**PANKHURST, Emmeline (1858-1928)**

Emmeline Pankhurst was born Emmeline Goulden in Manchester, England. One of the most prominent activists in the suffrage movement, Pankhurst founded both the Women’s Franchise League (1883), and the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU, 1903). She married Richard Pankhurst (1834-1898), a barrister, in 1879, and had five children: Christabel (1880-1958); Sylvia (1882-1960); Francis Henry (1884-1888); Adela (1885-1961); and Henry Francis (1889-1910). All three of the Pankhurst daughters became political activists in socialist and suffrage organizations.

In her autobiography, *My Own Story*, Pankhurst writes, “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” (268). Pankhurst’s work connected her with many of the leading socialist, labor and suffrage activists of her day, including Annie Besant, Keir Hardie, William Morris , Eleanor Marx, and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence. In 1894, Pankhurst investigated conditions at the Chorlton Workhouse, which galvanized her activism.“I thought I had been a suffragist before I became a Poor Law Guardian, but now I began to think about the vote in women’s hands not only as a right but as a desperate necessity” (28).

Founded in 1903, the Women’s Social and Political Union became the most militant organization campaigning for women’s suffrage. The WSPU’s slogan, “deeds, not words,” inspired highly publicized demonstrations, window smashing campaigns and arson, which shocked both parliament and the public. Emmeline Pankhurst and fellow suffragettes were frequently arrested in the years leading up to the First World War, often going on prison hunger strikes that were met with violent force feedings, and the passage of the Prisoner’s Health Act of 1913 (the “Cat and Mouse Act”), which released near-death prisoners until they recovered and could be re-arrested.

The outbreak of the First World War ended the WSPU’s campaigns and marked a conservative political turn for Pankhurst. All suffragettes were released from prison in August 1914, and the WSPU pledged to help the war effort. The Representation of the People Act of 1918 gave women over age 30 the right to vote. Emmeline Pankhurst died in June, 1928, just weeks before the government extended the right to vote to all citizens over the age of 21.

**Bibliography**

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