters presented another Private Member’s Bill to unite all parliamentary supporters of women’s votes. It successfully passed a **second reading**. Despite this, and the enormous support for the Conciliation Bill, the government did not allow it to proceed further. According to historian Lisa Tickner, there was an immediate response: ‘Thousands of public meetings and demonstrations were held and resolutions in support of the Conciliation Bill were passed by 182 city, town and urban district councils. It is hard to see what else could have been done.’<sup>2</sup>

The WSPU, which had stopped all militant action while the Bill was progressing through parliament, immediately responded by sending a deputation of 300 to 500 women to the House of Commons on Friday, 18 November 1910. They were not permitted entry. The battle that

followed was brutal with the women suffering beatings, being hit by batons, thrown to the ground, and verbally, physically and sexually abused. The day became known as Black Friday.

The government tried to stop reports about the incident being published and ordered the *Daily Mirror* to destroy the negative of a photograph it had published of a suffragette being kicked by a policeman while lying on the ground. The Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, refused to allow an inquiry into the violence. Black Friday marked another turning point in the tactics of the suffragettes, and acts of violence against property, such as window smashing, became more common.



Museum of London/Heritage Images/Getty Images

**SOURCE 4.2** The events of Black Friday were notable for the level of violence. As many as 200 suffragettes were beaten by the police and bystanders. The events led to a change in the tactics of suffragettes.

## THE SHIFT TO CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

After Black Friday, further women's movement campaigners adopted strategies of civil disobedience, refusing to follow the instructions of the government or obey the laws, for political purposes. Two major civil disobedience campaigns took place in 1911 – the **Census** Boycott and the Women's Suffrage Coronation March.

### The census

In 1911, the Women's Freedom League called for a boycott of the census under the banner of 'No vote – no census'. This action was supported by women, some militant, some not, from all classes and right across the country. The NUWSS, however, did not support the boycott.

Women went to great lengths to avoid the census, staying away from home on the night. One group hired gypsy caravans for the night. Women also gathered in London's Trafalgar Square as a protest. They walked around the city or visited all-night cafes. Others wrote comments on the census forms or filled them in incorrectly.

#### census

Official count of the size and characteristics of a population, for the government's use

## A night of skating

Marie Lawson of the Women's Freedom League described how her resistance group organised a roller skating event on the night of the census.

We formed immediately a census resistance group – women who said ‘we don’t count; we won’t be counted’ – that they would stay out somehow – out of a house or roof during the period when you had to be recorded. Our group took the Aldwych skating rink for the night – we hired it ... We had roller skates and we spent the night on roller skates and there was no-one to declare us and when we went away in the morning we were very weary, ... but we felt we had done the government out of so many names on the census resistance. ... We used to grab at every little thing, you know, that we could make a protest about. It was advertising really.

Marie Lawson, interview, 1970s

The Actresses' Franchise League provided entertainment. Some men sympathetic to the cause refused to record the women living in their homes. Emily Wilding Davison hid herself in a broom cupboard in the House of Commons, was discovered and so appeared in the census form submitted for the House of Commons.

The government reported that the effect of the boycott on the census was negligible. It chose not to prosecute anyone, most likely to avoid the enormous publicity that would certainly have come if women had been brought before the courts across the whole country.



## The Women's Suffrage Coronation Procession

Timed to occur when many international guests were present for the coronation of George V, this march provided a good opportunity to publicise the votes for women campaign. The plan included an imperial contingent with representatives from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, South Africa, India and Crown Colonies. The Australian and New Zealand contingent of women suffragists was led by Margaret Fisher – wife of the Australian prime minister – and Lady Anna Stout – wife of the Chief Justice of New Zealand.

The march was a great success, so much so that the *The Daily News* declared: ‘this unity of women and this universality of the cause lifted the movement into the rank of the great revolutions’.

**SOURCE 4.3** This poster, by Marjorie Hamilton, advertised the Women's Suffrage Coronation Procession of 17 June 1911, to be followed by a meeting in support of the Women's Suffrage Bill before parliament. A number of speakers for the evening are listed, including the Australian suffragist leader Vida Goldstein. This is an example of the close links between Australian women and the women's movement in Great Britain.

### ‘Trust the women mother’

This banner was painted by the Australian artist Dora Meeson Coates, who was living in London. Created in 1908, it was carried at the head of the Australia/ New Zealand contingent in the 1911 Women’s Suffrage Coronation Procession by Dora and her husband George Coates.

#### Questions

- 1 Identify the woman on the left.
- 2 Identify the young woman on the right.
- 3 What is the shield the young woman is carrying?
- 4 Who is ‘mother’?
- 5 What is the message of the banner?



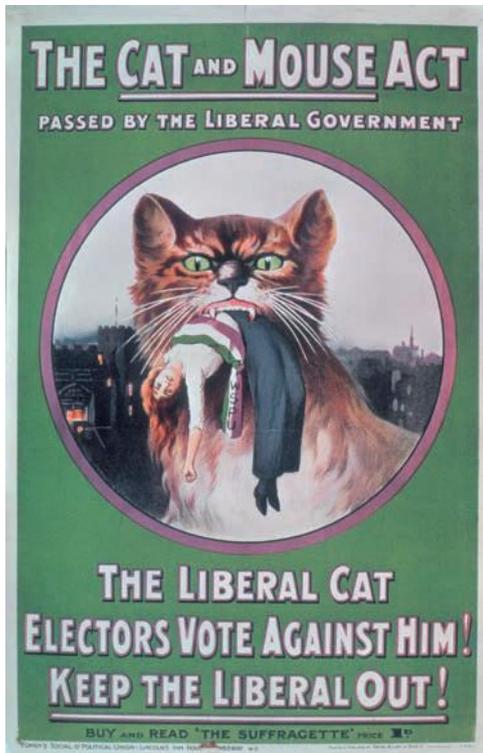
**SOURCE 4.4** Women’s Suffrage Banner by Dora Meeson (1869–1955). This artwork is held at the Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra.

Gifted to Parliament House by the Australian Council of Women in 2002. © Artist’s estate.

## VIOLENCE ESCALATES

The failure of civil disobedience campaigns led to an increased use of political violence by suffrage campaigners. Emmeline Pankhurst, speaking in 1912, observed: ‘We have tried every way, but we have had contempt poured upon us. Violence is the only way that we have to get power that every citizen should have.’ This escalation was partly due to Prime Minister Asquith deciding not to give women the franchise, fearful that they would vote against him at the upcoming election.

These violent campaigns included damage to property by arson, and, on occasions, the detonating of bombs. Their targets were wide ranging and included government buildings, politicians’ homes, sporting facilities, art galleries and churches. They were unpopular even with members of the WSPU. An indication of the organisation’s increasing militancy was the appointment of Nora Dacre Fox as General Secretary of the Union in 1913. She was a fierce militant suffragette and



Getty Images/Heritage Images

**SOURCE 4.5** A 1914 poster created by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) by an unknown artist.

radical feminist who wrote speeches for Christabel Pankhurst and gave fiery ones herself. In the 1930s, she joined the British Union of Fascists.

Again, members left the WSPU, disagreeing with this new violence. Emmeline and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, long-time supporters who had both devoted so much of their time, energy and money, and had been imprisoned and suffered the pain and indignity of force-feeding, were expelled from the WSPU because they objected to the window smashing and arson campaign.

## The Cat and Mouse Act

The government was determined that none of the suffragettes who were on hunger strikes would die. It feared that if any women did die, they would be viewed as martyrs for the cause. The public was already sympathetic to the suffragettes on the issue of force-feeding. To reduce the likelihood of any deaths, the government introduced the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act in 1913, which allowed the suffragettes to be released once they became weak and ill. When they recovered they would then be re-arrested. It became known as the Cat and Mouse Act.

**TABLE 4.2** Suffragette violence

Type	What and where	Who was involved	Damage
Throwing stones and smashing windows	10 Downing Street, government offices; shops in London's West End	Mary Leigh, Edith New, Maud Sennett, Evelyn Sharpe, Barbara Gould	Broken windows
Attacking art works in galleries	<i>Rokey Venus</i> – painting by Velazquez in the National Gallery in London	Mary Richardson, a Canadian suffragette and WSPU member. Action approved by Christabel Pankhurst	Big slashes from the top to the bottom of the painting
Arson	Contents of post boxes, houses, churches, racecourses, piers, sports pavilions	Emily Wilder Davison, Kitty Marion, Fanny Parker	Significant damage to property
Bombings	Chancellor Lloyd George's house; Alstone Lawn Manor; Lord Inverclyde's yacht	Mary Richardson, Mary Leigh	£500; £400–£500; £40 000
Attacking people	Politician Winston Churchill attacked with a riding switch as he was getting off a train in Bristol	Theresa Garnett – member of WSPU	Unharmful
Attacking public buildings	Station buildings at Leuchars Junction in Scotland burnt to the ground June 1913	Suffragettes believed to have caused the fire	£2000

## The bodyguard

In response to the Cat and Mouse Act, the WSPU set up a bodyguard unit to protect Emmeline Pankhurst, who, in 1913, was in danger of being rearrested and returned to prison to serve out her time. The unit also protected suffragettes from the police and the public at rallies. A unit of 25 to 30 women was organised and trained in the Japanese martial arts of jiu-jitsu and in the use of Indian clubs as defensive weapons. The unit included Katherine Willoughby Marshall and Gertrude Harding. Edith Garrud, a jiu-jitsu instructor, who joined the WSPU in 1908, seen in the cartoon below, trained the bodyguard unit. Training took place in secret locations and the unit was involved in several confrontations and clashes with police. One of the most notable of these occurred in February 1914 when Emmeline Pankhurst was to give a speech in Camden Square at a time when the police were seeking to rearrest her. Speaking from a balcony, Emmeline gave her speech that ended by criticising the government and the police. When a small, veiled woman (surrounded by the bodyguard) emerged, the police thought it was Emmeline and rushed towards her with their truncheons at the ready. The bodyguard pulled out Indian clubs and a fight ensued. The small figure was seized by the police but she was a decoy. Mrs Pankhurst had escaped while the fight was on.



© Punch Limited

### THE SUFFRAGETTE THAT KNEW JIU-JITSU.

THE ARREST.

**SOURCE 4.6** Cartoon by Arthur Wallis Mills published in *Punch Magazine* in 1910 and also in *The Wanganui Chronicle* in New Zealand. The woman in the cartoon is Edith Garrud, who was a suffragette and a martial arts instructor. She taught members of the suffragette movement from 1908 at the Palladium Academy. She wrote articles explaining jiu-jitsu positions in *Votes For Women*, the newspaper of the WSPU.

## Police surveillance

When the suffragettes were imprisoned they refused to be photographed as common criminals and protested that they were political prisoners and should be treated as such. In response, Scotland Yard purchased a long-lens camera and hired a photographer, Mr A Barrett, to sit in a van and secretly photograph the women during their daily exercise in the yard at Holloway Prison.



AAP/Mary Evans

**SOURCE 4.7** Portrait of Kitty Marion



Alamy/Heritage Image Partnership Ltd

**SOURCE 4.8** Four suffragettes exercising in the yard at Holloway Prison, c. 1912

This was possibly the first time systematic and secret photographic surveillance was undertaken in Great Britain – something that is commonplace today. The photographs were distributed to police to prevent the women protesting or committing acts of violence when they left prison. Not all of the photos were taken in prison; police also used portrait photos such as the picture above of Kitty Marion. Photos were also used by agents to track women on their release from prison and watch what they did.

Scotland Yard had been photographing prisoners since 1871, but not secretly. The prisoners knew that they were being photographed at close range. In the case of the suffragettes, the government was spying on them.



The National Archives/AR 1\_528\_1914-1914



The National Archives/PCOM 7\_252\_1913

**SOURCE 4.9** Evelyn Manesta, a young woman from Manchester who resisted being photographed. The introduction of modern surveillance techniques with the camera brought the ability to alter photographs. The two photographs above show how a policeman's arm has been removed from one of them to hide the fact that Manesta was being restrained.

*continued*

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### Questions

- 1 Do you think the government had the right to secretly photograph the suffragettes in prison?
- 2 The issue of spying on the public has been debated recently, in the 21st century. Discuss in class the issue of spying on the public, particularly in light of increased usage of CCTV footage in the late 20th century and today.

## EMILY WILDING DAVISON: CONTESTED VIEWS OF THE PAST

One of the most shocking incidents in the campaign for female suffrage was the violent death of suffragette and WSPU member Emily Wilding Davison in 1913. This incident was the subject of discussion and debate both at the time of her death and 100 years later. There is a marked contrast between the way she was seen in 1913 and the views about her in 2013.

On 4 June 1913 Emily Wilding Davison, one of the most militant suffragettes, caught a train from Victoria Station, London, to the town of Epsom, about 30 kilometres away. Epsom was the site of a two-day horse racing carnival that had been held there since 1780. She did not tell anyone where she was going. She carried a return ticket.



Getty Images/Print Collector

**SOURCE 4.10** Emily Wilding Davison being struck by the king's horse during the Epsom Derby on 4 June 1913

The Epsom Derby was one of the most important social and racing events in Britain at the time and offered the most prize money of any of the racing events. Parliament adjourned on the race day so its members could attend. The royal family attended and often entered one of their horses in the race. In 1913, King George V and Queen Mary were present, and their horse, Anmer, was running. Emily bought a racing card that listed the races and the names of horses running in each of them. She was interested in the 3 p.m. Epsom Derby race, in which the king's horse was running.

As the horses stormed towards the sharp turn known as Tattenham Corner, they slowed a little before charging down the last straight to the finishing line. At this moment, Emily took from her sleeve a hidden suffragette flag and slipped under the rails. She ran on to the track, reached up to the king's horse – flag in hand – and was knocked down and severely injured. The horse somersaulted and threw the jockey. Emily, who took the full impact of the speeding horse, died in Epsom Cottage Hospital from severe internal injuries four days later, not having regained consciousness. She was 40 years of age.

Herbert Jones, the jockey, and Anmer survived the incident. Emily's death was deemed to have been accidental by the Coroner, who also commented that it was sad that an educated lady should sacrifice herself in this way.

### Short-term effects

The short-term effects were considerable as the publicity drew attention to the underlying cause of the incident: the struggle for female suffrage. The suffragettes took full advantage of this opportunity. Grace Roe, a fellow suffragette, organised the funeral ceremony. Six thousand suffragettes attended the service and 50 000 people lined the road to watch the funeral procession that was like a pageant, with ten brass bands and suffragettes wending their way through the streets of London.

The young woman who led the cortège wore gold and carried a huge cross. Four black horses pulled the open hearse and six suffragettes dressed in white (including Sylvia Pankhurst) marched beside the carriage. Purple silk banners had been made with the words 'Fight on and God will give the victory'. These were the words of Joan of Arc.

The memorial service was held at St George's Church in Bloomsbury, officiated by the Church League for Women's Suffrage (CLWS). Emmeline Pankhurst was among the attendants, along with 50 hunger strikers and hundreds of suffragettes who had been imprisoned for their actions. After the service, the coffin was sent by train from King's Cross Station to Morpeth, Northumberland, where Emily Davison's mother lived. Inscribed on her tombstone is the suffragette motto 'Deeds Not Words'.

### VIEWS IN 1913

After the incident on the racecourse, the public's view of Emily Wilding Davison was overwhelmingly negative. On Thursday 5 June, *The Evening Telegraph* newspaper published a photo of the scene with the heading 'Suffragette Outrage at the Derby'. On Wednesday 4 June, the *Derby Daily Telegraph* headed its reports 'Woman's Mad Outrage' and 'Attempt to Stop the King's Horse'. The report said that the woman 'was seen to suddenly rush out from the crowd and throw herself in front of Agadir and Anmer'. On Thursday 5 June, *The Dundee Courier* published a photo of Emily Wilding Davison with the caption saying that she 'plunged recklessly among the galloping horses at the Derby race yesterday and pulled down the King's horse Anmer'. The words on the Pathé newsreel of the event read 'Suffragette Killed In Attempt To Pull Down The King's Horse'.

### Questions

- 1 Why would the authorities in 1913 have wanted to present Emily as a 'hysteric'? What was her cause? What did she represent?

*continued*

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The Queen Mother sent a telegram to the jockey condemning the ‘abominable conduct of a brutal lunatic woman’.

The Coroner’s report read: ‘Fracture at the base of the skull caused by being accidentally knocked down by a horse through wilfully rushing on to the race course at Epsom Downs Surrey on the 4th June 1913 during the progress of a race.’

## VIEWS IN 2013

Enormous interest was shown on the centenary of Emily’s death, in 2013. Despite the negative opinions held by the public and authorities at the time of her death, during the centennial celebrations she was embraced by society. She is now recognised as a strong and dedicated militant, passionately committed to achieving votes for women. People are not only interested in the manner of her death but also in her suffragette ideas and life.

During the centenary year there appeared:

- + numerous television programs about Emily Davison and the suffragettes
- + books and articles written about her, including one from a descendant
- + new analysis of the Pathé film of the incident using forensic techniques that support the view of her death as an accident
- + a plaque laid at Epsom Downs racecourse commemorating her work for the right to vote
- + exhibitions celebrating her life and death
- + a tribute in the English parliament as an early day motion
- + a one-woman play based on her life and performed by a Cambridge theatre company
- + a performance of an opera called *Emily*, composed in 1913.

## Questions

- 2 Why would Queen Mary call Emily a ‘lunatic’? Think about Emily’s position in society and the words of Queen Victoria about the votes for women campaign.
- 3 In 2013, the authorities, as well as the public, celebrated Emily Davison’s life and work. Even the racecourse at Epsom dedicated a plaque to her. She is not seen as a lunatic now. Why not? What accounts for the positive attitude?
- 4 Discuss why opinions about the past change over time.

## Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928)

Emmeline Pankhurst was a political activist, an agitator and an orator. She was the controversial leader of the British suffragettes. She was named one of the 100 most important people in the 20th century by *Time Magazine* – a woman who ‘shaped an idea of women for our time; she shook society into a new pattern from which there could be no going back’.

Emmeline grew up in Manchester with parents who devoted themselves to issues of social justice. They were involved with the anti-slavery movement, and women’s rights, including female suffrage. She was 14 years of age when she attended a suffrage meeting with her mother and that made a significant impression upon her.



Getty Images/UGC via Getty Images

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Her husband Richard Pankhurst was a radical lawyer and supporter of women's suffrage and other liberal causes. She joined the Manchester Women's Suffrage committee, and then formed the Women's Franchise League (WFL) with her husband and friends. The death of her husband in 1898 left her poor, but she gained employment as a registrar of births, deaths and marriages. This experience broadened her understanding of the injustices that women suffered in their everyday life.

In 1903, frustrated at the lack of progress on achieving women's suffrage, she set up the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) with the motto 'Deeds Not Words'. Using new confrontational tactics, she gained publicity and the attention of the newspapers. Tactics diversified and increased in militancy until they became violent with attacks on property, leading to imprisonment, hunger strikes and force-feeding.

With the outbreak of the First World War, Emmeline stopped all activism on female suffrage and turned to organising the war effort. As a result, the government gave a blanket amnesty to all suffragettes who had committed offences. In 1918, it granted a limited suffrage to women over 30 with property. Emmeline joined the Conservative Party in 1926. She died in 1928 just after the government enfranchised all women. A memorial statue of her was unveiled by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin who said, 'I say with no fear of contradiction, that whatever view posterity may take, Mrs Pankhurst has won for herself a niche in the Temple of Fame which will last for all time.'<sup>3</sup>

### Quotes from Emmeline Pankhurst

Trust in God – she will provide.

<http://womenshistory.about.com/od/quotes/a/Emmeline-Pankhurst-quotes.htm>,  
accessed 20 March 2014

We are here, not because we are law-breakers; we are here in our efforts to become law-makers.

Midge Mackenzie, *Shoulder to Shoulder: A Documentary*, Penguin, 1975, p. 92

The argument of the broken window-pane is the most valuable argument in modern politics.

Richard P Coleman and Bernice L Neugarten, *Social Status in the City*, Transaction Publishers, 2011 (originally published 1935), p. 170

Militancy was right. No measure worth having has been won in any other way.

Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, 1914, Book 3, Chapter 3

I have made speeches urging women to adopt methods of rebellion such as have been adopted by men in every revolution.

Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, 1914, Book 1, Chapter 3

Men make the moral code and they expect women to accept it. They have decided that it is entirely right and proper for men to fight for their liberties and their rights, but that it is not right and proper for women to fight for theirs.

Emmeline Pankhurst, *My Own Story*, 1914, Book 3, Chapter 3, p. 268

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There is something that Governments care for far more than human life, and that is the security of property, and so it is through property that we shall strike the enemy. Be militant each in your own way. I incite this meeting to rebellion.

Speech given by E Pankhurst at Royal Albert Hall, London 17 October 1912

But since I am a woman it is necessary in the 20th century to explain why women have adopted revolutionary methods in order to win the rights of citizenship.

Speech given by E Pankhurst, 13 November 1913

We found that all the fine phrases about freedom and liberty were entirely for male consumption, and that they did not in any way apply to women. When it was said taxation without representation is tyranny, when it was “Taxation of men without representation is tyranny,” everybody quite calmly accepted the fact that women had to pay taxes and even were sent to prison if they failed to pay them – quite right. We found that “Government of the people, by the people and for the people,” which is also a time-honoured Liberal principle, was again only for male consumption; half of the people were entirely ignored; it was the duty of women to pay their taxes and obey the laws and look as pleasant as they could under the circumstances.

Speech given by E Pankhurst in Hartford, Connecticut, 13 November 1913

## Questions

- 1 Read the above quotes carefully. In groups, use the information in chapters 3 and 4 to discuss the meaning of each of the quotes.
- 2 Prepare a multimedia essay on the contribution of Emmeline Pankhurst to the campaign for women’s votes. Consider the following:
  - + her entrance into the suffrage cause
  - + the ideas that guided her in her work for female suffrage
  - + her actions to achieve female suffrage and whether they helped or hindered her cause
  - + how successful she was in achieving her ends.

## EVENTS OF 1914

The campaign for women’s votes intensified in 1914. The destruction of property continued to be a feature of the suffrage campaigns in the months leading to the commencement of the First World War. Major incidents between January and August 1914 included:

- + three Scottish castles destroyed by fire
- + Carnegie Library in Birmingham burnt
- + *Rockeby Venus* painting slashed in the National Gallery
- + country houses burnt, including Redlynch House, Somerset
- + bomb exploded in Westminster Abbey
- + organ at the Albert Hall flooded.

Just one month before the outbreak of war, the WSPU was planning a Great Women's Meeting in London to raise funds to fight against the force-feeding of suffragette prisoners. The force-feeding of the hunger strikers was still the main issue for the government.

### Government confusion

A debate in the parliament in June shows the degree to which the government was helpless in front of the determination of the prisoners. Lord Cecil was against force-feeding and suggested the militants should be deported. The Home Secretary expressed his belief that the situation was 'a phenomenon absolutely without precedent in our history'. Some people had advised him to let the hunger strikers die, others to put them in a lunatic asylum. He admitted that he had them examined many times by doctors 'but in no case have they been willing to certify them lunatics'.

## *The impact of the First World War*

On 4 August 1914, the British Government declared war on Germany. The impact of the war on the women's movement was immediate. At the outbreak, all political activity by the NUWSS was suspended. Emmeline Pankhurst was a patriot and believed that it was everyone's duty to work for the war effort. She also thought that if women actively did this they would not be denied the vote after the war. She stopped all militant acts and called a truce with the government. On 10 August, the government freed all suffragettes from prison in return for the ending of violent acts.

Had the war lasted only until Christmas – as the British Government had promised – the lives of women would not have changed very much. But as the war continued on into 1915 the government realised that more and more men would be needed to enlist. Therefore, women in the workforce became essential both to the war and to the continuation of everyday life in Great Britain.

Emmeline Pankhurst and many other suffragettes saw themselves as political leaders so it was not surprising that they joined the War Office recruiting campaign and spoke at public meetings across the country – urging men to enlist and women to join the war effort and calling it 'the right to serve'. In July 1915, the government that had been so utterly opposed to her finally recognised her organisational skills and her influence. It provided her with money to organise a rally and procession urging women to support the war effort.

About 30 000 women marched through the streets of London calling for 'the right to serve'. They approached the support for the war with as much fervour and energy as they had done for the right to vote. This included handing out white feathers – a symbol of cowardice – to men who were in civilian clothes.

### THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT SPLITS

While many prominent suffragists supported the war effort, tension and divisions emerged. Millicent Fawcett urged members of the NUWSS to direct their energies into the war effort, but the majority of her executive disagreed, wanting to work for a negotiated peace. They resigned from the organisation in 1915.



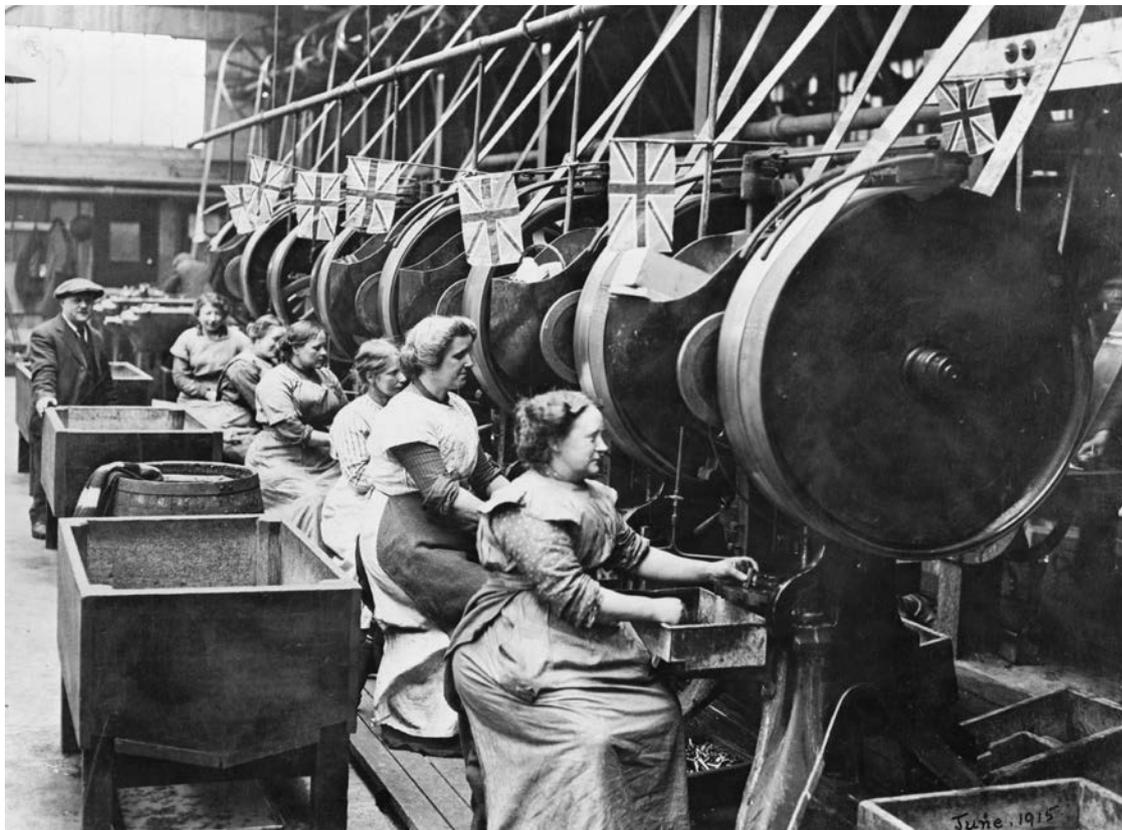
**SOURCE 4.11** Government posters during the First World War encouraged women to support the war effort.

Not all members of the WSPU were pro-war either. Sylvia Pankhurst and pacifists Frederick and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence disagreed with Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. They were opposed to the war and believed that they should be working for peace. This division became extremely bitter and the gulf between Emmeline and Christabel on one side and Sylvia on the other never healed. Emmeline's break with Sylvia extended to her other daughter, Adela, who was living in Australia and who also opposed the war.

## INTO THE WORKFORCE

The war brought women into the workforce in large numbers to fill positions left vacant by the men who had enlisted, or, later, those who were conscripted into the army. This challenged the traditional gender stereotypes as well as the idea that a woman's place was in the home, and that there were jobs women simply could not do. The attraction of interesting and better paid jobs, allowing women more independence, led to a decline in domestic service. It also introduced women to trade unionism.

Women who had worked prior to the war were mainly in nursing, teaching, domestic service and some factories. The war introduced them to a wide range of traditional male jobs that, it had been argued, were impossible for women to do. These included industrial jobs in the cities. Now women found themselves working in dangerous jobs such as in munitions factories, producing gas masks and shells, or as furnace stokers in factories, and even in the mines.



Getty Images/Heritage Images

**SOURCE 4.12** British women making bullets, 1915. A Union Jack hangs from each machine. Note the pile of bullets at the feet of the woman in the foreground of the photograph.

The women who worked in munitions factories were known as ‘munitionettes’ and their work included manufacturing explosives, small arms munitions, gun shells and filling shells. Those who worked in the National Shell Filling Factory at Chilwell were known as ‘Chilwell canaries’ – referring to the yellow colour of their skin, caused by the chemicals they were working with, in particular sulphur. There were 950 000 women munition workers by the end of the war. The safety conditions at these factories were often lax and serious accidents took place. Union leaders fought for equal wages with men in these factories but women’s pay remained approximately half the male wage.

One of the worst of several accidents occurred at the National Shell Filling Factory, Chilwell. During the war, this factory – one of the main producers of shells in Great Britain – filled 19 million shells with high explosives. On 1 July 1918, an explosion killed 137 people and injured 250 more.

Many joined the Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS or Wrens), Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), Women’s Royal Air Force (WRAF) or unpaid organisations that had existed before the war. These included the Women’s Volunteer Reserve (WVR), Women’s Legion, Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD) and Women’s Forage Corps. Some of the jobs they undertook were as drivers or telegram girls. At the warfront women worked as nurses and ambulance drivers.

## Women’s Land Army

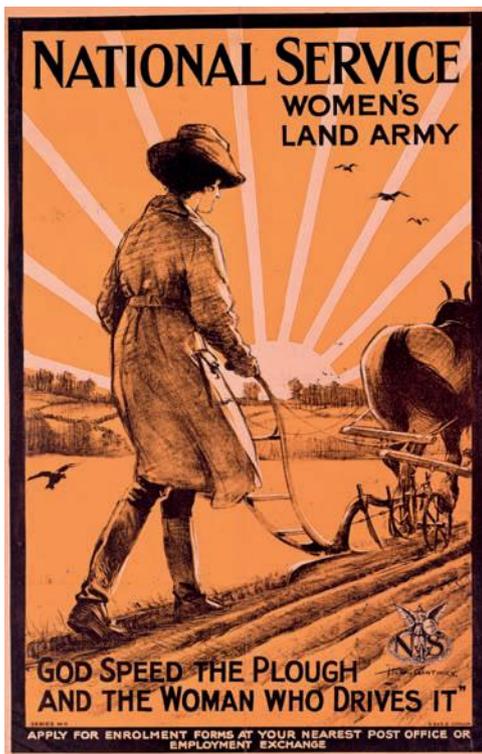
In the countryside, there was a critical shortage of labour on farms at a time when more food needed to be produced. During the war it was difficult to import food. Merchant ships could no longer be relied upon because of the danger of German submarines, and the risk of a ship being sunk by a German U-Boat reached its high point in 1917.

Although the Women’s Land Army was set up formally in 1917, women began replacing men in agricultural work as early as 1915. Women volunteered to work in the country doing agricultural jobs that male farm labourers had done, including the ploughing and threshing of grain crops. They drove tractors, milked cows and goats, and worked in piggeries. Hours were long and the work very hard but food production increased. An important job undertaken by the Women’s Land Army was timber cutting, providing the wood needed to construct the battle trenches. About 250 000 women were working on farms by 1917. The Board of Agriculture issued each woman with a certificate acknowledging her service.

## THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR ON WOMEN

Two million women entered the workforce between 1914 and 1918, raising the percentage of women in the workforce from 24 per cent to 37 per cent. The variety of jobs expanded. The numbers of women belonging to a trade union increased from 357 000 in 1914 to more than a million in 1918.

However, the jobs were gained with the understanding that women were replacing men only for the duration of the war. Their work conditions and their pay were no better as a result of the war – they undertook men’s jobs but for pay rates that were considerably less than the men had earned.



**SOURCE 4.13** Poster for national service in the Women’s Land Army

Despite the increased numbers of women in the workforce, the majority of them were still doing unpaid work at home, and although there was a recognition that women's contribution to the war effort was significant, historians debate whether the underlying ideas about men and women's places in the world had changed all that much.

## *Limited suffrage – Representation of the People Act*

In February 1918, the British Parliament passed the Representation of the People Act. This Act changed who could vote in British elections. All men over the age of 21 were granted the vote. However, suffrage – the right to vote – was not granted to all adult women. In fact, the right to vote was only granted to a small percentage of them. The thousands who worked in dirty, dangerous factories or on the land, or were nurses or ambulance drivers at the front, only received the vote if they had property and were over 30 years of age. The Act therefore was not a democratisation of the British political system. As suffragette Lilian Lenton later recalled: 'Personally, I didn't vote for a long time, because I hadn't either a husband or furniture, although I was over 30.'<sup>4</sup>



**SOURCE 4.14** A woman voting in the 1918 General Election, the first election in which British women could vote.

### RESPONDING TO ENFRANCHISEMENT

#### Jessie Kenney

Suffragette WSPU member, wrote in her diary:

We gained nothing by our patriotism. No money, no lasting position. By Armistice we were tired out, no homes, no jobs, no money, no cause. Forgotten.

Extract from 'Women's Suffrage - Jessie Kenney', © John Simkin, September 1997–June 2013, Spartacus Educational, <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/>

#### Millicent Fawcett

President of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 1918, wrote:

The war revolutionised the industrial position of women - it found them serfs and left them free.

Extract from Joanna Bourke, 'Women on the Home Front in World War One', BBC History, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/>, Last updated 2011-03-03

#### Barbara Caine

Historian, wrote:

Far from demonstrating the possibilities for women to manage both family life and paid employment the war suggested rather that this was possible only during an emergency and that once 'normal life' resumed, the family and its welfare should become the chief concern of women.

Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780–1980*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 182

Three reasons are often given to explain why the government gave women the right to vote. They are:

- 1 The recognition of women's war service. The government wanted to enfranchise all men over the age of 21 but could not ignore women, given their contribution on the home front and at the frontline. It would be hard to defend ignoring women and granting all men the right vote.
- 2 The government wished to prevent the militant acts of violence that had been part of everyday life before the war.
- 3 There had always been a lot of support in the House of Commons for female suffrage and it was simply a matter of timing.

The government's decision was probably influenced by all three of the above reasons. The vote in the House of Commons was 385 in favour of limited female suffrage to 55 against. The vote in the House of Lords was 134 for to 71 against.

One of the reasons for not granting the franchise to all women was that they would have formed a majority of voters due to the loss of men during the war.

### The right to stand for parliament

Also in 1918, the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act was passed, allowing women to stand for election. Seventeen women stood for parliament and one – the Countess of Markievicz, an Irish revolutionary nationalist – was elected but did not take her seat. Lady Nancy Astor was the first woman to sit in parliament after being elected in a by-election.

**TABLE 4.3** Women elected to the House of Commons, 1918–1928

Dates	Name	About
1918	Countess de Markievicz	Did not take up her seat
1919–45	Lady Nancy Astor – Conservative Party	First woman to sit in House of Commons
1922–24	Margaret Wintringham – Liberal Party	Campaigned for equal franchise and equal wage; member of National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC)
1923–24	Dorothy Jewson – Labour Party	WSPU member; pacifist; advocated the voting age of 21 for women in first parliamentary speech; formed Worker's Birth Control Group
1923–29	Mabel Philipson – Labour Party	Former teacher; trade union organiser; pacifist
1923–24; 1926–31	Margaret Bondfield – Labour Party	First female Minister (1924); member of Cabinet (1929)
1923–31	Susan Lawrence – Labour Party	National Federation of Women Workers
1923–28	Katharine Stewart-Murray, Duchess of Atholl – Conservative Party	First woman elected into parliament from Scotland
1923–24	Vera Woodhouse, Lady Terrington – Liberal Party	Supported equal rights to custody of children
1929–31; 1945–70	Jennie Lee, Baroness of Asheridge – Labour Party	First elected to constituency of North Lanarkshire; later to Cannock in Staffordshire
1924–31; 1935–47	Ellen Wilkinson, known as 'Red Ellen' – Labour Party	NUWSS member
1928–29	Hilda Runciman, Viscountess of Doxford – Liberal Party	President of the Women's National Liberal Federation
1929–1931	Lady Cynthia Mosley (nee Curzon) – Labour Party	The daughter of prominent anti-suffragette leader George Curzon and wife of the leader of the British Union of Fascists, Sir Oswald Mosley

## AFTER 1918

The passing of these Acts affected the women's movement. In 1919, the NUWSS was renamed the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC). The organisation worked for another ten years before women were granted political equality with men. This was with the passing of the *Equal Franchise Act 1928*. The NUSEC broadened its aims to include working for legal, economic and social reforms, such as legal equality in the area of child custody, and allowances for working families.

The *Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919* banned any disqualification on the grounds of sex or marriage from the civil service or public office, and allowed women to become lawyers, solicitors and magistrates. They would now be able to serve on juries. While this broadened some opportunities for women, its scope was limited and did not prevent women from being excluded from other areas.

During the 1920s, legislation that women had been demanding since the 19th century was finally passed. This was a positive move, despite the fact that it reinforced the notion of women as mothers in the traditional family. The Acts passed were:

- + *Criminal Law Amendment Act 1922*, which raised the age of consent to 16 years
- + *Married Women's Maintenance Act 1922*, which allowed some maintenance under separation orders
- + *Matrimonial Causes Act 1923*, which allowed wives to divorce on the basis of adultery, something men had been able to do since 1857
- + *Guardianship of Infants Act 1925*, which allowed equal parental rights in custody disputes
- + *Widows, Orphans and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act 1925*, which provided financial support for widows.

## EQUAL FRANCHISE ACT 1928

In 1928, the Equal Franchise Act was finally passed, granting equal voting rights to women. Margaret Bondfield, a Member of Parliament, spoke for many women when she said in the House of Commons:

“ Since I have been able to vote at all I have never felt the same enthusiasm because the vote was the consequence of possessing property rather than the consequence of being a human being ... At last we are established on that equitable footing because we are human beings and part of society as a whole. ”

Margaret Bondfield, speech in the House of Commons, 29 March 1928

## CHANGING ATTITUDES

Two years after the right to vote was achieved, and also after the death of Emmeline Pankhurst – the suffragette leader of the militant Women's Social and Political Union and *bête noir* of the government – Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin unveiled a statue of her very close to the Houses of Parliament, where many of her demonstrations and militant actions had taken place.

In towns and villages all over Great Britain, but especially in London, the suffragettes are remembered on plaques that commemorate an action or event, or mark the former residence of

one or more of them. There are walks dedicated to their work, libraries named after them and books written about them. There are two life-size memorial statues of Muriel Matters in Hastings. There are Suffrage Gardens and Suffrage Walks. During 2013, the centenary of Emily Wilding Davison's death, exhibitions were mounted, plays were performed and novels were published about her life and death. In 1964, the film *Mary Poppins* presented the wife of Mr Banks (the banker) as a suffragette who goes to marches and meetings, and sings a suffragette song based on the original lyrics of 'The March of the Women' by Ethel Smyth – a popular song of the suffragette movement in 1911.

The meaning of the suffrage movement was broader than a single issue. It challenged the place and role of women in society and caused a social and political revolution, as the *Daily Mail* acknowledged after the 1911 Female Suffrage Coronation March.

## *Conclusion*

For the first three decades of the 20th century, the women's movement in Great Britain fought for the right to vote. This was the first step in addressing the lack of political and legal rights of women and it also aimed at achieving other social reforms.

The movement was united in purpose but divided over tactics. The NUWSS believed in protesting peacefully while the WSPU believed that peaceful protests achieved little and the time for direct action had come. This division on tactics split the movement.

More than 1000 suffragists went to prison for their belief in the importance of votes for women. So strong was their determination to achieve the vote, both women and men were prepared to undergo what, even then, was regarded by many as torture – force-feeding. The force-feeding of women was not only extremely painful but left them with health problems for the rest of their lives. This action by the government was their response to the hunger strikes that suffragists undertook as a protest for not being classified as political prisoners but as common criminals.

The question remains as to whether the suffragists' direct action achieved any positive benefits for the cause. Historians disagree on this. Many people were put off by the suffragists' violence, including their own supporters and many of them left the WSPU, disassociating themselves from it. There is agreement that the suffragettes drew attention to their cause during their militant, but non-violent protests, and ensured that they received good press coverage up to about 1911. But when they shifted to more violent tactics many members left their organisation, and those who watched from the sidelines and had been sympathetic to the suffragettes over their prison treatment were dismayed and withdrew their support.

A similar question mark remains over the degree to which women's work on the home front – replacing men who enlisted – and on the frontline as nurses and ambulance drivers contributed to the government softening its attitude and agreeing to grant a limited suffrage to women. Some historians question this but many people at the time did accept the women's contribution to the war effort and rewarded them with a limited suffrage. The women's movement, particularly the National Association for Equal Citizenship, continued its campaign for all women to receive the vote during the 1920s, and achieved success in the Equal Suffrage Act of 1928.

In 1999, *Time* Magazine nominated Emmeline Pankhurst among the top most influential people of the 20th century, an indication of her contribution to the votes for women campaign, despite her support of violence.



## Chapter summary

- + Suffrage societies were united in their aims but increasingly divided by their militant or non-militant methods. The tactics of the non-militant group included tax resistance and civil disobedience campaigns such as the 1911 Census Boycott.
- + From 1912 onwards, the militant suffragettes began a campaign that included violent attacks on property and people. This resulted in them being imprisoned and deliberately treated as common criminals rather than political prisoners.
- + The outbreak of the First World War ended the political campaign of the WSPU, which supported the war effort and encouraged women to serve their country on the home front.
- + When the vote was granted to women in 1918, it was based on an age and property qualification. This did not achieve political equality with men who had the right to vote once they turned 21.
- + In 1928, British women achieved political equality with men.

### Further resources

*Shoulder to Shoulder: A Documentary*, Midge Mackenzie, Penguin, 1975 (History of the militant suffragettes)

*Emily Wilding Davison: The Suffragette Who died for Women's Rights*, Lucy Fisher, Black Toad Publications, England, 2013

*English Feminism, 1780–1980*, Barbara Caine, Oxford University Press, 1997

*The Spectacle of Women, Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–14*, Lisa Tickner, Chatto and Windus, London, 1987

### Weblinks

Weblinks relevant to this chapter can be found at <http://nmh.nelsonnet.com.au/women>.

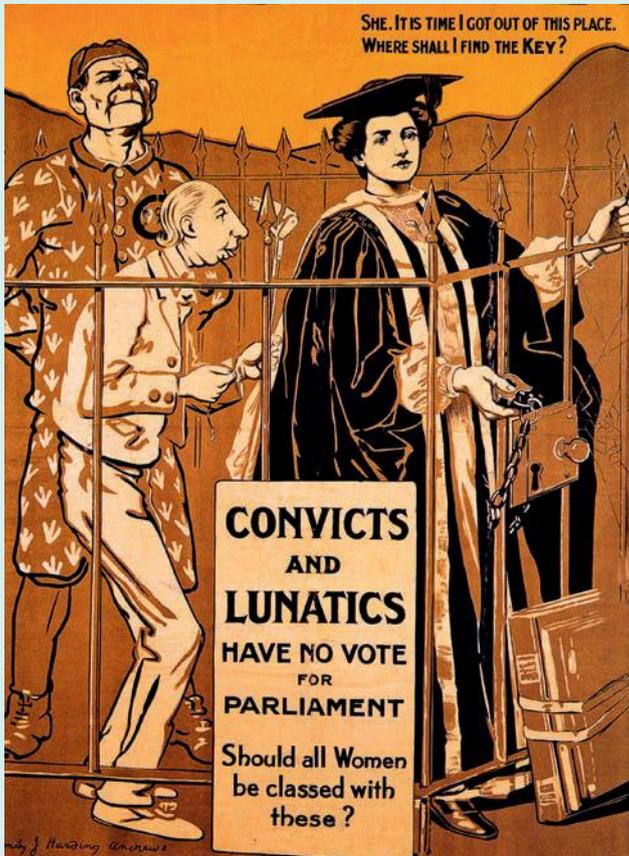
### Endnotes

- 1 HN Brailsford and Henry Nevison quoted in Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, Chatto & Windus: London, 1987, p. 105
- 2 Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1987, p. 119
- 3 Quoted in June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography*, Routledge, London, 2002, p. 357
- 4 *The Listener*, 8 February 1968



## Chapter review activities

- 1 The WSPU lost many of its members as the suffragist campaign progressed over the years. Explain why these losses occurred.
- 2 Describe some of the suffragettes' non-violent forms of protest. How effective were they?
- 3 Why did the suffragettes embark on hunger strikes while in prison?
- 4 The government response to the hunger strikes was to force-feed the suffragettes. The suffragettes' action was a non-violent form of protest. How did the government justify its action? What was its real motive? What other reasons might the government have had to take this action?



Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

**SOURCE 4.15** 'Convicts and Lunatics' poster created by Emily Harding Andrews and published by the Artists' Suffrage League

- 5 Carefully examine this poster and answer the following questions.
  - a Who made it?
  - b Who is the audience?
  - c What is its purpose?
  - d How is the woman dressed? Why?
  - e What is its message?
  - f Is it a reasonable statement?
  - g What effect do you think it had?
- 6
  - a Why did the WSPU change from being a group that took peaceful actions and carried out minor property attacks to one that adopted violent methods of protest such as arson, bombings, cutting telegraph wires and destroying paintings?
  - b Debate in class whether violent action was justified (as the WSPU thought) or not justified.
- 7 Sylvia Pankhurst broke with her mother over the direction of the WSPU and established the East London Federation of Suffragettes with the help of the socialist MP, Keir Hardie. Prepare a brief biography of Sylvia Pankhurst, including her political beliefs and her work in the East End of London.



- 8 Create an annotated photographic essay of the most important women who fought for the right to vote in Great Britain. Give reasons and evidence to support your choices.
- 9 Extreme violence was used by some suffragettes.
  - a Conduct research to find two responses (public/newspaper/political) to the violence. Account for different points of view evident in the responses.
  - b What impact did these attacks have in the short and long term?
- 10 Research the work of the munitionettes – women working in munitions factories during the First World War – and present a multimedia presentation or photographic essay that includes the following:
  - a different types of products made in the factories
  - b materials the women worked with
  - c the process involved
  - d working conditions
  - e potential health risks for women
  - f first-hand experiences.
- 11 In groups, research the accident at the National Shell Filling Factory in Chilwell and prepare a class presentation. Use the following headings:
  - a Cause of the explosion
  - b Pay received by the munitionettes
  - c What the factory manufactured
  - d Number of people employed
  - e How the disaster was handled by the authorities.
- 12 How important do you think women's war work was in terms of achieving the right to vote for all women?
- 13 There is a saying that 'the end justifies the means'. Do you think that the violent methods of the suffragettes were justified? Debate this in class.
- 14 How would the methods and actions of the suffragettes be viewed by people today? They were called militants in their day. What would they be called now?
- 15 Over the past century, many memorials have been created to celebrate the suffragettes and their achievements. Memorials exist in many different forms, including as walks, gardens, statues and museums. Investigate the meaning of these memorials and write a brief paragraph on why people create them.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### *New opportunities: The Second World War and beyond*

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 offered Australian women opportunities that were denied them during the First World War. They were able to contribute to the defence of their country as equal citizens with the men. The government appealed to women's sense of patriotism by encouraging them to seek civilian work, jobs in military organisations, or even munitions work.

Thousands of women entered the workforce, in women's auxiliary defence services or on farms with the Australian Women's Land Army. Working in men's jobs raised the issue of pay rates and access to adequate childcare, and the women's movement lobbied for these.

Young single women, who were the first to be drafted into war work, now had money and sought entertainment, fun and romance when off duty. They argued for the same moral and sexual code for both men and women, but the dangers of venereal disease and fear of promiscuity resulted in the curtailing of women's rights.

The 1943 Women's Charter of Rights was promoted nationally and internationally when leading Australian feminist Jessie Street took it to the founding conference of the United Nations, where she was one of the Australian delegates.

Most women returned to the home and to childbearing after the war. Some were content with this situation, but others resisted it. Publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1949 was a forerunner of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

◀ Three female motorcycle messengers of the National Emergency Services in Australia, during the Second World War, c. 1943. Members of the organisation supplied their own uniforms and vehicles.

#### INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- + What was the significance of the Second World War for Australian women?
- + Was it a temporary experience just for the duration of the war or were their lasting gains for women?
- + Were the 1950s a return to pre-war expectations of women's place?

## *The opportunities of war*

In 1939, Prime Minister RG Menzies declared that Australia was, at war as a consequence of Great Britain being at war with Germany. Many women wanted to contribute to the war effort and Jessie Street wrote to the Minister for the Army stating:

“ The women of the country are as anxious to help in the war effort as the men of the country. In the interests of the defence of the country, the brain-power and general abilities of women should be used as well as the brain-power and abilities of men. ”

Jesse Street, quoted in Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: the history of Australian feminism*, Allen & Unwin, p. 187

Initially many women began with the voluntary work they had been restricted to in the First World War. However, many of them were dissatisfied with these traditionally female, supportive activities and rushed to volunteer for defence work. They saw it as an opportunity for national service. Their enthusiasm is captured in the words of Betty Hayles:

“ Women can fight just as well in tanks and armoured cars. We are going to get hold of service rifles and machine guns, too, though I can't tell you how just yet. We will do bayonet exercises and train until we are good enough to teach the men about machine guns. ”

Betty Hayles, quoted in Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation 1788–1900*, Mcphee Gribble Publications, 1994, p. 255



### 1939–1945

- 1939** Britain declared war on Germany  
2nd Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) formed  
Volunteers called to register  
Women's Emergency Signal Corps set up by Florence McKenzie as a volunteer organisation
- 1940** Australian Comforts Fund established  
Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service (RAAFNS) formed
- 1941** Women's services formed: Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS), Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS), and the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF)  
Prime Minister Curtin appealed to the United States for help
- 1942** Japanese air raid on Darwin; first of 64 bombing raids on the city
- 1943** Australian Women's Charter Conference, also known as the Australian Women's Conference for Victory in War and Victory in Peace
- 1944** Government sent members of the AWAS to New Guinea to release men for the fighting area
- 1945** Germany surrendered on 8 May  
United Nations founded; United Nations (UN) Charter written and accepted by 51 countries, with Australian feminist Jessie Street as part of the Australian delegation
- 1948** HV Evatt elected President of the UN General Assembly; Civilian Widows Association led by Ivy Kent

Women began to organise, and, according to Jessie Street, by 1941, the United Associations of Women were training instructors, using two rifle ranges and flat roofs for drilling. Hundreds of women's defence organisations sprang up across Australia, including the Women's Transport Corps and the Women's Flying Club.

At first the government showed no enthusiasm for allowing women into the workforce. However, when faced with a shortage of men in the middle of 1941, it reluctantly agreed to allow women's auxiliaries into the armed forces. Initially it established the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF).

When Japan entered the war and Australians feared they would be invaded, the demand for **munitions** and other war goods increased. Men needed to be released from non-combat jobs on the home front in order to join the fighting troops. It became clear then that women would be required to join the workforce.

#### munitions

Military weapons, ammunition, equipment and stores

After 1942, the slogans 'total war' and 'all in' were used by the government. It also introduced widespread controls and regulations over the population. One aspect of this was the mobilisation of women into the paid workforce. Brightly coloured posters were produced to appeal to women's sense of patriotism and to encourage them to sign up for the services and for civilian work. encourage women to sign up for both the services and for civilian work. As the war progressed new employment opportunities opened for women in manufacturing munitions and military equipment. A new organisation, the inappropriately named the Directorate of Manpower, was set up to control employment during the war.



Orphan work – Image supplier unknown

**SOURCE 5.1** Poster to encourage women to join the National Service

### 'Help win the war ... ME?'

Carefully examine this poster and answer the following questions:

#### Questions

- 1 What was the context in which this poster was created?
- 2 Who is the audience for this poster?
- 3 What is the purpose of the text?
- 4 How has the message been constructed? Consider the language used, the size of the font the scene that has been set up and the narrator.
- 5 What emotion is the creator appealing to?
- 6 How effective is the poster? Why?

## Directorate of Manpower

The Directorate of Manpower was a government organisation established in 1942 and responsible for providing workers for jobs that were identified as high priority. It was responsible for recruitment into active service and into important war industries, and for encouraging women into the workforce. It issued identity cards to all Australian adults and conscripted unemployed men and single or divorced women to work. Children of 14 and 15 were required to register with the Directorate of Manpower, later renamed Commission of Manpower.

## NEW WORK OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

New work opportunities opened up for women during the Second World War, in both civilian and military organisations. Thousands joined the three new women's military services:

- + the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF)
- + the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS)
- + the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS).

Two new nursing services were established: the Royal Australian Naval Nursing Service (RANNS) and the Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service (RAAFNS).

Between 1939 and 1943, the number of working women soared, although it is difficult to find precise figures. According to historian Anne Summers, there was an increase of 35 per cent – from 644 000 in 1939 to more than 855 000 by December 1944.

### Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force

The Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) was founded in March 1941 when the women's lobby received support from the Chief of Air Staff, who wanted Air Force men to be released from non-combat roles for service overseas. The initial opposition to the proposal was soon overcome.

Claire Stevenson was appointed director in June 1941 and was one of the most significant women in the history of the air force. Before taking up her position in the WAAAF, she had been an executive with the Berlei Company in London, where she trained staff. The WAAAF grew to be the largest female defence service in the Second World War, with about 27 000 women enlisting between 1941 and 1946.

At first, the women in the WAAAF worked in communications, as wireless and teleprinter operators. After the bombing of Darwin, their roles expanded considerably to include radar scanning, signalling, radiotelephone operations, parachute packing and aircraft maintenance. Jobs in transport meant driving oil tankers and acting as drivers for senior officers. One unusual job was that of weather forecasting, in advanced operational areas such as RAAF bases close to combat zones. Women were paid two-thirds of the RAAF male rate for equivalent positions.

## Women's Royal Australian Navy Service

The Women's Royal Australian Navy Service (WRANS) was formed in 1941 when the Royal Australian Navy experienced a shortage of telegraphists. As the war in the Pacific intensified, requiring more men, the government granted permission for the formation of the Women's Royal Australian Navy. More than 3000 women had served with the WRANS by the end of the war. Gradually positions taken by women extended beyond telegraphists to coders, wireless transmitters, signallers, drivers and cooks.

## Australian Women's Army Service

In August 1941, the government formed the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS), thereby releasing men for the fighting units. It was the largest of the women's services and part of the army, unlike the WAAAF which was an auxiliary force. More than 24 000 women served in the AWAS during the war years, including some who were sent overseas.

At first, women worked in a range of traditional female jobs, such as cooks, clerks and typists, as well as motor transport drivers; but gradually they moved into specialist jobs in signals and ordnance work. Some women served with Royal Australian Artillery formations on searchlight, coastal defence and anti-aircraft batteries. Others joined the Australian Corps of Signals. In 1945, the government allowed 500 AWAS women to serve in New Guinea, the only non-medical women's service to do so.



Australian War Memorial/139779

**SOURCE 5.2** WAAAF women cleaning and repairing the engine of an RAAF aircraft

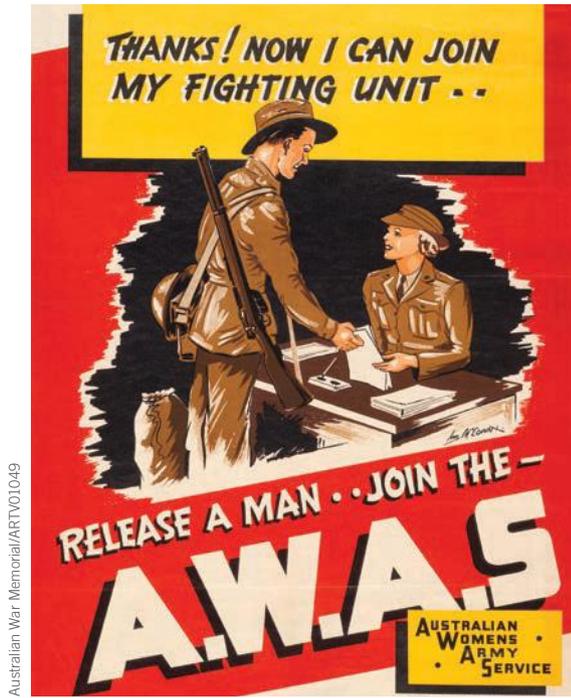


Australian War Memorial/100566

**SOURCE 5.3** Women working as signallers during the Second World War, as part of the Australian Women's Army Service

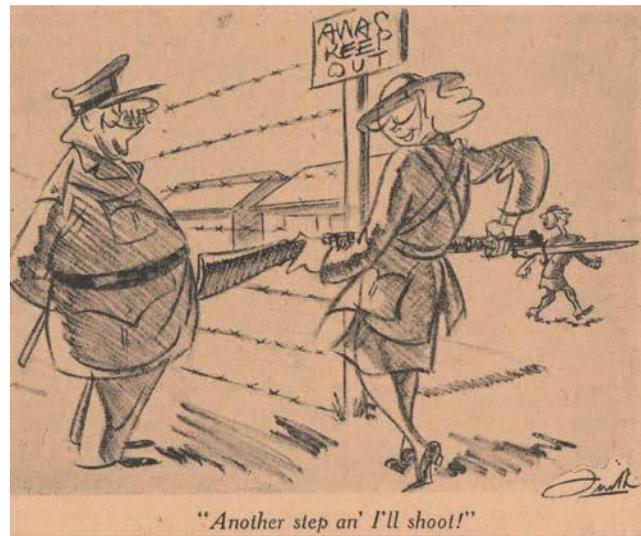
## Recruiting women

Although the government wanted women to join the services there was some opposition from men. Sources 5.4 and 5.5 highlight these two competing attitudes.



Australian War Memorial/ARTV01049

**SOURCE 5.4** A recruiting poster for the AWAS Anti-Aircraft Defence Unit



National Library of Australia/ctc.10453269

**SOURCE 5.5** A cartoon from *The Bulletin*, 28 June 1944

### Questions

- 1 Explain the context of the cartoon in Source 5.5.
- 2 Who is the intended audience?
- 3 What is the message being conveyed by the cartoon and for what purpose? (Consider the woman's stance, her gun and the notice on the fence.)
- 4 Does the date of the cartoon indicate an underlying anxiety about a changing world? Why might that be the case? What sorts of changes had taken place that might threaten the pre-war social conventions?
- 5 Compare Sources 5.4 and 5.5. Which image conveys the message most effectively?

## CIVILIAN WORK

In contrast to the First World War, Australian society became mobilised for the war effort, especially after Japan entered the war in 1942. The first bombing of Darwin made it clear that Australians at home had to contribute to the massive effort required to produce armaments, food and clothing for the men fighting at the front. At the same time, jobs on the land and in factories, schools, retail, transport and the public service – jobs that had been vacated by men – needed to be filled.

This was a new situation. By necessity, women would have to fill the vacant jobs. In contrast to the First World War, the government actively recruited women into work and into men's jobs.

When the need for more labour increased, women were conscripted into essential industries, the Australian Land Army and munitions factories. Volunteer organisations such as the Red Cross and the Australian Comforts Fund continued to raise money and provide extras badly needed for men serving overseas. They also provided help to families. But from 1942 the focus was on getting women into the workforce as quickly as possible.

## The Australian Women's Land Army

The Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA) was established in 1942 and was modelled on the British Women's Land Army. Many men had enlisted from rural areas and as a result there was a labour shortage on farms.

Women who were recruited into the Women's Land Army took up a variety of tasks, including the heavy manual labour usually done by men as well as fruit growing and pig, sheep and poultry farming. There was some resistance from farmers and farm workers to these young women, who were mostly from the city, but they gradually won respect for their hard work. Despite the word 'army' being in the title, this was a civilian and non-military service under the control of the Directorate of Manpower. By 1944, the AWLA had about 3000 members. Their pay was a lot less than the male rate for the same job, and they received none of the benefits given to those in military service, such as pensions, deferred pay and bonuses.



Australian War Memorial/014929

**SOURCE 5.6** Australian Women's Land Army members assisting in the war effort by harvesting large crops of vegetables, which were being canned for the troops. The women shown in the photo were paid much less than men doing the same job. It took until 1997 for them to be given the Civilian Service Medal.

### Optical munitions workers

A good example of women working in men's jobs during the Second World War was in optical munitions in Tasmania. As the men enlisted, laboratories and factories took on female workers to replace them. Optical munitions involved the production of submarine and tank periscopes, range finders, a range of telescopes for different purposes such as signalling, and telescopic rifle sights. Some of the jobs the women took on were:

- + grinding lenses
- + undertaking measurements of refractive indices, prism angles and focal lengths
- + doing calculations of lens designs using optical ray tracing
- + testing optical components
- + reconditioning binoculars.

Female optical workers became the first equal pay case before the Women's Employment Board (WEB).

## THE QUESTION OF EQUAL PAY

In 1941, John Curtin became prime minister of Australia. He faced the problem of the pay rate for women working in men's jobs during the war on lower wages than men. The Australian

Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the metal and munitions unions called for women to be paid the same wage as men. They feared that a lower wage level for women during the war could threaten their own jobs and rate of pay when the war was over.



## STRUGGLE FOR EQUAL PAY CONTINUES

1938	First International Conference on Equal Pay
1940	Conference on Women and Children in Industry in Wartime
1942	Women granted 75 per cent of male rate of pay Women's Employment Board (WEB) established during the Second World War; women replacing men in male jobs received 90 per cent of male rate
1951	Federal post-war basic wage inquiry established to reinstitute the 57 per cent wage rate for women

### Childcare during wartime

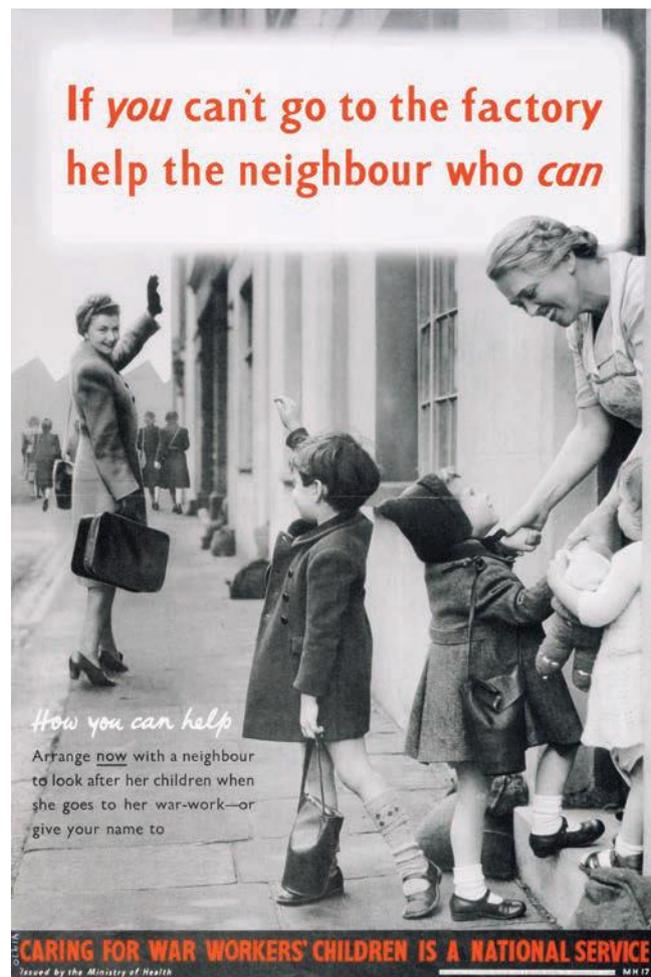
Childcare was an issue for women when they joined the workforce. Childcare centres were few. This poster was created by the Ministry of Health.

Carefully examine the image and words of the poster. Consider how the children and adults are represented. Answer the following questions:

#### Questions

- 1 What is the historical context?
- 2 What is the purpose of the poster?
- 3 How would you describe the scene created?
- 4 How is the message conveyed?
- 5 How realistic is the picture that is created?
- 6 How effective is the poster in encouraging private child carers?
- 7 Why weren't there childcare centres that women could use when they worked?

**SOURCE 5.7** A poster issued by the Ministry of Health during the Second World War, encouraging women not working in factories to care for the children of those who are.



Australian War Memorial/ARTV01970

## Women's Employment Board

In response, in 1942 the government established a special wage fixing tribunal – the Women's Employment Board (WEB) – to decide on rates of pay for women doing men's jobs. The Board was able to award women pay rates of between 60 and 100 per cent of men's rates, depending on the job.

According to historian Beverley Symons, as many as 80 000 women – mostly working in the munitions, metal and aircraft industries – benefited from the WEB, receiving 90 per cent of the male rate. This rate applied to 9 per cent of the female workforce at its wartime peak.

The effectiveness of the WEB was reduced due to opposition from employers who feared the end of cheap female labour after the war.

## CHILDCARE

The question of childcare arose when the government wanted women to undertake war work. Childcare affected war production and came to be seen as one of the causes of absenteeism. There was conflict for married women having the primary care of their children in the private sphere while working full-time in the public sphere. Government research during the war years showed that almost one-third of women's absence from work was a result of domestic responsibilities combined with the demands of work.

One woman recalled the difficulty for her in 1942.

“ But there was nothing being done about child care. The Sydney Day Nursery Association had a few centres in that period, but the attitude then was that they were for women who were forced to go to work because they were deserted wives, or widows, or had a no-good drunken husband. It was more regarded as a charity than you might want to be part of the workforce, or even have a rest from your children. ”

Quoted in 'Gender Relations' in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans, *Australia, Domination and Negotiation*, Harcourt Australia, 1999, p. 389

A husband could look after the children if his wife worked an afternoon shift, but not if he was away fighting. Some women made arrangements with neighbours or friends. Lobby groups formed, and in January 1943 a Child Care and the War Conference was attended by 150 organisations – from conservative to radical groups. Simultaneously the government allocated £25 000 for childcare.

The money was only intended to subsidise and extend existing voluntary centres while the war continued. It was not intended to introduce ongoing childcare centres as was the case in Britain and the United States. The government had no plans for women's economic independence and wanted childcare to go back to the private sphere after the war.

The women's movement continued to lobby for better childcare. The Women's Charter, produced later in 1943, as an outcome of the Australian Women's Conference of Victory in War and Victory in Peace, included childcare as one of women's rights.

## FEMININITY AND SEXUALITY

“ In the WAAAF camp there were 24 of us in a hut and we had really good fun, especially just before lights out. We were young – I was only nineteen. We worked hard during the day. We went to a lot of dances at that time. I remember getting into trouble after another girl and I got caught sneaking out one night. We walked from Laverton to Williamstown just to get to that dance. ”

Terry Howson, interview with author

Young women in particular were economically and socially independent. These young women went to the new American-style dance halls, such as the ‘Trocadero’ in Sydney, where they danced the Jive and Jitterbug to a full orchestra. They were seeking adventure, romance and glamour, and the advertisements, magazines and films of the late 1930s and early 1940s suggested that it was their right to do so. A new femininity had evolved and women had become sexualised. The conceptual change was from women as mothers to women as wives and lovers.

Despite any personal opinions older feminists held about the young women’s sexual behaviour, they fought to ensure that women were not blamed for causing or perpetrating venereal disease. They wanted to protect women’s civil liberties and keep them out of gaol-based hospitals (known as ‘lock hospitals’) as punishment for contracting a sexually transmissible disease (STD).

Conservative society regarded this younger generation of women as responsible for the social chaos of the war. When United States servicemen arrived in their thousands, the government became even more concerned and tried to stop women going out with the Americans. In 1942, the government banned the advertising of contraceptives in an attempt to prevent the spread of venereal disease. Church groups put on entertainment and advocated early marriage.



Australian War Memorial/P00561\_005

**SOURCE 5.8** ‘Overpaid, oversexed and over here’. When US servicemen arrived in Australia, the government became increasingly concerned, even attempting to stop Australian women going out with them.

## 'WOMEN FOR CANBERRA' MOVEMENT

The number of women working during the war highlighted the lack of them in parliament and in public life. This issue was taken up in 1942 at the celebration of the 40th anniversary of women gaining the right to vote in New South Wales, organised by the United Associations of Women. Invitations to the celebration carried a comment about the visibility of women in employment, in industries and in the defence services compared with the lack of even one woman in the federal parliament. Not one woman had been elected to either house of parliament.

The campaign known as Women for Canberra began the following year as the next federal election approached. Nineteen women stood for the 1943 election and two of them, Enid Lyons and Dorothy Tangney, were elected. Both of them were endorsed by a political party. Enid Lyons was elected as a United Australia Party candidate and Dorothy Tangney as a Labor Senate candidate.

As the war progressed, the government started to plan for the needs of Australians in a post-war society. The women's movement, seeing an opportunity to influence the outcome of these plans, organised a conference and developed a Women's Charter.

## THE 'AUSTRALIAN WOMAN'S CHARTER' OF 1943

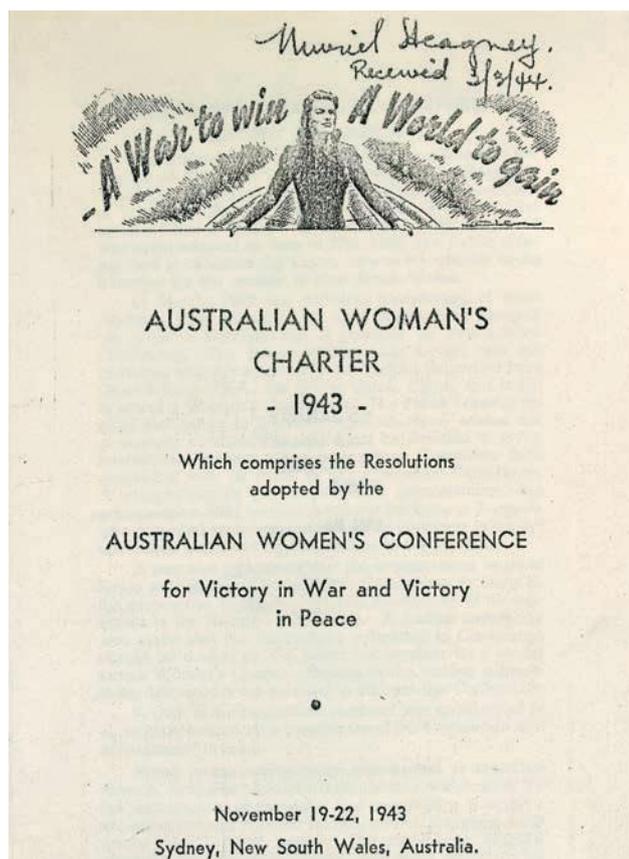
'A War to win, A World to gain' was the motto of the 1943 Australian Women's Conference for Victory in War and Victory in Peace. This motto suggested the women's rights movement was focused both on the present and the future: women working for the war effort and also women's interests in the future post-war period. This latter focus was particularly important when the government began making plans for post-war Australia and set up the Department of Post-war Reconstruction. The purpose of this new department was to plan for the transition from war to peace.

Jessie Street, as president of United Associations of Women, organised the conference. Women wanted to ensure that the government's plans took account of their needs. The outcome was a Women's Charter.

About 90 women's organisations from around Australia sent delegates to the conference and it was one of the largest and most representative women's conferences held until that time. Delegates came from trade unions, religious organisations, political parties and philanthropic organisations.

The following list of attendees is an indication of the diversity of organisations taking part in the conference:

- + Housewives Association
- + Watson Labor Women's Auxiliary



**SOURCE 5.9** Title page of Muriel Heagney's copy of the Australian Woman's Charter, 1943

- + Teachers Federation
- + Hairdressers Union
- + Presbyterian Women's Federation
- + Council for Women in War Work
- + Munitions Workers Union
- + Jewish Red Cross Society
- + Communist Party
- + League for the Protection of Aboriginal Women.

The conference was one of the most unified events of the feminist movement, which was especially surprising as the organisations were from across the political spectrum. This may have been partly due to the war situation. The Second World War did not divide the women's movement as had the First World War.

The conference discussed a range of issues with attention to the particular needs of rural and Aboriginal women. Specific issues included women's rights to:

- + paid work
- + equal pay
- + equal citizenship
- + adequate housing and childcare
- + financial allowances for mothers and homemakers.

The Charter contained 28 resolutions. One of the first concerned women in public life. It stated the belief that women have a special contribution to make to public life 'as citizens of a democratic community and in order that their capabilities may be developed and utilised for the national good'.

The resolution recommended that women should be encouraged to stand for all elected legislative bodies, and be appointed to diplomatic posts, to boards of management and commissions, and to positions of public authority.

Resolution 24 called for federal control over all aspects of Aboriginal welfare. A special resolution was included concerning racial persecution. It urged all women to work to 'eliminate all colour prejudice from the social life of the nation'.

More than 20000 copies of the Charter were published after the conference and distributed nationally and internationally. This was to be one of the key feminist manifestos of the 20th century. It also provided an agenda for post-war society.

The women did not view this Charter as simply for Australia, but conceived of it as part of the international women's movement. They envisaged sending copies of it to all women's organisations in Australia and in other countries, calling for an international conference to discuss its contents.

In March 1944, Jessie Street and other committee members presented the Charter to Attorney-General HV Evatt, who was deputising for the prime minister. As a result of this meeting, Jessie Street received an invitation to join the Australian delegation to the conference that founded the United Nations. At this conference in San Fransisco, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## After the war

The war ended in 1945. When the excitement and celebrations were over the question remained about what lay ahead for women in the workforce. The majority of women fulfilled the expectation that they would return to their domestic sphere. The Australian Women's Land Army disbanded at the end of 1945. The women's defence services were disbanded in 1947. There were some women, though, who were reluctant to give up their jobs and financial independence and remained in employment with their employers' agreement.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WAR FOR WOMEN

Despite the fact that the war brought about personal changes for women, most historians view their wartime experience as limited in terms of achieving a lasting, significant effect. Although many more women entered the workforce – as shown in the table – the majority (about two-thirds) remained in their traditional sphere at home. The government had always made it clear that women were expected to return to their homes after the war. Most did so.

The figures in Table 1.1 are estimates of women's participation rates in the paid workforce.

**TABLE 1.1** Women's participation rates in the paid workforce between 1920 and 1955

Year	Percentage
1920	25.8
1930	27.3
1940	29.9
1945	34.4
1950	31.5

Adapted from Barbara Caine, *Oxford Australian Feminism: A Companion*, 1998, p. 360

### HISTORIANS, WOMEN AND THE WAR

Fundamentally, the relations of power between men and women during the Second World War were breached but never transformed. The ideology of women's central vocation in the private arena, with more limited engagement in the public sphere, was not challenged and reformulated – just modified.

Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, Harcourt Australia, 1999, p. 395

#### Questions

Discuss the following in class:

- 1 What were the power relations between men and women before the war?
- 2 What do the authors mean by the word 'breached'?
- 3 In what ways did women 'breach' the power relations? Give examples.
- 4 What was 'women's central vocation'?
- 5 What evidence is there that the power relations between men and women didn't change over the course of the war?
- 6 What evidence is there that in society today the power relations between the sexes has changed?



## Jessie Street (1889–1970)

There can be no real freedom for any man or woman unless they are economically independent.

Jessie Street

Jessie Street was one of Australia's leading feminists and a major social reformer until her death in 1970. She was a strong and active supporter of Aboriginal rights.

She worked tirelessly for international cooperation and peace, and for women's rights nationally and internationally.

Jessie was born in India, schooled in England and went to university in Sydney where she met her future husband with whom she would have four children.

One of her passionate, long-held beliefs was in the importance of women's economic independence and autonomy. She identified the cause of women's dependence as man-made laws. In 1932, in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, she wrote, 'It is in Parliament where only men sit that these laws are made and maintained'.

She argued for:

- + the professionalisation of domestic service
- + an allowance for mothers
- + women's right to work
- + equal pay
- + an equal moral standard for men and women
- + protection of girls and women against venereal disease.

She spent more than 50 years working through many women's organisations to address women's rights, and tackling social issues that affected women, including Aboriginal women. Aboriginal activist Faith Bandler said, 'If it were not for Jessie Street, we would never have had the 1967 referendum'.

Jessie Street joined the Australian Labor Party at the beginning of the Second World War.

One of the most important organisations Street was involved in was the United Associations of Women Workers, which became the United Associations of Women in 1937. Its aim was to achieve 'a real equality of status, opportunities and liberties for men and women'. She became president in 1930. In the 1940s she was instrumental in organising the Australian Women's Conference for Victory in War and Victory in Peace, which produced the 1943 Australian Woman's Charter.



National Library of Australia/nla.ms-ms2683-11-5x-s1-v

*continued*

*continued*

In 1945, Jessie Street was the sole Australian woman delegate to attend the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco. She worked intensively with other women to ensure that women's rights were included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in establishing the UN's Commission for the Status of Women. In the 1950s, she worked for the World Peace Council in London. On her return to Australia she worked for the 1967 referendum on Aboriginal rights.

Jessie Street died in Sydney in 1970.

## THE FOUNDING OF THE UNITED NATIONS

As early as 1942, the main Western Allies were talking about setting up a new international organisation to prevent future wars. Franklin D Roosevelt first used the term 'United Nations' in 1942. Between 1942 and 1945, there was much discussion about this new global organisation, and in 1945 an international conference was held in San Francisco that would lay its foundations.

In 1945, 66 Australian women's organisations signed a cable to the Secretary-General of the United Nations conference that read:

*Request United Nations International Conference Incorporate Into Post-War Plans The Democratic Principle of Equality Of Status, Opportunity, And Reward For Men and Women, And Elimination Of All Discriminations Based On Sex.*

Jessie Street worked with other women at the conference to ensure that equal rights for men and women would be incorporated into the Charter. No such clause appeared in its original version. They also lobbied hard to have a resolution recommending that a Special Commission on the status of women be established. Here, they were successful, and one of the Commission's first achievements was to ensure that gender neutral language was used in the first draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



**SOURCE 5.10** The Australian delegation to the conference that founded the United Nations, held in San Francisco, from April to June 1945. Frank Forde, Deputy Prime Minister, and HV 'Doc' Evatt, Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs, are seated centre and on the right respectively. Jessie Street, president of the United Associations of Women (UAW), is the only female delegate.

National Library of Australia/Group portrait of Australian delegates to the United Nations conference in San Francisco, 1945] [picture], an23236247



## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS

- 1942 Declaration by United Nations – this document contained the first official use of the term ‘United Nations’, as suggested by President Roosevelt
- 1945 Fifty countries attended the San Francisco conference to draw up the United Nations Charter; the aim of the organisation was to prevent further devastation and loss of life as had occurred in the Second World War; the Charter was signed on 26 June 1945
- 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN’s 58 member countries
- 1951 International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted the Equal Remuneration Convention 1951, which mandated equal pay for equal value. Australia was a signatory to this Convention
- 1953 Convention on the Political Rights of Women (UN)

### Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. It defines the political rights that are taken for granted in most democratic nations.

#### PREAMBLE

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts that have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

**Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS** as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.

#### Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

#### Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

*continued*

*continued*

### **Article 3**

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

### **Article 4**

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

### **Article 5**

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

### **Article 6**

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

### **Article 7**

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

### **Article 16**

- (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
- (2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
- (3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

### **Article 17**

- (1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
- (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

### **Article 19**

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

### **Article 20**

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
- (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

### **Article 21**

- (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
- (2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
- (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections that shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

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### **Question**

- 1 Why is it of significance that the United Nations included rights for women?
-

## SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AND THE SECOND SEX

In 1944, during the war, French women at last received the right to vote. They voted for the first time in 1945, nearly half a century after Australian women had won the right to vote in 1902. The provisional government of General de Gaulle proclaimed voting rights for women by decree, as the republican Senate refused to pass the legislation four times during the inter-war years after the Chamber of Deputies had approved it.

The preamble to the 1946 French Constitution included – among the basic principles of the republic – that ‘the law guarantees women equal rights to those of men in all spheres’. Women were given full citizenship rights, including the right to vote.

In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), a French intellectual, former teacher and writer, published her feminist treatise called *The Second Sex*. It was a history of women’s oppression over time. It became a feminist classic and the starting point of what is known as ‘second wave’ feminism.

One of de Beauvoir’s fundamental ideas was that ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’, meaning that girls are formed by the culture as they grow up. They are trained to be women. Culture provides expectations about what is feminine, as distinct from what is human, which is equated with what is male. De Beauvoir asserted that women could free themselves through their individual decisions and through collective action.

She believed that the right to vote would not make a difference to women if they did not have, for example, adequate health, education and money.

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR



Getty Images/Hulton Archive

• *One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.*

• *Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female – whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male.*

• *This has always been a man’s world, and none of the reasons that have been offered in explanation have seemed adequate.*

• *... being a woman is not a natural fact. It’s the result of a certain history. There is no biological or psychological destiny that defines a woman as such ... Baby girls are manufactured to become women.*

## The influence of *The Second Sex*

Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of motherhood and female sexuality shocked readers at the time because talking about women's sexuality and identity was considered scandalous. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s – particularly in America – that *The Second Sex* began to inspire feminists. Her statement 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' created controversy, shifting discussions about women's rights towards the cultural construction of women.

Many feminists from the 1960s onwards claimed that they were influenced by *The Second Sex*. Americans Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*) and Kate Millett (*Sexual Politics*) as well as Australian Germaine Greer (*The Female Eunuch*) all acknowledged de Beauvoir's influence. Betty Friedan dedicated her book to Simone de Beauvoir. Many women later claimed that *The Second Sex* changed their lives because it shifted the way they looked at the world. They began to observe and critique the cultural practices that formed and constrained women. Others were fiercely critical of *The Second Sex*.

## Conclusion

The Second World War presented women with new opportunities in employment and ways in which to serve their country as citizens. They took them up with alacrity, rushing to set up new organisations to defend their country, even before the government had mobilised them. The government was initially reluctant to take the women seriously.

When Australia was perceived to be under threat, the government realised that women would be needed to replace men in their jobs, and to be employed in war industries such as munitions factories. Under these circumstances, the government encouraged, and then conscripted, women to cross into the public sphere of the world of work. But it was, as the prime minister made clear, 'only for the duration' of the war.

Indicators of the government's intention that the public–private spheres of men and women should not be breached permanently lay in its attitude to equal pay and childcare. Despite successfully filling so-called 'men's jobs' – often involving heavy manual labour on farms, in munitions or heavy metal factories – apart from a few exceptions, women were never awarded the same rate of pay as men. The Women's Employment Board expressed the view that women could never reach the productivity level of men.

Women were often considered to have high rates of absenteeism in the workforce. However, the government did not provide adequate childcare for women with children and they had to make their own arrangements. The core of this problem was the fact that childcare was still seen as belonging in the private sphere, rather than in the public sphere where it might lead to women's right to economic autonomy.

Despite the difficulties of working in a wartime economy, the women's movement continued to work and lobby for women's rights, developing a significant charter of women's rights in

1943. The international focus of the women's movement in Australia continued through the war years and into post-war agreements. Through one of the leading Australian feminists – Jessie Street – women's organisations lobbied the United Nations successfully to ensure the rights of women were an integral part of its work and central to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In achieving this, a framework and reference point was established for future work in gaining women's rights.

## Chapter summary

- + The Second World War opened up opportunities to women to work in a variety of jobs that were previously unavailable to them. Some of the jobs were traditionally seen as men's jobs.
- + In contrast to the First World War, the government needed women in the workforce to produce munitions and on the farms to produce food.
- + Women were able to join the defence services for the first time, performing a national service.
- + Women's wages were raised significantly during the war (some to 90 per cent of men's wages for the same job) but rarely to the same rate.
- + During the war years, young women with a new idea of femininity looked for romance and glamour, causing anxiety in some sections of society.
- + Women's work opportunities during the war were only 'for the duration'. Men were promised that after the war women would give up their jobs and return to the home – their proper sphere.
- + The women's movement remained active during the war, hosting a women's conference to prepare for post-war demands. They developed the Australian Woman's Charter – a charter of women's rights.
- + The women's movement continued working for equal pay and childcare throughout the war.
- + The women's movement and one of its leaders – Jessie Street – worked with women internationally to enormous effect in the founding of the United Nations after the war.
- + The 1949 publication of *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (translated into English in 1953) presented a new analysis of the history of women's oppression. *The Second Sex* is now regarded as a feminist classic.

### Weblinks

Weblinks relevant to this chapter can be found at <http://nmh.nelsonnet.com.au/women>.



## Chapter review activities

- 1 What was the response of women to the outbreak of the war? Provide examples.
- 2 What changed the government's attitude to women joining the defence services as well as the civilian workforce?
- 3 In what ways did women's roles change because of the government's 'all in' motto and its changes to regulations?
- 4 Florence McKenzie, Australia's first female electrical engineer, set up the Women's Emergency Signal Corps in 1930 to prepare for the war. Prepare a brief biography of her, covering the following:
  - a What did she hope to achieve when she set up the Women's Emergency Signal Corps?
  - b How did her aims change?
  - c What types of training did she provide? What contribution did she make to the war effort?
- 5 The Australian Woman's Charter has been called a landmark feminist document of the 20th century. Write a short report describing the Charter and what was so significant about it.
- 6 Imagine that you are one of the women who has worked during the war as a tram driver. You are single. You have enjoyed the job and the money that supported you. Your employer has told you that a returned soldier is going to be employed instead. Write a letter to your sister who is nursing, telling her about the interview with your boss and your reactions.

7

To all of us it was an amazing revelation to see women who were yesterday working in beauty salons or who had not previously worked outside their own homes or who had come from the counters of retail stores or a dozen other industries rendered superfluous [not needed] by war, who now stood behind mighty machines operating them with a skill and mastery that was little short of marvelous.

Judge Foster, Chairman of the Women's Employment Board (WEB), quoted in 'Lipsticks, Bullets and Bombs, Women at Work in World War Two', *ozhistory bytes*, Issue 3, The National Centre for History Education, © Commonwealth of Australia 2002

This quote suggests Judge Foster was genuinely surprised and overwhelmed at the skill and competency of the women. What does that indicate about the general attitude towards women's work capabilities?

- 8 A number of interviews with members of the Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA) are available online. Find and listen to the recordings of the former Land Army women; or read the transcripts of the interviews.
  - a Why did the women volunteer?
  - b Describe their living conditions. What are palliasses?
  - c Describe the range of jobs the women undertook in the AWLA.
  - d How significant was the role of the AWLA for the war effort?
  - e What reasons would you give to support a case for giving women in the AWLA the same benefits as the women who joined the defence services?
  - f Select one of the speakers who served in the AWLA. Construct a multimedia presentation about her work, hours of work, living conditions and experiences. Where possible use her own words.
  - g Imagine you are one of the AWLA women working with flax. Write a letter to your family telling them about the work you do and why it is important.
  - h At the end of the war, the women who worked in the AWLA received no recognition for their contribution to the war effort. They received no medals, benefits, pensions or medical assistance, as the women in the defence services did. Nor could they march on ANZAC Day. Consider reasons why the government overlooked them and write a letter of protest.
- 9 What was Jessie Street's role at the United Nations and what did she achieve for women in her time there?
- 10 Read the United Nations document study carefully. Outline the rights it sets out for women. Evaluate the importance of the document for women.
- 11 Discuss in class Simone de Beauvoir's idea that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman'. What did she mean by that statement? Do you agree with her? Provide evidence to support your argument.

- 12 a Examine the poster in Source 5.11 carefully, looking at the text and the six women.  
 b Write a half-page analysis of the way in which the message has been conveyed. Think about who the women represent and how they are presented.



**SOURCE 5.11** This poster, created by Maurice Bramley, is an example of the many recruitment posters the Australian Government produced during the Second World War. It was created in 1943 when the need for women to join the workforce was critical. It contains many elements to convey this message. In 1991, this image was used on an Australian stamp to commemorate ANZAC Day.

- 13 Design a poster illustrating the jobs women did during the war.



FREE  
CHILD-CARE  
ABORTION ON  
DEMAND.

A WOMAN'S BODY  
IS NOT  
STATE OR CHURCH  
PROPERTY

WOULD YOU SUPPORT  
ME IF I WAS YOU TAKE  
ABORTION 4  
1975

Fairfax Syndication/Berry

## CHAPTER SIX

### *A new militancy*

After the war most women returned to the domestic sphere, got married and gave birth to the children who would become the ‘baby boomer’ generation. Domesticity and the new ‘housewife’ image dominated women’s magazines, accompanied by advertisements for new domestic technologies. Following the privations of the war, a new consumerism was encouraged. However, domesticity was not enough for many of the women who had actively participated in the war effort.

Many of the ideas and values of the 1950s were challenged during the 1960s and women began to return to the public sphere. In a decade of political and social turmoil both internationally and in Australia, students and others protested against racism, conscription and the Vietnam War. The emerging counter-culture movements also rejected the socially conservative values of the 1950s.

In this changing social and cultural environment a new version of the women’s movement emerged. A new, radical organisation called the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) was formed in 1969. Members were militant and fought for civil rights as well as personal and social liberation.

This chapter focuses first on the international context during the 1960s, which paved the way for the new feminism that arose in Australia. It then turns to the Australian experience to explore the consequences of this development.

◀ During the 1970s, members of the Women’s Liberation Movement took the struggle for political, social and cultural rights to the streets, in demonstrations, such as this one in Sydney, which mirrored earlier suffrage campaigns of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

#### INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- + What distinguished the Women’s Liberation Movement from earlier organisations in terms of aims and methods?
- + What other factors may have been involved in changing women’s rights?
- + What did this new feminism achieve?

## *International stirrings*

By the late 1960s, political movements in Australia made it possible for women to use their organisational skills and knowledge to work towards social change in their lives. The new women's movements were influenced and shaped by international developments. The women had learned their tactics from the American Civil Rights movement and from the student protests against the United States engagement in the Vietnam War. Other influences included the African and South-East Asian struggles for independence from European colonial powers. Australians had also been involved in demands for Aboriginal civil rights, and in the late 1960s many women activists began to turn their attention to the issue of women's rights.

Women established new feminist organisations and demanded rights that previous generations of feminists had worked for, such as equal pay. To these they added newer rights, many of which focused on the body: the right to contraception; the right to abortion on demand; the right to a satisfying sexual life; the right to same-sex relationships and the right to be safe from violence.

New ideas and new birth control technology sparked off the first major change in women's lives, bringing equality with men in sexual choices and changing women's social conditions.

### REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND TECHNOLOGY – THE PILL

“ By any estimation, the Pill, in all of its forms, has led to a radical transformation of America's moral landscape. It has facilitated extramarital and premarital sex on a scale unprecedented in human history. ”

Extract from Sheryl Henderson Blunt, 'The Links Between Plan B and the Pill', *Christianity Today*, 23 October 2006

“ The introduction of the birth control pill blew apart forever the Old World order, helping prompt the explosion of the women's movement in the late 60s to early 70s. ”

Extract from Ann Taylor Fleming, *The Push for Equality*, PBS News Hour, 28 December 1999, © 1996–2014 MacNeil/Lehrer Productions. All Rights Reserved

“ But there is, perhaps, one invention that historians a thousand years in the future will look back on and say, 'That defined the 20th century.' It is also one that a time-traveller from 1000 would find breathtaking – particularly if she were a woman. That invention is the contraceptive pill. ”

Extract from 'Millennium issue: Oral contraceptives – The liberator', *The Economist*, 23 December 1999, © The Economist Newspaper Limited 2014



**SOURCE 6.1** The contraceptive pill was one of a number of triggers to the changes in women's movements in the 1960s.



## 1960–1986

- 1961** The Pill took Australia by storm but was only available to married women
- 1963** Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was published
- 1965** Merle Thornton and Rosalie Bogner chained themselves to the bar rail in the Hotel Regatta, Brisbane
- 1966** The term 'women's liberation' used in print in US magazine *Ramparts*  
Married women permitted to work in the Commonwealth Public Service
- 1969** Equal Pay for Equal Work case won in the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission  
*Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett published – a very controversial book criticised by some feminists; regarded as important for 'second wave feminism'  
First Women's Liberation group formed in Sydney
- 1970** *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer published – controversial for its use of explicit language and its content arguing that the traditional nuclear family represses women sexually by turning them into eunuchs  
Women's Action Committee (WAC) formed
- 1971** Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) formed in Melbourne
- 1972** Helen Reddy released her song 'I Am Woman'  
International Women's Day March became a focus in Sydney; 4000 women marched from the Town Hall to Hyde Park; an egg was thrown at Germaine Greer  
Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) formed; survey conducted to identify attitudes of existing Members of Parliament (MPs) to women's issues  
Conciliation and Arbitration Commission recognised equal pay for work of equal value
- 1973** Commonwealth public service granted women maternity leave  
Elizabeth Reid appointed as first women's adviser to the prime minister  
First women's shelter in Australia (Glebe, Sydney) opened for women experiencing domestic violence; known as Elsie's Women's Refuge  
Australian Government officially recognised International Women's Day
- 1975** International Women's Year  
*Damned Whores and God's Police: the Colonization of Women in Australia* by Anne Summers published
- 1976** 'Reclaim the night' campaign against violence towards women began
- 1977** Anti-Discrimination Act, New South Wales
- 1979** Full- and part-time women workers awarded the right to one year's unpaid leave after giving birth
- 1981** Rape within marriage became a criminal offence
- 1983** Government created the Office of the Status of Women  
Government ratified International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- 1984** Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act
- 1986** Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission established Affirmative Action Act

The right to safe and reliable birth control had been a goal of the women's movement since the 19th century, both in Australia and overseas. The 50th anniversary of the introduction of the Pill was in 2010. Today more than 100 million women worldwide use the Pill and in Australia this includes half of the sexually active, fertile women.<sup>1</sup> Today the Pill is seen as a symbol of the 1960s, a decade of social and political change. It gave women the right to control their own fertility in a reliable and easy way. No other contraception had been able to do this and it changed women's social conditions.

The Pill was developed as a result of new scientific and technological developments, not directly through women's political struggles for birth control. Interestingly, though, funds for its development were donated by Katherine McCormick, American birth-control pioneer and activist, and Margaret Sanger, long-time women's rights advocate.



## A new form of contraception

The contraceptive pill ushered in long-lasting changes that were embraced by young, single women as part of the sexual revolution, and it heralded a new period of sexual freedom after the conservatism of the 1950s. Traditional family values were challenged by the new permissive society that emerged, although not everyone embraced the changes.

While some regard the Pill as having caused a range of social problems in the 1970s and 1980s, and even say it was the cause for everything that was wrong with Australian society during those decades, the Pill had an enormous impact on the place of women in society and laid the foundation for new discussions about their role and status in the community.

The Pill was launched in the United States in 1960 as the first ever oral contraceptive. Australia was the second country to release the Pill – in 1961 – but it was expensive (taxed as a luxury item) and initially it was only prescribed for married women.

Despite the expense, the Pill was immediately popular because, for the first time, women had an effective, reliable form of contraception that was easy to use – just one pill each

night. Sexual experience without the fear of pregnancy gave women choices that men had had for so long. By 1963, one in ten married women of childbearing age in Melbourne was taking the Pill.

In 1973, a year after Prime Minister Gough Whitlam had reduced the cost of the Pill, in response to feminists' demands, more than 750 000 women were using the contraceptive.

During the 1970s, it became possible for single women in Australia to get a prescription for the Pill. Prior to that many of them wore rings to pretend that they were married in order to obtain prescriptions from a doctor. Single women's response to the Pill was different from that of married women. In the late 1960s, Nancy, a 20-year-old bookkeeper, noted:

“ I've done a lot of thinking, and I'm really too young to get tied down ... You never know what's around the corner, and it's more fun hunting than settling. These days, you get on the pill, and you stop worrying. The pill's changed everything. Now, if a girl's over twenty and still a virgin, there's something wrong with her. ”

Quoted in Frank Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians, a History*, Black Inc., 2012, p. 232

## Women's right to control their own fertility

Judy Blume, the highly successful author of books for pre-teens and teenagers, talks about how hard it is today to understand the fear of getting pregnant. This extract is from an interview available on the internet (search for 'Judy Blume makers'). Watch the full interview and answer the questions below.

They don't know what it was like to worry all the time about getting pregnant, to be terrified ... Even within our marriages that was such an enormous fear. There was nothing you could do about it if you got pregnant except a back alley kind of abortion and that could kill you.

Transcript from 'Judy Blume: The Era of Illegal Abortions', *The Makers*, 18 February 2012, [www.makers.com](http://www.makers.com)

In 1975, in the United States, Loretta Lynn recorded 'The Pill', a comic song about birth control written by Lorene Allen, Don McHan and TD Bayless. Several country radio stations refused to play it, but outside the country market, this controversial song gained huge attention and ultimately became Lynn's highest charting pop single. Search the internet for the lyrics to this song and answer the questions below.

### Questions

- 1 What is the fear expressed by Judy Blume in her interview?
- 2 What was the choice that she and other women would face if they got pregnant?
- 3 What do Judy Blume and Loretta Lynn have in common?
- 4 Who is Loretta Lynn addressing in her song?
- 5 What were her expectations of married life before she married?
- 6 Describe her married life before the Pill.
- 7 What change does she predict as a result of the Pill?

## The backlash

### encyclical

A letter sent by the Pope to all his bishops

The Pill attracted strong opposition from the Catholic Church hierarchy but not from the laity and some members of the clergy. In 1968, Pope Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae*, an **encyclical** that condemned all forms of birth control. There were protests from within the Catholic community. A few left the priesthood while others ignored the Church's ban. An American survey in 1970 found that only 29 per cent of Catholics supported the Pope's ban on the Pill. Also, two-thirds of Catholic women were using birth control and one quarter of them were taking the Pill.

The introduction of the Pill initiated moral debates during the 1960s about pre-marital sex and promiscuity. Some doctors opposed the Pill on religious and moral grounds, arguing that it lowered the purpose of sexual intercourse to personal gratification rather than the higher one of procreation.

In the United States, all forms of contraception were banned in many states, but in 1965, the Supreme Court intervened and ruled that laws banning contraception violated the right of privacy. In 1973, unmarried minors were given the right to buy contraceptives.

### Impact of the Pill

- + It broke the connection between sex and reproduction.
- + It allowed for sex without the fear of pregnancy.
- + There was no longer a direct connection between sex and conception.
- + Women took charge of their bodies and reproduction.
- + Some women found it harder to resist men's sexual demands.
- + Families became smaller because it was easier to limit the number of children.
- + Couples could better plan to buy a home because they could rely upon two incomes for a period of time.
- + Employers now saw women as an employee option.
- + Higher educational institutions realised that women would not get pregnant and would be more likely to finish their degrees.
- + There was an increase in the number of couples living together without marrying and disapproval of this practice declined.
- + Younger women had pre-marital sex at an earlier age according to a survey taken in Australia in 1973 by an American sexologist. The survey also showed that nearly three quarters of the cohort had had pre-marital sex and that women were on average having sex at 18 and a half. A higher percentage of young women under 25 were having premarital sex (92 per cent) and they initiated sex more often.
- + The average marriage age in the US rose for women in the 1970s. In 1970, the average college graduate getting married was 23 years old; by 1975 that age was 25.5 years.

The effect of the Pill was to change women's social conditions and offer them more in life than marriage and children. When it became legally available to single women in the 1970s, new opportunities opened up as the fear of getting pregnant disappeared. Women could plan their families, they could finish their tertiary education, and as a result they entered the professions on a more equal basis with men.

## New ideas

During the 1960s, a number of women began to research and write about the experiences of women in modern society. Often they were drawing on earlier ideas such as those of Simone de Beauvoir (see Chapter 5, pages 134–135). This new research highlighted the fact that for many women in developed countries their opportunities to access education and careers had been limited only by their sex.

### THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE

One of the most influential of these works was *The Feminine Mystique* by American author Betty Friedan, first published in 1963. The book received an immediate response from women in the United States, Australia and Great Britain. In the United States, it is regarded as having initiated a new wave of feminism and has been designated one of the most influential books of the 20th century. It investigates ‘the problem that has no name’, the title of the first chapter.

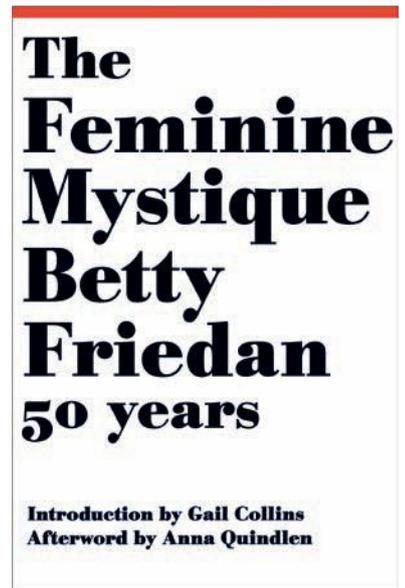
“ The problem laid buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction a yearning that women suffered ... Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – ‘Is this all?’ ”

Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, WW Norton & Company Inc., New York, 1963

*The Feminine Mystique* began in the 1950s as a survey for the 15th anniversary reunion of Friedan’s college classmates, all of whom were housewives. It focused on the way in which they were using their education. The survey results indicated that 89 per cent of the women were not using their education and skills and were unhappy in their role as housewife. She concluded that they were financially secure, had children, but asked themselves, ‘Is this all?’ The traditional role of wife and mother was not enough; it was not satisfying. Friedan continued surveying other suburban housewives before writing *The Feminine Mystique*. The book sparked discussion about the role of women in society at a time when, in the United States, 60 per cent of female college students were dropping out and getting married, rather than completing their studies.

### Impact of *The Feminine Mystique*

Betty Friedan received hundreds of letters from unhappy housewives in America supporting her ideas. She also received criticism from those who claimed she focused only on white, middle-class women and did not include those from other races or classes. Bell Hooks, a prominent black feminist scholar, was highly critical of Friedan’s work, arguing that her approach excluded many women, including those without husbands or partners, children or homes, the poor and non-white women. More recently, however, other black feminists have claimed Friedan did them a favour by provoking them into action.



Used with permission of WW Norton & Company, Inc.

**SOURCE 6.2** A special edition of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 2013 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its publication

“ Today, I would argue that Friedan’s unintentional exclusion of African American women in ‘The Feminine Mystique’ was in fact a gift because it might be what led to the development of a black feminist movement and scholarship in the area of black feminist thought. ”

Michelle Bernard, ‘Betty Friedan and black women: Is it time for a second look?’  
Washington Post blog, 21 February 2013

More than two million copies of *The Feminine Mystique* have been sold since publication and it has been translated into many languages.

*The Feminine Mystique* is regarded in America as a catalyst for what is called ‘second wave feminism’. Some American feminists refer to the publication of the book as ‘where it all started’. In Australia, it appeared in 1963 just prior to the announcement of conscription of 18-year-old men for the Vietnam War, an event that ushered in a period of questioning of social norms and of mass protests – an era that radicalised young women as well as men.



### Betty Friedan (1921–2006)

It seemed to me that men weren’t really the enemy – they were fellow victims ...

Betty Friedan, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 1 April 1974

Betty Friedan was an American writer, women’s rights activist and feminist. As a journalist she wrote for a number of union publications. In 1952, she was dismissed from the United Electrical Workers’ *EU News* when she asked for maternity leave for her second child. She then became a freelance writer. Friedan came to international attention with the publication of her book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963.



Alamy/ZUMA Press, Inc

In 1966, she co-founded the National Organization for Women (NOW). The aim of NOW was to advocate for women’s rights. It published a Bill of Rights in 1968 that advocated the passing of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) that could have amended the US Constitution to guarantee equal rights for women. This ERA dated back to 1923 when it was written by suffragist Alice Paul.

Friedan also established a number of feminist organisations, including the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) in 1969, dedicated to achieving abortion rights. She also formed the National Women’s Political Caucus in 1971. She published a number of other books including *The Second Stage* in 1982 and *The Fountain of Age* in 1993.

She died in 2006, aged 85.

#### Question

- 1 Prepare an evaluation of Betty Friedan’s work for women’s rights in the period after she had published *The Feminine Mystique*. What did she achieve? How significant do you think she was in furthering women’s rights? Use evidence from this chapter and search the internet for more interviews and resources.

## NEW ACTIONS IN AUSTRALIA

In Australia, *The Feminine Mystique* prompted a new approach to thinking about the place of women in society. The book gave Australian women the impetus to question their own role in society and their lack of participation in public life. A range of campaigns began in the 1960s as well as debate about equal pay. Women felt that the time had come for action.

### The Bar Room Suffragettes

On 31 March 1965, two women entered the public bar of the Regatta Hotel in Brisbane and asked for a drink. The barman refused to serve them so they chained themselves to the railing at the bar. The police were called, and when they arrived they took the women's names and told them that they were not allowed in the public bar. The police then left, not wishing to create a scene.

The action of chaining themselves to the rail represented a new approach by Australian women wishing to extend their rights. Their action was reminiscent of the British suffragettes, Muriel Matters and Helen Fox, who had chained themselves to the grille of the Ladies Gallery in the House of Commons in 1908.

#### Bar Room Suffragettes

Merle Thornton, right, and Rosalie Bogner chained themselves to the bar in the Regatta Hotel in Brisbane in 1965. The action was a protest against women being barred from public bars. Hotels usually had a room called the Ladies Lounge where women could drink, but at higher prices than men in the public bar. Thornton and Bogner were nicknamed the 'Bar Room Suffragettes' by the Brisbane newspaper, *The Courier-Mail*.



Newspix/© News Ltd

#### Questions

- 1 What were Thornton and Bogner trying to achieve in chaining themselves to the rail in the public bar of the hotel?
- 2 What effect did they have? Did they achieve their aim?
- 3 Imagine you were one of the policemen called to the pub that afternoon. Write a report for your superior officer, describing the problem you found, the actions you took and the behaviour of the men and the publican.
- 4 How did the women advance women's rights by this action?

Merle Thornton and Rosalie Bogner were protesting against the exclusion of women from the public bars of hotels – an iconic male space. They were also breaking with the women's movement's former good allies (the temperance movement) by wanting to drink in a pub.

Their husbands distributed leaflets explaining what they were doing and calling for women to be allowed to drink in bars. A few weeks earlier, the women had asked the Minister to alter the Licensing Act governing hotels in order to allow women access to public bars. He refused so they resorted to action as the British suffragettes had decades earlier.

Women were banned from many public spaces in the 1960s, including public bars, football stadiums and other sporting facilities such as racetracks. Up to that time married women were also not allowed to work in the public service.

This action of civil disobedience drew attention to the issue of women being denied access to public spaces. It also attracted considerable press and television publicity. One writer to *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper commented on the connection to the British suffragettes and the rights elaborated in the United Nations' Charter.

“ The Charter of the United Nations stands for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction in race, sex, language or religion. Good luck to the two young Ladies who have drawn our attention to the drinking law which is contrary to this charter by discrimination against women. ”

*The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 5 April 1965

The women's action also drew attention to the fact that women paid higher prices on lower wages for a drink in the Ladies Lounge. According to historian Diane Kirby, the 40 men in the bar who were asked what they thought of the action said they admired the women. The publican, however, opposed their presence.

A week later, Thornton and Bogner, along with eight other women, entered three different pubs and were welcomed by the men. The police refused to come, as reports came in that men were buying the women drinks in the public bar. The women claimed the action as a victory for women's rights. This event has come to be regarded as the beginning of the new women's movement in Australia, a movement with more militant methods of operation. In 1970, women were finally given the legal right to drink in public bars.

## THE RIGHT TO EQUAL PAY

Equal pay for equal work had been an issue for the women's movement since the beginning of the 20th century. In Australia, the Harvester Judgement in 1907 set the minimum wage and was very important in terms of women's work and wages, as it based its ruling on the concept of a family wage. A family wage was the minimum amount needed for a man to support himself, a wife and children. The idea of a male breadwinner with dependent wife and children was counterbalanced against the female worker as a single woman without dependents. However, single men received the family wage even if they remained single all their lives.



## EQUAL PAY, 1950–1985

- 1951** Equal Remuneration Convention of the International Labour Organization recommended that men and women workers be given equal pay for work of equal value with a view to setting a rate for jobs without regard to gender
- 1958** The Equal Pay Act was passed in New South Wales. This gave women on state awards equal pay with men.
- 1966** Married women allowed to work in the Commonwealth public service
- 1969** Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission decreed that men and women should receive equal pay if engaged in work 'of the same or a like nature'; the result was that the 82 per cent of women engaged in women's work got nothing; mostly teachers and nurses benefited. It was to be phased in over four years.
- 1972** National Wage case introduced the phrase 'equal pay for work of equal value' (taken from the International Labour Organization) but no definition was given for the word 'value', regardless of the sex of the worker, nor did it outline a way to compare jobs
- 1973** Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission set a minimum wage for all adults
- 1974** Men and women could receive the same minimum basic wage; gender was no longer the main factor in wage setting and the concept of family support was no longer a part of the wage system
- 1977** The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) adopted the Working Women's Charter calling for an end to 'discrimination on the basis of sex, race, country of origin, age, religious or political belief, marital status or sexual preference'
- 1985** Anne Sgro Children's Centre opened in Coburg

Through the decades of the 20th century, each time the case was put for an equal wage the response was that a woman did not need as much as a man because she was included in her husband's wage. The connection between the family wage and a woman's wage was critical in denying her equality of pay. Men feared that equal wages would undermine the family wage for male workers and also the family itself.

In 1950, the basic wage for a woman was set at 75 per cent of the basic wage of a man. During the 1950s, women went on strike to protect their wages. Two examples of this are women at the Rheem factory in Brisbane and at the Swift Meatworks in Aitkenvale. Organisations were formed to fight the issue of equal pay – for example, the Queensland Equal Pay Committee, which was formed in 1956 and included union activists Kath Thomas and Stella Nord, both of whom worked for equal pay over decades.

The 1960s brought more campaigns and test cases. The ACTU decided in 1962 to declare a National Equal Pay week to raise the profile of the campaign and put pressure on employers.

In 1969, Zelda D'Aprano, a trade unionist, took action as the Bar Room Suffragettes had done a few years previously. Knowing that



**SOURCE 6.3** Nancy Anderson, in a 1969 protest for equal pay, highlights the way in which activists for women's rights frequently made imaginative use of protest methods to make their point.



Fairfax Syndication/The Age Archives

**SOURCE 6.4** Zelda D'Aprano chained herself to the railing outside the Commonwealth Public Service building in 1969, as a protest against the lack of equal pay for women.



The Herald

**SOURCE 6.5** Zelda D'Aprano with friends, paying only 75 per cent of the price of a ticket, arguing that 'We earn 75 per cent, we pay 75 per cent on the trams'.

their protests was to only pay 75 per cent of a tram fare, arguing that they only received 75 per cent of a man's wage.

## Equal pay

In 1972, the idea of equal pay was broadened to 'equal pay for work of equal value', meaning that jobs could now be compared to see if there were similar tasks involved. Pay was based on the job, not on the gender of the person undertaking it. As a result, employers sought to reclassify jobs to a lower classification in order to avoid implementing the ruling.

petitions and deputations brought few results, she chained herself to the Commonwealth Public Service building in Melbourne to attract attention to the campaign for women's equal pay.

D'Aprano later recalled:

“ After having a chat about all of these aspects, we both agreed that something more than just talking was needed to draw attention to the pay injustice meted out to women and more positive action was required. We began to fantasise women chaining themselves up like the suffragettes did and jokingly asked ourselves where women could chain themselves to make their protest effective. ”

Zelda D'Aprano, *Zelda*, Spinifex Press, Melbourne, 1995, p. 171

The action was successful in its aim – it drew widespread media and press television coverage.

## A limited victory

In 1969, shortly after Zelda D'Aprano had staged her protest, the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission granted women 'equal pay for equal work' but only in the situation where women were working in the same job as men. This benefited only about 18 per cent of women workers. Female teachers were among those who benefited.

This new legislation, with pay increases to be phased in over four years, did not provide equal pay in workplaces that were predominantly female. The family wage continued to exist.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Muriel Heagney had argued for 'one rate for the job' regardless of the worker's gender, but in the 1960s the concept of male and female work still existed. However, the legislation did establish the 'principle' of equal pay but it was a very limited achievement. More action was needed, so Zelda D'Aprano and three teachers – Thelma Solomon, Alva Geikie and Jessie 'Bon' Hull – established the Women's Action Committee (WAC). They envisaged that this would be a militant organisation and rather different from previous women's organisations. One of

## Migrant women in the workforce

Government-sponsored immigration on a large scale occurred after the Second World War. As a result, many migrant women – initially Italian and Greek – joined the workforce. They were often in poorly paid jobs in the textile, clothing and shoe industries. Many of them also undertook piecework at home. In the factories, they faced the difficulties of a different language, communication and culture. They were also discriminated against, given the worst jobs and lacked support from the unions. Naturally, they felt socially isolated.

With the election of the Whitlam Government and Al Grassby as Minister for Immigration, the working situation for ethnic groups improved. In 1973, the first Migrant Workers Conference was held, followed by greater recognition from the unions for the different needs of migrant workers.

In 1975, the women's group of the Italian Federation of Migrant Workers and their families spoke out on issues of importance to them. In particular, they wanted information in their own language about health and child-care. Other migrant women from different ethnic backgrounds also felt excluded. German-born Gisela Kaplan commented that she knew 'of no single immigrant woman of a non-English speaking background who is a stranger to the experience of ostracism and exclusion by other women and by feminists'.<sup>2</sup> In response, some women's groups in Australia attempted to include and represent the needs of migrant women. For example, when the Working Women's Centre was established in Melbourne in 1975, two part-time liaison officers who were fluent in Greek, Italian and Spanish were appointed. Shortly after, a paper called 'Women at Work' discussed the needs of migrant women, with articles written in as many as seven different languages.

In 1974 and 1975, ethnic rights were promoted along with feminist ones in the Migrant Women Workers Project, which produced a report that pointed out the lack of adequate services available for women of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The report, titled 'But I wouldn't want my wife to work here ...' was a study of migrant women in Melbourne and it highlighted the dire situation of migrant women factory workers. In 1982, the Immigrant Women's Speakout Association of New South Wales Inc. was formed; its aims included assisting 'immigrant and refugee women to achieve equal participation in society ...'

**SUPPORT THE DEMAND**  
**Equal Pay for Men and Women for**  
**work of Equal Value**

Attend—  
**EQUAL PAY FORUM**  
**CITY HALL (SUPPER ROOM)**  
**TUESDAY, APRIL 3, at 8 p.m.**  
 (Supper served after meeting)

**COME ALONG AND HEAR:** Prominent women speakers from interested professions, organisations, and from factory and office. A panel of Equal Pay experts will be there to answer your questions.

**THE EQUAL PAY FORUM** has been arranged as part of NATIONAL EQUAL PAY WEEK (commencing April 2) and sponsored by the Australian Council of Trade Unions as part of the Australia-wide campaign for Equal Pay for men and women for work of equal value.

**EQUAL PAY MEANS:** "The rate for the job" without regard to sex—in factory and workshops—schools and Universities—offices and shops—business and professions.

**All women are entitled to Equal Pay and equal opportunity.**  
 The International Labour Office provides in its Constitution that "men and women should receive equal remuneration for work of equal value."  
 By 1961—34 nations had ratified this Convention.  
**BUT—THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT HAS NOT RATIFIED THE I.L.O. EQUAL PAY CONVENTION.**

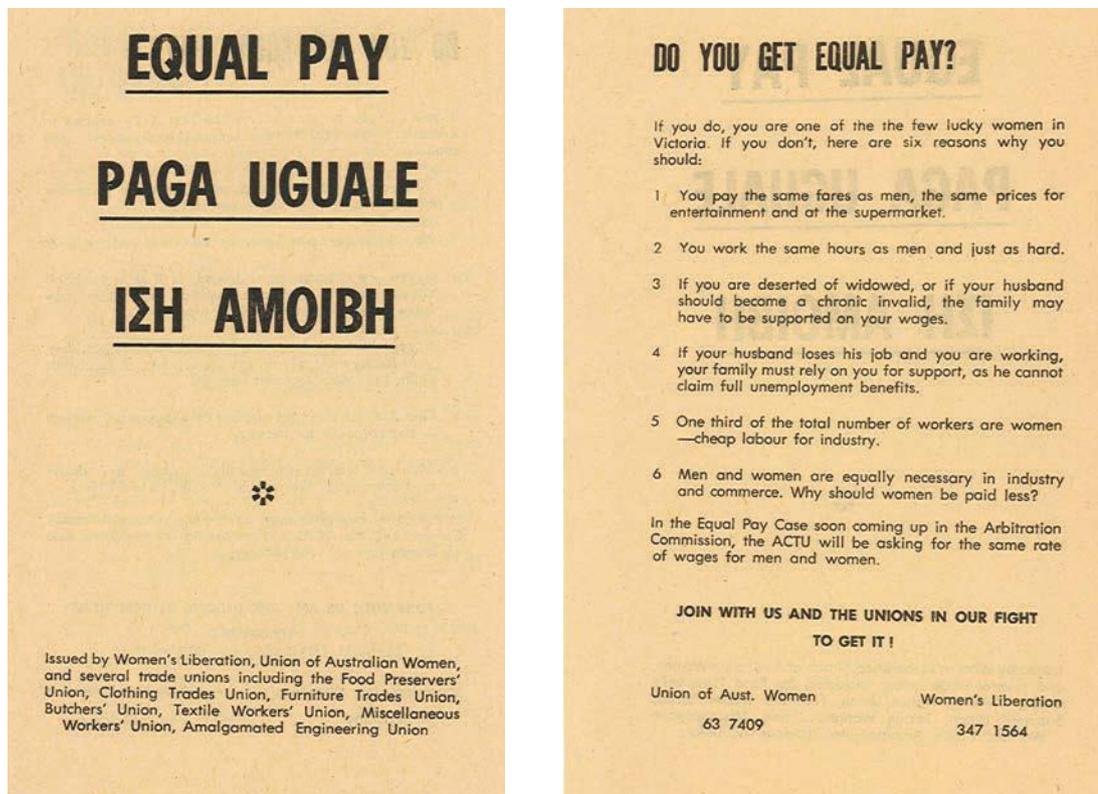
**This must be done—your help is needed—demand that the Federal Government ratify the I.L.O. Equal Pay Convention—ATTEND EQUAL PAY FORUM—TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 8 p.m.—CITY HALL, SUPPER ROOM.**

Remember too—  
**CENTENARY PLACE,**  
**SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 3 p.m.**  
**EQUAL PAY MEETING**  
**(Prominent Speakers)**

**Come along and bring your friends.**

Authorised by Equal Pay Committee, Trades Hall, Brisbane. A. Macdonald, Secretary. Coronation Print.

**SOURCE 6.6** This leaflet was authorised by the Equal Pay Committee, Trades Hall, Brisbane. It announced the Equal Pay Forum to be held on Tuesday 3 April at 8 p.m. as well as other equal pay events. This forum was to be part of the Equal Pay Week Campaign.



**SOURCE 6.7** This equal pay brochure, now held at the Women's Liberation Archives, Melbourne University, was published in English, Italian and Greek. Why was it important the such brochures were published in multiple languages? What does this suggest about the changing nature of the women's movement in Australia in the 1970s?

## *Women's liberation*

The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) burst onto the political stage in 1969 and grew into a mass feminist movement challenging all aspects of social life. It set the agenda for reform for two decades, in women's health, education, employment and childcare. The WLM represented a break from the values and methods of previous women's movements and introduced a significant philosophical shift.

The first women's liberation groups met in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney in 1969. They emerged at a time of expansion in higher education, and during the political and social protests of the 1960s – the debates and campaigns against conscription, the opposition to the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. Women's experiences within the protest groups led them to question their role as women in these organisations. They took many ideas and actions from the American women's liberation groups.

Australian women had already achieved political and legal rights, fought for by previous generations. Now they faced the barrier of conditioning – the formation of gender identity in childhood that conditions the attitudes and values of the adult.

Two influential and controversial books marked the beginning of the women's liberation movement. In 1969, *Sexual Politics*, by American author Kate Millett, was published, and *The Female Eunuch* by Australian author Germaine Greer was published a year later.

Copyright 1969, 1970, 1990, 2000 by Kate Millett. Used with permission of the University of Illinois Press.



• Patriarchy is fundamental to women's oppression.

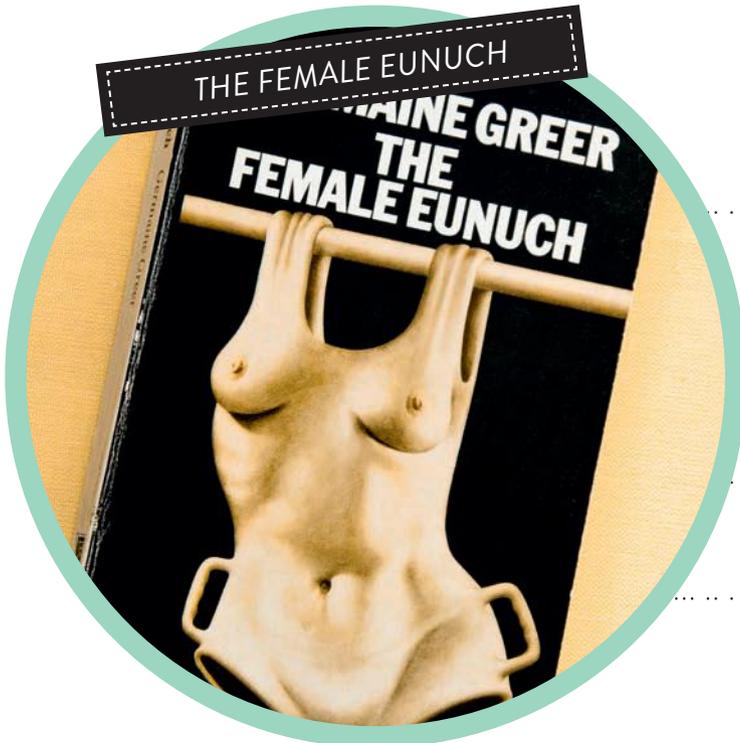
• Sex is political ... relations between men and women are based on the dominance and subordination of men over women.

• A study of sexuality in literature where women's subordination is played out or expressed in art and literature.

• In the novels of Norman Mailer, DH Lawrence and Henry Miller, it can be seen that men use their power over women to degrade them.

• The social conditioning of girls and boys shapes them into stereotypical 'masculine' or 'feminine', reflecting particular sex roles. Status is assigned to each role, with women receiving a lower status than men.

Alamy/foto-zone



• Greer encouraged women to be more active and less passive to overcome their oppression in society.

• Sexual liberation is a central part of women's liberation; thus women who were denied their own sexuality became eunuchs.

• Urged women to first analyse their own situation and then take action to secure their personal liberation.

• After women achieve their own liberation, they should work for social liberation.



## Germaine Greer (1939–)

Germaine Greer is a writer and radical feminist, a former academic and teacher. She came to attention both nationally and internationally with her first book *The Female Eunuch* in 1970. The book, a bestseller, was controversial, receiving both positive and negative reviews. It shocked some people by its graphic sexual references and images.

In the book Greer argued that men have contempt for women, and that the traditional family of husband, wife and children represses women sexually. Women are passive and powerless in this society. Women, she argued, should break away from their traditional roles and challenge male authority figures. They should explore their own sexuality. Sexual liberation, she says, is a central part of women's liberation.

Germaine Greer was born in Melbourne in 1939, attended a Catholic girls school and studied at the University of Melbourne and at the University of Sydney. She won a scholarship to Cambridge University where she began writing under pseudonyms for controversial magazines such as *OZ* and *Private Eye*.

*The Female Eunuch* became a symbol of women's liberation. It sold out quickly and went to a reprint. In the first year, it was translated into eight different languages. Like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* seven years earlier, it opened up a public space for women and provided them with a language they could use to question their social role. It sparked fierce debates in communities and in the public realm.



Fairfax Syndication/SMH Picture by Berry

## AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) in Australia was not one single group or organisation. It was decentralised – that is, it existed at local levels rather than as a single national organisation. The WLM consisted of grass-roots organisations and included feminists who labelled themselves as radical, socialist, communist, liberal, lesbian or Christian.

The WLM marked itself out as different from previous women's movements in both content and methods. It opened up broader discussions of the role of women in society, such as structural inequalities and women's absence from decision-making in public and private spaces.

## HERSTORY

The suffragists of the 19th century, both overseas and within the Australian colonies, used their writings to analyse their oppression and to fight for women's rights. In New South Wales, Louisa Lawson published a monthly magazine, *The Dawn*; in Queensland, Leontine Cooper published her monthly women's magazine, *The Star*; and in Victoria, Vida Goldstein published *The Sphere*.

Knowledge about the struggle for the right to vote and the work of women during the decades of the 20th century to extend women's rights was relatively unknown by the time of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s. Women's history was not taught in schools or universities.

The constant questioning by the WLM as to how and why women were oppressed led to the birth of subjects such as Women's Studies in universities and other higher education institutes, and a new interest in women's history.

In this context, four women's histories of Australia were published in 1975:

- + *Damned Whores and God's Police* by Anne Summers
- + *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann* by Beverley Kingston
- + *The Real Matilda* by Miriam Dixson
- + *Gentle Invaders* by Ann Conlon and Edna Ryan.

Soon after these books were published, other publications, such as the journals *Refractory Girl* and *Hecate* were published. These publications gave women a 'voice' and a new confidence, built upon a knowledge of their history, which they used to demand their rights.

### Questions

- 1 Why didn't women know about the women's rights struggles in the past?
- 2 What focus did histories of Australia have before the 1970s?
- 3 Explain why women's histories were rarely published before the 1970s.
- 4 What has been the effect of the lack of women's histories before 1970?

## WOMEN'S LIBERATION METHODS

The WLM adopted the method of consciousness-raising – an idea that came from the civil rights movements' method of using personal testimony. Consciousness-raising took the form of group discussion based upon the shared personal stories of oppression experienced by each member of the group. Women had the opportunity to speak out about their personal experience of oppression. In telling their stories they found common experiences, which they analysed and discussed. Through this practice they became more aware, or 'conscious', of the everyday oppression of women.

## The formation of gender identity

In consciousness-raising groups, women told stories that highlighted experiences of how they were brought up as girls in their families – how, as Simone de Beauvoir had said, ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’.

They analysed their upbringing, the custom of women changing their family name to their husband’s, and of putting girls in pink and boys in blue. They discussed the fact that some school subjects were identified as being for girls and others (such as science and mathematics) were seen as being boys’ subjects.

They also discussed the fact that occupations such as secretary, teacher and nurse were considered as being for women, while those of doctor, lawyer and tradesperson were for men. Girls were often encouraged to be teachers because they would be at home with the children after school and on school holidays.

In the selection of children’s toys they noted that there was a clear divide between the sexes.

Other methods used by the WLM to draw the public’s attention included choosing one day in a year to march or to celebrate a cause. One example was the adoption of the International Women’s Day (IWD) march. In 1978, a march called ‘Reclaim the Night’ was established to raise awareness of and protest against violence against women. This march started in America as ‘Take Back the Night’ in 1975 and was adopted by Belgium in 1976. In Australia, a ‘Reclaim the Night’ march was held in Sydney and Perth in 1978, followed by Melbourne in 1979.

Social activism was always a central part of the WLM. Women acted to provide assistance where the government had not and where there was a need. Rape crisis centres, childcare centres, halfway houses and refuges for women were established in each state, organised by collectives of women.

## Some of the rights women lacked in the 1970s

- + Married women had no right to credit.
- + Women had no right to equal pay.
- + Women had no right to continue to work in the Commonwealth public service or as teachers when they married.
- + Abortion was illegal.
- + Spousal rape was not a crime.

## The Women's Liberation declarations

Women's Liberation groups formed in many parts of Australia and most issued statements about their aims and goals. The following documents from the early 1970s show the full range of their views and ideas.

### Manifesto, Women's Liberation Movement

Women's Liberation is **not** a feminist movement, i.e., it is not narrowly confined to the struggle of women for equality with men in the present society. The aims of Women's Liberation are TOTAL in the sense that the liberation of women must concur with the liberation of **all individuals** from a situation in which the only socially accepted mode of self-expression or development is in terms of pre-defined sexual roles.

A woman is never taken for **herself**: she is always 'Bill's bird', 'the little woman' or just 'mum'.

Extract from 'Manifesto', *Camp Ink*, Women's Liberation Movement, Adelaide, July 1971

### Women's Liberation newsletter

Women's Liberation believes that women in our society are oppressed.

We are economically oppressed: in jobs we do full work for half pay, in the home we do unpaid work full time.

We are commercially exploited by advertisements, television, and press: legally we often have only the status of children.

We are brought up to feel inadequate: educated to narrower horizons than men.

This is our specific oppression as women. It is as women that we are, therefore, organising. We demand:

- 1 That Women Have Control Over Their Bodies – We believe that this is denied us until we can decide whether to have children or not and when we have them.
- 2 The Repeal of Abortion Laws: Abortion on Request – Abortion is an essential part of birth control. Contraception without the right to abortion means that the State, in effect, controls our bodies if we become pregnant unwillingly. Women should have the right to decide whether or not to have an abortion.
- 3 Freely Available Contraception – More education on contraception is needed at an early age and, for this to be effective, contraceptives should be easily available and free on social security. Doctors should not have the right to refuse contraception on their own moral grounds.
- 4 Free 24-hour Community Controlled Child Care – The government should provide full child care facilities throughout Australia. These should be free and staffed by qualified people – men and women. The centres must be under the control of those who use them, to prevent bureaucratic 'baby dumps'. Women should not have to bear individual responsibility for the care of children.
- 5 Equal Job Opportunities and an End to Low Pay – Employers have no right to pay women less than men, or to keep women in menial jobs. The government must act to correct this injustice by making it illegal for employers to discriminate against women. Although, at first glance, the equal pay decision in 1972 seems favourable, the full effect of the decision will not become apparent until 1975. In other words, we have been 'bought off' until then.
- 6 Equal Education Opportunities – To enable women to have really equal opportunity, all schools must stop streaming women into 'service' jobs which reflect the wife/mother role – cleaners, teachers,

*continued*

continued

nurses, secretaries, social workers – essentially supporting roles. Sexual bias in curricula should be eliminated. The education system must play a large part in undoing the conditioning of women to accept an inferior role, by encouraging women to assert themselves in all fields.

We believe that by united action we can achieve our aims.

Extract from Women's Liberation Newsletter, Women's Liberation Movement, March 1973, pp. 5–6

## Questions

- 1 What is the context of these manifestos?
- 2 Who is the audience?
- 3 Why do you think Women's Liberation groups produced manifestos?
- 4 What are the main points?
- 5 Look at the language used – why are words such as 'manifesto', 'demand' and 'oppressed' used?
- 6 Do these manifestos suggest a change in ideas and tactics for the women's movement?
- 7 What do these manifestos tell you about each organisation that wrote them?
- 8 Are there parts of the manifestos that are relevant today?

## Abortion law reform

Demands of the Women's Liberation Movement included a woman's right to control her own body. This includes the right to abortion – an aspect of reproductive rights. Abortion has long been used as a method of birth control, despite being against the law. Women often resorted to 'backyard abortions' that were illegally carried out by some doctors or people with some medical knowledge. Women sometimes tried to perform abortions on themselves. All of these methods came with risks and often ended in death or the woman not being able to have another child.

In Australia, health is a state responsibility so each state has the right to make its own laws on abortion. In the 1970s, groups sprang up in each state, demanding and lobbying for the decriminalisation of abortions. In New South Wales, for example, the Women's Abortion Action Campaign (WAAC) was established in 1972. It has campaigned continuously since then to achieve its stated goals:

- + abortion is a woman's right to choose
- + repeal of all abortion laws
- + free safe abortion on demand
- + free safe contraception on demand
- + no forced sterilisation.



**SOURCE 6.8** Pro-abortion march, Sydney, 2013. The Women's Abortion Action Campaign (WAAC) is one of the oldest action groups to emerge from the Women's Liberation Movement and its work is still continuing.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, state laws changed and abortion stopped being a criminal offence if the procedure was undertaken for the mother's health. This change in the law came about due to the 'right to choose' campaigns organised through the WAAC in Sydney, the Women's Abortion Action Coalition in Melbourne and equivalent organisations in the other states. Doctors could very broadly define the definition of 'the mother's health'. Since these rulings, women have received safe abortions in hospitals and clinics. However, abortion still retained a quasi-legal status – officially illegal but accepted in practice as long as a doctor agreed that it was in the best interests of the mother.

Abortion is still debated today as Right to Life, or 'pro-life', groups continue to campaign against it. Abortion is a right that women had to fight for in all Western countries during the 1960s and 1970s.

### *Roe v. Wade*

As in Australia, women in the United States campaigned for abortion rights. In 1973, a landmark court ruling on a woman's right to abortion was delivered by the US Supreme Court. It decided in *Roe v. Wade* (by seven votes to two) that the Texas state law prohibiting abortion was unconstitutional and that women had a right to an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. This decision was controversial and sparked a national debate. The United States was divided into pro-life and pro-choice groups.

#### Questions

- ① Research the abortion laws for the state you live in. Write a brief paragraph outlining them. Do you agree with them or not? Give reasons.
- ② Research the details of the US Supreme Court judgement *Roe v. Wade*. Who were Roe and Wade? What had happened to bring about this court action? Who opposed the decision and why? What was the response to the decision?

## Childcare

Childcare had been a critical issue during the Second World War, when women were drafted into the workforce, and it became so again during the 1960s and 1970s. This time the impetus for increased childcare provision came from the Commonwealth Government, which wanted women at work to boost economic growth and productivity. Feminists responded by asking for childcare centres to be open for 24 hours a day. The *Commonwealth Childcare Act 1972* supplemented the state services for day care centres.

As more women entered the workforce, feminists argued that childcare centres should be staffed by both male and female carers. They also argued that within the family home men could take their share in the job of caring for children.

In 1972, community activist and feminist Winsome McCaughey made one of the first statements on the issue of childcare on behalf of women's liberationists.

“ In our society, the nuclear family (read mother) has been held to be fully responsible for the development and socialisation of the child under school age. Women’s Liberation holds this to be an unreasonable and unsatisfactory method of childrearing. The recently formed Women’s Liberation ‘Community Controlled Child Care’ action group ... denies the assumption that the ideal environment is home with mother, all day every day ...

Children are in a very real sense, the children of the whole community and [Community Controlled Child Care] believe it to be the responsibility of the government to make educational facilities available to children under five years of age, in the form of good child care centres for the small child. ”

Winsome McCaughey, ‘Day care – liberating who for what?’, *Dissent*, 28, 1972, pp. 3–8

Provision of childcare had not increased with the increasing numbers of women entering the workforce in the late 1960s and early 1970s and this became an issue for women. They either arranged for private minders or attempted to obtain a place for their children at nurseries that employed kindergarten teachers.

In 1972, women’s organisations successfully lobbied the McMahon Government, and what followed was the first major commitment to preschools by a Commonwealth government – five million dollars were allocated to the building of childcare centres. The government also agreed to support local, not-for-profit initiatives with regard to childcare. Elizabeth Reid, who was the adviser to the prime minister on women’s issues, and members of the Women’s Liberation Movement, persuaded the government to extend day care and preschool facilities with an allocation of more than 45 million dollars during the 1974–75 fiscal year.

One of the groups that influenced the debate about childcare services was the recently formed Women’s Electoral Lobby (WEL). Formed in 1972, WEL identified itself as part of the Women’s Liberation Movement.

WEL was made up of mainly middle-class and professional women, and it focused not on personal liberation but on influencing politicians to make the changes in parliament that would lift barriers to women’s rights, including the right to adequate childcare services.

## WOMEN’S ELECTORAL LOBBY (WEL)

The Women’s Electoral Lobby was established in Melbourne and Sydney just before the 1972 federal election with the aim of interviewing all candidates (but particularly high-profile sitting members and ministers) about issues of importance to women.

The 1972 campaign was called ‘Think WEL before you vote’. This initial campaign was based on six demands:

- + equal pay
- + equal employment opportunity
- + equal access to education



**SOURCE 6.9** The Women’s Electoral Lobby has been campaigning for women’s issues for more than 40 years.

- + free contraceptive services
- + abortion on demand
- + free 24-hour childcare.

Beatrice Faust was the initiator of the Melbourne group. She had already been involved with abortion law reform as well as the campaign for the liberalisation of censorship. The group's membership blossomed very quickly as more and more women joined.

The Women's Electoral Lobby was independent and not aligned to any political party. Tension grew between WEL and other groups connected with the Woman's Liberation Movement, which dismissed WEL's choice of working within traditional politics as **reformism**, preferring more radical activities and new methods such as consciousness-raising. Despite this tension the various women's liberation groups worked together successfully on campaigns; for example, applying pressure on the Tramways Union to allow women to be tram drivers.

#### reformism

Policy of bringing about reform without radically changing the current political system

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WEL received positive coverage by the press; perhaps because its method of using surveys was less threatening than the demonstrations and protests, and the dress and behaviours of women's liberationists.

The practice of surveying politicians about their views on issues was not new for Australian feminists. It dates back to the beginning of the century. Other techniques used by WEL included media campaigns, demonstrations, and writing letters and submissions to the government.

In 1972, WEL conducted a survey to rate federal election candidates. The results were published in *The Age* newspaper and other major state newspapers. Bill Hayden and Gough Whitlam from the Australian Labor Party (ALP) scored highest, while then- Prime Minister William McMahon scored only one vote out of a possible forty.

Not all responses to the formation of WEL were positive. Sir John Cramer, a former Australian Army Minister, refused to attend WEL's public meetings, stating that 'a woman must be taught that virginity is the most valuable thing she possesses'.

Adequate provision of childcare was a major issue leading up to the 1972 election. Two years after the ALP won government, WEL placed an advertisement in the *Australian Financial Review* to remind the government of its pre-election promises. WEL also held a demonstration about childcare in the form of a children's party outside Parliament House in August 1974, with a fire engine and a merry-go-round.

WEL was instrumental in the following areas:

- + introducing the concept of an adult minimum wage rather than a family wage
- + introducing the concept of fault-free divorce
- + raising awareness about rape in marriage
- + defining the phrase 'lack of consent'.

## *The rise of the femocrats*

With the leader of the ALP, Gough Whitlam, actively campaigning for women's votes, an alliance was established between the ALP and the women's movement. After Whitlam won government, he appointed women to senior positions in the public service. This was a form of state feminism. A new Australian word was coined to describe these women: 'femocrats'.

No other Western country introduced feminists into government this way. Many of the women received their appointments with elation and high hopes. Other feminists were critical, viewing any acceptance of a position within the government as co-option that would lead to compromises on positions. Even worse, they saw working in government as a 'sell out' to the state and believed that nothing or very little would be achieved.

The combination of a newly elected Labor Government eager for reform and the Women's Liberation Movement led, in 1973, to the appointment of a women's adviser to the prime minister – Elizabeth Reid. This was the first time in the history of Australian government that such a position had been created. Some historians believe that this was the beginning of state feminism.

Women such as Sara Dowse and Anne Summers, who both headed the Office of Women's Affairs, came from the women's movement and accepted positions in the bureaucracy in the belief that they could effect social change for women. Other well-known femocrats to take high positions included Susan Ryan (who later became a senator), Lyndall Ryan and Daniela Torsh. Their work during successive governments introduced many significant services and benefits, and raised the status of women. It led to more women entering parliament and to the first Australian female prime minister in the 21st century.

According to historian Marilyn Lake, one of the femocrats' major and long-lasting achievements was to

gain federal funding for the services that the Women's Liberation Movement had set up. These included women's refuges, health centres, rape crisis centres and childcare services. This funding was an acknowledgement from the government that there was a need for such programs; it was also an indication of the success of the movements that had set up the services without government support. Leading academic Marian Sawer has suggested that these femocrats brought about a 'quiet revolution'.

“ The United Nations (UN) drew on the Australian model as an example of good practice and international researchers drew attention to the distinctive ways in which the Australian women's movement had operated through the state to achieve gender-sensitive policy and the funding of feminist services. ”

Marian Sawer, 'Australia: The Fall of the Femocrats' in Joyce Outshoorn and Johanna Kantola (eds), *Changing State Feminism*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, p. 20



**SOURCE 6.10** Elizabeth Reid, the first adviser to the prime minister on women's affairs, photographed with Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and the Secretary of the Australian Government's Department of the Media, James Oswin in 1974



## 1980s – 1990s

- 1980 Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council established
- 1983 Susan Ryan became Labor's first woman cabinet minister. She was appointed as Minister Assisting the Prime Minister Bob Hawke on the Status of Women and was Minister for Education and Youth Affairs.
- 1984 Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act passed  
UN Conference on the Status of Women, Kenya
- 1986 Joan Child became the first woman to be Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act passed  
Janine Haines was elected as leader of the Australian Democrats political party, becoming the first female federal parliamentary leader of an Australian political party
- 1987 Justice Mary Gaudron became first woman appointed to the High Court
- 1989 Rosemary Follet became Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), the first female head of a government in Australia
- 1990 Joan Kirner (Victoria) and Carmen Lawrence (Western Australia) became first women to head their respective state governments
- 1994 Indigenous Women's Network formed
- 1996 Jenny George elected as first woman president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions
- 1998 Abortion legalised in limited circumstances in Western Australia

As a result of the femocrats' initiatives in the wider political context, federal and state governments in Australia introduced laws that addressed many of the enduring concerns of the women's movement. Two of the most important Acts passed were the Sex Discrimination Act and the Affirmative Action Act.

### SEX DISCRIMINATION ACT 1984

This Act was a milestone in Australian anti-discrimination legislation. It faced strong opposition in parliament and held the record for stimulating the longest debate in Australian parliamentary history. In the end, members of the opposition voted with the Labor government on this Bill.

The aim of the Sex Discrimination Act is to eliminate discrimination and sexual harassment in Australian society, and, by so doing, promote gender equality. The Act is written in gender-neutral language. Both men and women are able to make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission about discrimination on the basis of their gender.

In addition to the Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act, each state introduced its own sex discrimination legislation. The first year after this Act was passed into law, Jane Hill was awarded \$35 000 under New South Wales legislation when she suffered sexual harassment at her job over a period of 18 months.

## The Sex Discrimination Act 1984

The objects of this Act are:

- (a) to give effect to certain provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and to provisions of other relevant international instruments; and
- (b) to eliminate, so far as is possible, discrimination against persons on the ground of sex, marital status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy or breastfeeding in the areas of work, accommodation, education, the provision of goods, facilities and services, the disposal of land, the activities of clubs and the administration of Commonwealth laws and programs; and
- (ba) to eliminate, so far as possible, discrimination on the ground of family responsibilities in the area of work; and
- (c) to eliminate, so far as is possible, discrimination involving sexual harassment in the workplace, in educational institutions and in other areas of public activity; and
- (d) to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle of the equality of men and women.

Extract from 'Sex Discrimination Act 1984. Act No. 4 of 1984 as amended'. This legislative material is reproduced by permission, but is not the official or authorised version. It is subject to Commonwealth of Australia copyright.

### Questions

- 1 Describe in your own words the aim of this Act, making sure you cover all the points from (a) to (d).
- 2 Why was this Act so important?

## AFFIRMATIVE ACTION ACT (EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN) 1986



**SOURCE 6.11** Some occupations opened up to women by anti-discrimination laws were in the military. Wing Commander Linda Corbould was the first woman to command a Royal Australian Air Force Flying Squadron. She joined the RAAF in 1981 and served until 2011, seeing active service in Somalia, East Timor and the Iraq War.

This Act replaced the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*. It required higher educational institutes and employers with 100 or more staff to introduce programs that would assist in removing barriers to inequality, and to women's equal participation in the workforce. This was opposed by some employers and reviewed in 1999. The anti-discrimination Acts opened up new occupational areas for women.

Affirmative action was intended to make employers change the gender profile of organisations. If a workplace had more than 100 employees an Affirmative Action Plan was to be developed by management in order to provide opportunities for women to gain knowledge and skills required to take on more senior positions.

In the education sector, schools and universities employed Equal Opportunity Officers to work towards broadening girls' views about courses that were appropriate for them. Female students were encouraged to think about applying for studies that were largely taken by males at the time. These included mathematics and science subjects in schools, and medicine, science or engineering degrees in universities. Girls were also encouraged to consider taking on an apprenticeship in a trade area.

## WAVES OF FEMINISM

There is a generally accepted idea, repeated in many books, textbooks and articles, that there have been two waves of feminism. The first wave began in the late 19th century and finished in America around 1920; in Great Britain in 1918; and in Australia in 1902. This was when women achieved the right to vote. The second wave began with the Women's Liberation Movement in 1969.

Some historians refer now to a third wave that began in the 1990s and extends into the 21st century. It refers to a new stage in which the idea of feminism has changed to acknowledge the differences among women. It encompasses those women whose lives and experiences have been largely invisible – such as Indigenous and migrant women.

These extracts from prominent historians of the women's movement in Australia highlight the complexity of the issues of the two-wave theory.

### Anne Curthoys

Despite the changes of the last two decades and the continuities with the past, the year 1970 does seem to mark a significant moment in Australian history – a starting point for a new kind of women's movement.

Ann Curthoys, 'Doing It For Themselves: The Women's Movement Since 1970' in K Saunders and R Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992, p. 425

### Marilyn Lake

Five overlapping phases can be discerned in the history of Australian feminism ... the first phase, the 1880s and 1890s ... the second stage in the first three decades of the twentieth century ... The third phase from the 1940s to the 1960s ... the fourth phase which styled itself a women's liberation movement ... and the fifth phase of feminism which we presently occupy.

Marilyn Lake, 'History of Australian Feminism' in Barbara Caine (ed.) *Australian Feminism: A Companion*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 134.

### Questions

- 1 In what ways do Lake and Curthoys differ in their ideas about phases of feminism in Australia?
- 2 If we accept that there are only two stages of feminism, what does that suggest about the years in between in terms of a women's movement?
- 3 Review Chapters 4 and 5, and then 6. What evidence is there to suggest that women's liberation was a significant break from past women's movements?
- 4 What continuities do you see? Have all the demands made in the early movement been met?
- 5 Why would people think that there was no women's movement in Australia between 1902 and 1969? Consider how people learn about the past.

## Conclusion

Between 1960 and 2000, there was a radical shift in the role of women in Western society. The home was no longer seen as the natural space for women. The term 'househusband' was created to describe men who switched roles and stayed at home to care for preschool children while their wives went to work as the 'breadwinners'.

It would have been inconceivable in 1960 to imagine that by the 1980s the military would be made up of both men and women, or that a woman would be commanding an air force squadron, or that women in the military would see active service and be present at all levels of command and decision making.

For women to have equal opportunities in employment, a sharp disjuncture was required in society's view of their role. The catalyst for this disjuncture was the Women's Liberation Movement. It burst onto the social landscape in 1969, breaking with the women's movements of the past in its desire for personal as well as social liberation. Its criticism of the unequal structures of societies, as well as an emphasis on activism and new methods, signalled its difference. But even new, radically different movements have some continuity with previous ones. In their reaction to the previous movements, women's liberation groups also revealed their origins.

Debates about continuing with previous methods of operation – such as whether feminists should remain outside government or join the government – produced tensions within the women's movement. However, groups on both sides of this debate cooperated when necessary in a political event or protest.

The significant changes that took place in politics and economics during these years led to a more equal society. However, the process is by no means complete. The explicit sexism experienced by Australia's first female prime minister, Julia Gillard, shows that the struggle is not over and that a women's movement is still needed. As Kate Millett wrote in *Sexual Politics* in 1969, 'there is such a thing as sexual politics and the personal is political'.<sup>3</sup>



## Chapter summary

- + The Pill was revolutionary because it provided an oral contraceptive that was reliable; it removed the fear of pregnancy and was disconnected from the act of sex.
- + Despite initial disapproval and concerns about its side effects, the Pill changed women's lives and was an important influence on the development of the women's movement in the latter part of the 20th century.
- + The battle for equal pay continued throughout most of the 20th century, and although equal pay was achieved in principle, in reality for most women during the second half of the century the gender gap in wages still existed.
- + The impact of *The Feminine Mystique* was enormous both in America and internationally, despite its focus on white, middle-class women. It opened a public space for women from different backgrounds to express their grievances and lack of rights.
- + *The Female Eunuch* was controversial and immediately successful in challenging the existing role of women. The book presented a picture of women's oppression as a fundamental element of society. It raised sexual issues that had not been discussed so openly before.
- + The Women's Liberation Movement differed from the previous women's movements in its criticism of inequalities imposed by institutions and structures in society. Its adoption of consciousness-raising as a method of exposing the sameness of the oppression of women, while giving them confidence to speak out, was new.
- + The Women's Electoral Lobby was highly effective in keeping politicians to account and putting pressure on them to keep their electoral promises.
- + The entrance of feminists into government positions was divisive. There were those who thought feminists could effect change within the bureaucracy and those who believed that women would be co-opted to join the system, or be forced to compromise.
- + Feminists who joined the bureaucracy were called 'femocrats'. Their support for women's services through government has been labelled as a form of state feminism by some historians.
- + The Sex Discrimination and Affirmative Action Acts were two of the most important Acts passed by the Australian parliament. They addressed women's concerns about discrimination in society on the basis of sex, and about the structures in organisations that prevented women from participating equally in the workforce.

### Weblinks

Weblinks relevant to this chapter can be found at <http://nmh.nelsonnet.com.au/women>.

### Endnotes

- 1 Norman Swan, ABC Health Report: Beyond the Pill, 10 February 2014
- 2 Marilyn Lake, *Getting equal: the history of Australian feminism*, Allen & Unwin, 1999, p. 266
- 3 Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, Doubleday & Co., 1969



## Chapter review activities

- 1 In 1999, *The Economist* named the Pill the most important scientific advance of the 20th century. What was so significant about it?
- 2 Imagine that you are a female sitting next to a classmate who is male. You both work for the same number of hours at the local fast-food shop, both serving chicken and chips. You receive 75 per cent of your classmate's wage. Write a letter to the manager arguing why you should receive the same amount of money.
- 3 What did the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) achieve? The extent to which the WLM was successful can be measured by how many of its aims were achieved. Listed in the first two columns of the table below are the demands set out in the Women's Liberation Movement's Manifesto on page 159 and from WEL on page 162. The two sets of demands are remarkably similar. Using this chapter and wider research, briefly indicate in the third column your assessment of the women's movement's achievements in these areas during the 1960s. In the fourth column, note the evidence you used to make this assessment.

WLM Manifesto	WEL	Level of success	Evidence
Women's right to control their own bodies through contraception			
Legalised abortion	Abortion on demand		
Freely available contraception	Free contraceptive services		
Free 24-hour childcare	Free 24-hour childcare		
Equal opportunity/job opportunities	Equal job opportunities		
Equal educational opportunities	Equal access to education		

- 4 Using evidence from the table, evaluate the extent to which the WLM achieved its aims.
- 5 Before 1969, women were paid less than men in the same job just because they were women. Were there some jobs from which a woman had to resign when she got married? What reasons were used to justify this?
- 6 Kath Thomas and Stella Nord were two unionists who fought for equal pay over several decades. Investigate their work in the equal pay struggle, and write a short account of their methods, and their achievements.

- 7 Merle Thornton became one of the leaders in the struggle for women's rights in Queensland, establishing organisations and campaigning for changes to laws restricting women. Research her political work and write a short assessment of her achievements for women. Provide evidence of your assessment. How significant was her work for women?
- 8 In 1978, a new campaign to raise awareness about violence against women began. It was called 'Reclaim the Night'. Investigate this campaign to find its origins, its organisers, their aims and achievements. Create a poster for their campaign.
- 9 Childcare was one of the three most important demands of women as mothers. Explain why it was so important? Is childcare still an issue today? Explain.
- 10 Analyse the poster in Source 6.12.
  - a What is the context of this poster?
  - b Who produced it?
  - c What is its purpose?
  - d How might it have shocked the public when it was produced?
  - e How does it convey its message?
  - f How effective do you think it is?
- 11 Elsie's Refuge in Glebe, New South Wales, was the first Australian women's refuge set up by feminists in 1972. Research the refuge and write a brief history of it for your local newspaper. Outline its origins, who set it up, what their purpose was and what outcome it had.
- 12 Is feminism still a 'bad' word? Give reasons for your response.
- 13 The song 'I am Woman' became a number one hit in 1972, selling more than one million copies. Written and performed by the Australian singer Helen Reddy, it reflects on issues associated with the women's movement. Find the lyrics for the song online. What themes and message do they convey? Is it a 'feminist' song? What use might such a song be to historians of the women's movement in the early 21st century?



**SOURCE 6.12** A 1969 poster produced by the Health Education Council, UK, and issued by the Family Planning Association

CONCLUSION

*Women's  
movements*



By the end of the 20th century, a great deal had changed for Australian women in terms of their political and legal rights. In many ways, the situation for women at the end of the 20th century, and also in the first decade of the 21st century, would have been unimaginable to women at the beginning of the 1900s.

We have appointed female politicians including a prime minister, state premiers and a governor-general. We have women serving as judges of the High Court of Australia. We have women who are at the top of their field, whether they are chief executive officers of companies, or in medicine and nursing, or in education. Women are working in the trades as electricians, plumbers or cabinet-makers. All this would have amazed the early feminists. The social, political, economic and cultural landscape for women has indeed changed radically.

The early feminists of the late 19th century created the underpinnings for these later successes. Therefore, the women's movement can be seen as a continuation of their work throughout the 20th century, rather than as two separate waves of feminist social activism.

Early feminists considered that achieving the right to vote was critical to achieving further reforms. In 1912, after campaigning for a maternal citizenship and maternal welfare state, all white women received a maternity allowance on the birth of a baby. Subsequently, feminists were successful in achieving child endowment, a continuing payment to support raising a child, in 1927. Other campaigns during the 1920s and 1930s focused on maternal and child health, equal pay, birth control and economic independence for women.

From the 1920s onwards, Australian women established formal contact with international organisations such as the League of Nations, the International Labour Organization and the United Nations, providing Australian women with an international forum in which to discuss the rights of women. The Australian Federation of Women Voters was instrumental in including women in each Australian delegation to the League of Nations.

The international nature of the women's movement continued with the advent of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s. Students returning from America brought new ideas and new forms of social activism to Australia. Factors that led to a more radical movement and the hope for structural changes in society included the contraceptive pill (with its effect on women's social conditions), an increased number of women in tertiary education, and new ideas critical of women's role in society. Many of these ideas came from books published at the time, such as *The Feminine Mystique*, *The Female Eunuch* and *Sexual Politics*.

The 1970s Women's Liberation Movement achieved impressive victories in changing sexist laws and raising the consciousness of both men and women about society's sexist practices. A new awareness about women emerged with regard to their choices in education, employment and relationships. None of these changes would have seemed possible at the beginning of the 20th century. They came about through legislative changes in the areas of sex discrimination and affirmative action, in both education and employment.

However, despite advances that have been made through the law, it seems that changing entrenched attitudes is much more difficult. The sexist treatment of Australia's first female prime

◀ Julia Gillard and Anne Summers – two powerful public women. Julia Gillard was the first female prime minister of Australia and Anne Summers was a leader in the Women's Liberation movement. As a feminist historian, senior government adviser and femocrat, Summers remains an influential and important social commentator.

minister is testament to the continuation of sexist attitudes held by some men. This demonstrates the need for women to understand that there are still areas of public life where they will be treated badly. We can see how far Australia still has to go in attitudinal change when we remember that in the 1930s women who were categorised as being the 'divorcing type' were described as being 'generally childless', and that in 2007 Julia Gillard was accused of being 'deliberately barren'.

On the subject of female prime ministers, Julia Gillard said in a speech at Parliament House on 26 June 2013, 'What I am absolutely confident of is it will be easier for the next woman and the woman after that and the woman after that. And I'm proud of that'.



- b How did the concept of women's rights evolve between the late 19th century and the early 20th century?
- c Evaluate the tactics and success of women's rights movements in Australia between 1880 and 2010.
- d Women's movements have been criticised for focusing only on the political rights of middle-class white women. Draw on your knowledge and further research to evaluate this assessment.

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