

SUFFRAGETTES, SUFFRAGISTS AND PARTY POLITICS IN SOUTHAMPTON 1907-14

By PAMELA JOHNSTON

ABSTRACT

This article examines the activities of the two main suffrage organisations, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) in Southampton during the years 1907-14.

The interaction between the national bodies and the local branches is discussed; so is the surprising mutual sympathy between the two local groups. Detailed accounts of newsworthy events are found in the three main local newspapers – the *Southern Daily Echo*, the *Hampshire Advertiser* and the *Southampton Times*. The political bias of the newspaper determines the length and tone of the accounts published. Changing attitudes in the Press reflect the changing policies of Liberal and Conservative parties towards the issue of women's suffrage. The national weekly publication, *Votes for Women* gives an insight into the local WSPU members' own opinions and aspirations, as regular contributions from the Southampton branch appear. The views and activities of the local NUWSS branch are recorded in a manuscript notebook of committee minutes for 1911-14, lodged in Southampton Record Office. These sources, together with some 'eyewitness' observations from individual ladies who have written to me, provide sufficient material to give a fairly detailed account. A minimum of background information is included on Southampton political life at the time and the limited role women played within this.

INTRODUCTION

This study of the women's rights movement in Southampton before 1914 is mainly of local interest, but it also draws attention to two themes which may have a wider relevance. The first concerns the harmony and co-operation at a local level between the two large organisations, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU, the Suffragettes) and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS, the Suffragists). The methods of the two groups, however, differed. This theme can be studied at

close quarters in the WSPU Branch reports sent from Southampton to *Votes for Women*, the weekly newspaper which played such a large part in its campaigns; and in a manuscript minute-book of the Southampton NUWSS branch, covering the period 1911-1914, now lodged in Southampton City Records Office (SRO D/2 405). Secondly, the extent to which women's suffrage became a party issue after Asquith became Prime Minister in 1908 stands out strikingly when reference is made to the three main local newspapers, the *Southampton Times*; the *Southern Daily Echo* with their Liberal bias; and the *Hampshire Advertiser*, with its Conservative outlook. From a comparatively friendly tone in 1907, the *Echo* swings to a hostile and ultimately silent response, whilst the more radical *Times* continues to uphold the women's cause and show increasing sympathy for it. The *Advertiser* continues to report the activities of the Suffragettes and Suffragists in a reasonably objective and fair-minded way as the Pankhursts' movement became increasingly associated with the Conservative party. Local reactions provide an instructive counterpoint to the main national themes.

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY SOUTHAMPTON

The rise of the Suffragettes was partly the outcome of new educational opportunity for girls in the late nineteenth century, partly a proof of the intensity of political life in the early twentieth century. This was true locally. Southampton was already something of a marginal seat, with lively and frequent political debates and meetings. In general elections, Southampton followed the national trend, electing Liberal MPs (Messrs Phillipps and Ward) with large majorities in 1906 (Ensor 1936, 417-8. 423-7) after years of Conservative representation;



Fig 1. Photograph of three WSPU members – Mrs Applin, Miss March and Mrs Ethel Harvey, mother of Mrs Thompson – selling *Votes for Women* – by the Clock Tower (given to the author by Mrs Thompson).

sending the same MPs back, with smaller majorities, in 1910. The new Labour party was also gaining a foothold, though already divided against itself. In 1911, a strong supporter of women's rights, Dr Stancomb, was put forward as prospective Labour candidate for Parliament. He had support from the ILP and several unions, but he stood down in favour of a more extreme Socialist, Mr Lewis, Honorary President of the Seafarers' Union (Temple Patterson 1970, 136).

Women could only play a very limited part on this political scene. The two large political parties had realised in the 1880's that there existed an increasing number of educated women, many of whom had no work outside the home, whether married or not; they also had servants. This source of voluntary labour had been tapped in the formation of the Women's Liberal Association and the Primrose League. Although these organisations helped to

increase the political awareness of women, their ideas merely echoed current party policy and they never claimed 'votes for women' as their cause. The Women's Liberal Association had several active branches in Southampton which often voiced sympathy for the Suffragists and even for Suffragettes, but without committing themselves beyond party orthodoxy. Their President, Mrs Laughland, was prominent in the National Women's Liberal Association. She attended Suffragette meetings; when Mrs Pankhurst came to Southampton she complained about WSPU criticism of Mr Asquith (ST9 Feb 1911). Mrs Foster Welch, a prominent Conservative, belonged both to WSPU and NUWSS. An Act of 1907 allowed women to sit on municipal and county councils, but there was no woman councillor in Southampton until 1918. (This was Mrs Foster Welch herself.) Women were also allowed to sit on the Boards of Guardians, which administered workhouses and

the poor law. The Southampton Board had five women members out of twenty-three in 1914; none of them appear in the list of known members of WSPU or NUWSS.

EARLY SUFFRAGETTE ACTIVITY IN SOUTHAMPTON

From 1903 onwards, the Pankhursts encouraged their followers, members of the newly-formed WSPU, to attend political meetings, an important focus in the days before mass media. Their aim was to draw attention to the cause of women's suffrage, even if it meant disturbances and a degree of militancy. Cabinet ministers

were continuously on tour, explaining policies and keeping in touch with public opinion. The *Southern Daily Echo* gives detailed coverage to a Liberal meeting held in Southampton on 13 November 1907 at which the Speaker was Mr Augustine Birrell, then Chief Secretary for Ireland, described as a man having 'broad sympathies and a sense of humour'. (*DNB*, 1931-40, 80-83). The front page headline reads: 'Liberal demonstrations at Southampton. Suffragettes forcibly ejected.' The full report inside had another headline: 'Suffragettes demonstrate before Mr Birrell; lively scenes.' A contingent of leading Suffragettes had come down from London for the occasion. The first mentioned by



Fig 2. Portrait of Mrs Foster Welch by Frank Brooks, unveiled by Duke of Gloucester in 1928. (In Southampton Art Gallery.)

name is Mrs Drummond, known in the movement as the General. Her stentorian voice contrasted with her short, stout appearance which she concealed by appearing at outdoor demonstrations on horseback! On this occasion, she sat in the front row and immediately began heckling, whereupon she was removed by the stewards, together with a male sympathiser. Another suffragette sitting near the front then called out: 'What is Mr Birrell going to do for the women?' This provoked laughter and cries of 'Throw her out'. Mr Birrell, who behaved with courtesy throughout, answered: 'If you will only keep order, we shall proceed quietly.' The lady called out: 'I am afraid not', at which the attendants made a rush at her and she was ejected while the brass band in attendance gave an impromptu rendering of 'In the shade of the old apple tree'.

There was a similar episode later in the meeting, at which the brass band rose to greater heights with the Soldiers' Chorus from Faust. Mr Birrell complained at the discourtesy of interrupting a minister of the Crown; however, he wound up his speech with a reference to the issue of women's suffrage, which showed he was well disposed to the cause in general. He regretted it was necessary to remove the ladies — (cries of 'serve them right') — said it was not a party question, as countless Tories were in favour of it. He added that he 'could not force his views down the throats of other people', probably meaning his fellow cabinet ministers, several of whom were strongly against votes for women. Birrell was subsequently injured by militants in 1912 when his knee-cap was fractured (Jenkins 1964, 246).

The strongest opponent was Asquith, and when he became Prime Minister in 1908, the atmosphere changed (Jenkins 1962, 247f; Rover 1967, 122). Women were not allowed to attend public meetings and could only put their case by lobbying speakers outside. Though a tribute to the nuisance value of the suffragettes, it was a definite setback for them.

Next time a cabinet minister, Mr Runciman, visited Southampton in 1909, different tactics were used and the local press took little interest. The only mention in the Liberal *Echo*, came in

the first paragraph of a long report:— 'Admission was strictly by ticket and every effort was made to guard against the incursions of the ubiquitous suffragettes, who dog the steps of ministers' — clearly a more hostile tone. The way in which Mr Runciman's steps were dogged is reported in the WSPU journal, *Votes for Women*. It relates how a Miss Pitman tried to attract the minister's attention as he left the meeting. She took his arm and quietly said: 'When are you going to give justice to women? You gentlemen talk a lot about justice and freedom, but when are you going to be just to the women and give them the vote?' He ignored her, but as he climbed into his wagonette, she managed to jump on the step, hung on to the carriage door and said more loudly: 'When are you going to give justice to the women of this country?' A dozen or so bystanders rallied round and pulled her off, but she continued to shout 'Votes for Women'. No police action was taken; in fact the crowd seems to have been sympathetic, according to the *Votes for Women* reporter. Miss Pitman is not mentioned elsewhere, so she may have been another campaigner from outside.

The following year, 1910, was the period when the Liberals were considering the introduction of a Conciliation Bill, which might give the vote to a small number of women. In view of this, the Suffragettes declared a truce and suspended their militant tactics, which by this time had included hunger strikes; (there are no local examples). This new policy was mentioned in an editorial in the *Echo* for 2 February 1910 — 'If the issue is treated in a proper manner and there are signs that the government is prepared to treat it seriously, there will be no further trouble; if the government show they do not intend to respond to the demands of the women, the militant campaign will be recommended . . . this is the policy on which the Suffragettes are to be congratulated.'

WOMEN'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNION — SOUTHAMPTON BRANCH

At exactly this time, February, 1910, the first mention of a Southampton WSPU branch appears in *Votes for Women*. Weekly reports were

sent in, first by a Miss Birstingl of Denzil Avenue, then by Mrs Shaw of 62 Bedford Place; another address frequently quoted in 81 Alma Road, home of Miss Kennedy. Membership must have been small as the reports always contain appeals for new members, especially those willing to sell *Votes for Women*. Little headway seems to have been made until the autumn of 1910. In an October issue of *Votes for Women*, the Southampton and Portsmouth branches are mentioned together and from then on appear to have amalgamated. Immediately, a more urgent and energetic note appears in the reports, suggesting that the driving force came from Portsmouth. There were more working women in Portsmouth, especially at the corset factory. They seem to have been more organised and radical than Southampton Suffragettes.

Another reason for increased activity was the impending visit of Mrs Pankhurst. She was due to speak at Southampton on 19 November 1910 – there was a flurry of preparations and instructions. 'The Palace Theatre has been taken and work must begin at once. Handbills and tickets . . . 2s reserved and 1s 6d unreserved, will be sold at Hodges the music sellers, Above Bar. Membership cards from Miss Kennedy, 81 Alma Road.' Preparatory outdoor meetings were held during October, the most successful seem to have been those at the dock gates, Shirley Recreation Ground, Kingsland Square and the Clock Tower. In early November, an appeal for help in distributing handbills appears; also the announcement of a poster parade – 'members are requested to wear short skirts and small hats.' Then orders for the meeting itself – 'Stewards are asked to wear white if possible. Ribbon in the colours (ie WSPU colours of purple, green and white) can be obtained from the organiser.'

Excitement was mounting, especially as some members had attended an Albert Hall demonstration, following the government's veto on the Conciliation Bill. So the truce was over and further demonstrations in London culminated in the notorious Black Friday (18 November 1910) procession to the Houses of Parliament, where on orders of the Home Secretary (Winston Churchill), the police treated women with

unprecedented force – women were thrown on the ground, limbs dislocated; many arrests made (Mackenzie 1975, 162-9; Rosen 1974, 138). One of these arrests was Mrs Pankhurst herself, so the excited preparations of the Southampton Suffragettes were to no avail – the meeting planned for the 19th had to be cancelled. No announcement of the meeting or of its cancellation appears in the *Echo*, but there was a prominent report of the events in London. The only hint of the methods used comes in the words 'The police were much too strong for the women.' The report is not consistent with the approval of Suffragette policy expressed a few months earlier.

The Southampton Suffragettes were not long deterred and Mrs Pankhurst's visit was rearranged for 4 February 1911. A full report appears in the *Hampshire Advertiser* on 8 February also in the *Southampton Times* on 9 February (comparison with the *Daily Echo* is not possible in 1911, as the archive for that year was apparently destroyed in World War II). The Suffragette leader was welcomed by a largely female audience at the Palace Theatre, which was decked with violet, green and white banners and posters with inscriptions such as 'Who would be free themselves must strike the blow.' 'Through thick and thin when we begin.' and 'Will Asquith give way?' Mrs Pankhurst, 'a quiet little figure in black' spoke slowly and moderately at first, outlining the case for women's franchise. Because women of the twentieth century had been driven to extremities by continual refusal, a good many people imagined that their claim was extreme. In fact, it was very moderate. Women were fighting against a disability put on their sex by accident of birth. Sex privilege was as strong and rampant as ever. Throughout life, a woman was handicapped in her work by want of citizenship. Women had no desire to be like men; indeed it was because they realised their womanhood that they wanted the vote. Towards the end of her speech, Mrs Pankhurst referred to Black Friday, bitterly denouncing the police for their brutality, instigated, she suggested, by Mr Winston Churchill.

She denied that the Suffragettes themselves had used any but constitutional methods at

public meetings. A degree of militancy was justified, she argued, because it brought the issue of women's rights to the forefront. She ended by emphasising that there was a woman's point of view on every question and that women would no longer be degraded. Questions and discussion then took place, but no resolutions were passed. Turning back to the *Suffragette* newspaper, *Votes for Women*, the report from Southampton tells what happened after the meeting:—

'Through the kindness of Mrs Welch, who invited many friends and sympathisers to tea, members and friends of the WSPU had an opportunity of meeting their leader and of gaining that renewed courage which a talk with Mrs Pankhurst always gives.'

In March, a 'self-denial' week (one of several) was held by the WSPU members, to raise funds for making a banner to be taken to the next Albert Hall demonstration. 'A good contingent must represent the district in the great procession of June 17th.' 'Portsmouth and Southampton must not be behind other towns in sending volunteers.' By May, the banner was almost complete, due to the hard work of Mrs Hartnell, Miss Warner and Mrs Schoenfelt.

Instructions came through about the formation of the procession. Southampton and Portsmouth were in section A.3, forming up on Waterloo Bridge and marching seven abreast in groups according to occupation, where this applied. 'All members expected to attend, defaulters to pay a fine. If possible, dress in the colours, small hats, short skirts.'

Attempts to organise an excursion fare from Southampton fell through, but many members attended, paying the full rail fare of 8s 2d. It is noticeable once again, that the local members rise to a national occasion, rather than organising events locally.

This event was clearly something of an inspiration, as there was no slackening of local activity and events for the rest of the year. The main emphasis was on publicity, with poster parades at railway stations, and an effort to form a new group in the Isle of Wight. 'At theatre queues, outside concerts and meetings, in fact, wherever anything is going on, the suffragettes must be

selling the paper', they reminded each other. Special meetings would be held for discussion of the latest Conciliation Bill. Energy and enthusiasm are more in evidence than vision or real initiative. Special national events spurred the activists to fresh efforts. No doubt there was plenty of sympathy from women of all ages but the number of branch members cannot have been adequate for the work to be done, judging by the rather desperate tone of appeals for help in *Votes for Women*.

LATER ACTIVITIES OF WSPU

Indeed, the movement as a whole was becoming somewhat desperate, as the government yet again postponed the Conciliation Bill and the vote seemed further away than ever. From 1912 onwards, the Pankhursts urged greater militancy in London; arson and window breaking became the order of the day. This caused division within the ranks of the suffragettes and the split between the Pankhursts and Pethick-Lawrences meant the weakening of local groups (Mackenzie 1975, 210–15). It is difficult to know exactly what happened in Southampton, as regular reporting in the new *Suffragette* publication became sporadic and brief and branch reports no longer appeared in *Votes for Women*. Perhaps support in Southampton was stronger for the Pethick-Lawrences who continued to publish *Votes for Women*. This supposition is based on a letter received, after a recent appeal in the local press, from Mrs Ralph Thompson, previously of Southampton, who writes:— 'I can remember going round Swaythling with my little purple, white and green bag selling their papers. That must have been around 1914. I can recall at the age of five, waiting in my best dress all afternoon for a visit from Miss Marsh from London (1912).' She enclosed a photograph of her mother and two friends selling 'Votes for Women' in Southampton town centre (Fig 1) but no date appears on the photograph.

Even if the local branch of WSPU was in decline after 1912, efforts to revive support for the Cause were made by sending well-known speakers from London. Part of their aim was to

counteract hostile public opinion arising from the policy of increased militancy; this included window breaking and pillar-box arson.

In March 1913, Annie Kenney, spoke at Shaftesbury Hall, Ogle Road. She was Christabel Pankhurst's closest associate, visiting her regularly in her self-imposed Parisian exile and bringing back fresh instructions to the faithful. She was therefore a prime target and had to battle against considerable odds at the meeting, which was fully and sympathetically reported in the *Southampton Times*. The main opposition came from a large, all-male contingent of Hartley College students. They caused so much disturbance by heckling and singing that Annie Kenney could only be heard by the first three rows of her audience. However, she persevered and made many telling points which have survived in print, even if they were hardly heard at the time (*ST* 1 March 1913).

She compared women's militancy with earlier male militancy before the passing of the 1832 and 1867 Reform Acts, saying that it was necessary to attract attention to prove their determination. Attacking property was justified 'because it is your god and we touch the thing you care for most.' She defended arson, because it would arouse the great power of the insurance companies to influence the government in favour of women's suffrage. She belittled male opposition, referring to similar reaction to Florence Nightingale and Josephine Butler, which had been proved wrong. Loud singing of 'Everybody's Doing It' eventually brought the meeting to an end and Miss Kenney was escorted by police from a back entrance. A letter in the *Southampton Times* from Dr Stancomb the following week commented tartly on Mr Asquith's willingness to enfranchise such young hooligans, but to keep women waiting yet again. A Trade Union columnist also wrote sympathetically of the visit. In March 1914 'General' Drummond paid another visit to Southampton, this time as a speaker. Opposition seems to have subsided, as no disturbances are reported (Temple Patterson 1970, 137).

THE NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES, SOUTHAMPTON BRANCH

From May 1911 to October 1914, more information is available about the parallel women's organisation, NUWSS, which also had a branch in Southampton. The national leader was Mrs Millicent Fawcett, and the group had existed many years before WSPU. Its national membership in 1912 was 36,000. The methods of the NUWSS were painstaking and moderate, with emphasis on letter writing, campaigns, meetings, marches and publications. Reports of meetings and activities of the Southampton suffragists appear regularly in the local press, especially the *Southampton Times*. By 1914 this newspaper had a regular feature called 'Women's Outlook on Social and Political Life,' which seems to reflect NUWSS views. They seem to be a more articulate and self-sufficient branch than the WSPU.

From 1911, a further picture of their work can be obtained from a manuscript minute-book of their committee meetings. (SRO D/2 405). Unremarkable in itself, it is a fortunate survival, as it becomes possible to continue the story of women's rights in Southampton after the information on WSPU has dried up.

To begin with, the similarities are more striking than the differences and in Southampton, there was considerable mutual sympathy between the two groups. This may be because the WSPU was so restrained and untypical in its lack of militancy. There must have been co-operation over the great London procession of 17 June 1911 in which the NUWSS members also carried their banner. Later in 1911, and in 1912, Mrs Welch was prominent on their committee, offering hospitality for meetings, just as she had done to Mrs Pankhurst. Public meetings were organised to discuss the Conciliation bills, one of which was addressed by Mr Brailsford, national chairman of the Conciliation Committee. The idea of making this a joint meeting with the WSPU was discussed, but rejected; WSPU were to be cordially invited, however.

A curious ambivalence appears in NUWSS

records for March and April, 1912. At a public meeting organised in March, all the speakers criticised militant tactics, because they did harm to the Cause. Yet the following month, the committee sent a letter of sympathy to Mr and Mrs Terrero 'expressing sorrow that Mrs Terrero has had to suffer imprisonment for the sake of the women's cause'. (No reports of militant or violent episodes appear in the local press at this time, though Professor Temple Patterson refers to pillar-box arson in Southampton without giving a reference (Temple Patterson III 1970, 137). At the same time, it was decided that the secretary should send a letter of protest to the Home Secretary, 'expressing indignation with the inhuman way he allowed the militants in prison to be treated.' (This refers to the Cat and Mouse Act, and forcible feeding, also largely restricted to WSPU members.) It is interesting to find such evidence of moral support from the NUWSS when the WSPU itself was about to split over the militancy issue.

THE ANTI-SUFFRAGE LEAGUE

Another joint concern of the two organisations was opposition to the powerful Anti-Suffrage League, which had emerged in 1909 under the leadership of Mrs Humphrey Ward and a group of imperialist aristocrats such as Lord Curzon and Lord Cromer. Although in general the Conservative leadership supported the cause of votes for women, this organisation represented a kind of backlash from within. At a meeting held in Southampton in November 1911, reported in the *Hampshire Advertiser*, the speaker was Lord Montagu, prospective Unionist candidate for Southampton. Fear of the consequences of universal suffrage was the theme of his speech. 'Whatever party was in power, women should be given privileges (unspecified), but this was a different thing from handing over "the government of our great empire" to a majority of women.' Another speaker stressed the difficulty of deciding on a suitable franchise for women - 'Should there be a democratic franchise for men, but an aristocratic franchise for women?' 'Would women have to give up the vote when they marry?' Hurdles of this kind

were given much attention as reasons for withholding the franchise from women. The WSPU opposition took the form of poster parades before Anti-Suffrage meetings, and selling *Votes for Women* outside the hall where the meeting was held. The NUWSS reports in its minutes for September 1912:- 'The Anti-Suffrage League people are planning to concentrate on Southampton this winter; a sub-committee under Mrs Welch is to organise a campaign to counteract this influence.' However, this does not seem to have been followed up. No reports of further anti-suffrage activity appeared in the press over the following winter.

NUWSS AND OTHER SUFFRAGE GROUPS

During 1911 and 1912, the NUWSS branch continues its characteristic work of writing to local MPs to press for facilities for the Conciliation Bill, but these letters met with a negative response. In April 1912, a letter from Mrs Fawcett herself appeared in *Southampton Times* explaining the defeat of the Conciliation Bill for a third time. In 1913, Mrs Fawcett sent a letter to the Branch committee, urging all branch members to write to their MP about an amendment to the new Franchise Bill now being brought forward in place of the Conciliation Bill. As a result, 250 letters were sent off in the Southampton branch postal campaign. It is clear from the Committee minutes that the NUWSS branch was part of a well co-ordinated network covering the south of England; representatives were occasionally sent to regional meetings. There was also contact with smaller organisations working directly or indirectly for women's rights, and maintaining a presence in Southampton. Some of these groups have received little recognition, for example, the Women Worker's Council (Women in industry) group, which concerned itself with conditions of work in factories and women's wages, in the face of the largely hostile and male-dominated trade unions of this time. Similar to this was the Co-operative Guild of Women (Thompson 1975, 245). These two groups must have provided a focus for working-class women and partly

accounts for the largely middle-class membership of WSPU and NUWSS. (See Liddington and Norris.) Other groups mentioned are the Men's League for Women's Suffrage and the Tax Resistance League. The latter may have been an offshoot of Mrs Despard's Women's Freedom League; this had a branch in Portsmouth which organised a census strike in 1911 (reported in *Votes for Women*, February-March 1911).

Returning to the local press, there is further evidence of support for women's suffrage from a wide cross-section of population, in the report of a demonstration held on March 30th, 1912 (ST. March 31). This was organised by the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the People's Suffrage Federation and the Southampton Trades and Labour Council. (Unfortunately, no records of the local branches of these organisations survive.) The ubiquitous Dr Stancomb was in the chair. In his introductory speech, he emphasised that the burden of poverty fell mainly upon women - 'they had to bear the responsibility of economic trouble at home'. Linking this with current labour troubles, he added, 'so long as the government deprived women of the vote, they would not settle in a satisfactory manner, the great labour unrest in the country.' The presence of Mrs Charlotte Despard (sister of General Sir John French), brought to Southampton another leading figure in the women's movement, though not strictly suffragette. She had formed the Women's Freedom League in 1909, as a breakaway movement from WSPU, as she disagreed with the tactic of hunger strikes. However, in her speech she gave an account of several spells of imprisonment she had endured - 'I am a criminal really' (applause) - and went on to speak of the 'spiritual force' in the women's movement, as well as the more practical points that women wanted the vote for two main reasons - as a badge of citizenship and as a passport to greater service in the community. Mr Anderson, local chairman of the ILP, wound up with a fighting speech, declaring that it was 'humbug' to speak of a woman's place being in the home when 'there were four million women going out into the world each morning to earn

their own livelihood, and they were miserably sweated and underpaid.' A resolution in favour of universal adult suffrage was enthusiastically passed. By this time, it is clear, the various types of injustice in society were being compared and discussed as part of a single, overwhelming problem. However, the WSPU and NUWSS did not concern themselves greatly with the social implications of the suffrage, but concentrated on the constitutional, legal and practical business of getting a measure of reform, no matter how limited, through Parliament as a first step. The WSPU did not always welcome the support of these labour-inspired groups, as they did not wish to be identified too closely with any single political outlook. The Pankhursts themselves switched their party's allegiance in a tactical manner - from Labour to Liberal (after 1906); then to Conservative (after Asquith became Liberal leader in 1908). Sylvia Pankhurst, however, remained a socialist.

OUTBREAK OF WAR

The last is heard of Southampton NUWSS in 1914. More useful work is reported at the April AGM. 'In the last year, nineteen meetings have been held, also outdoor campaign work in connection with women's Pilgrimage (a nation-wide effort converging on London, arranged by NUWSS), much quiet visiting and propaganda.' Then in August, the knell of doom. The minutes record: 'War declared between Great Britain and Germany. A meeting held at once at which the Committee agreed to place the organisation at the service of the town for relief work. It was proposed and passed unanimously that the Mayor should be written to and the offer placed before him.' However, two weeks later, no reply had been received. Another letter was sent, asking for definite plans of relief work, especially employment for women in distress due to the war. It was decided to suspend all political work for the duration of the war. The WSPU had already made a similar declaration; in fact, the militant suffragettes, especially the Pankhursts, threw themselves into the war effort and recruitment drive with greater enthusiasm than the NUWSS, wielding the white feather at every turn.

CONCLUSIONS

In the end, women's suffrage came as a corollary of the women's war effort, though the way was paved by the WSPU, NUWSS and other smaller organisations, and by all the women who had quietly taken part in their activities over the years. The information available for Southampton suggests an intelligent, politically-conscious caucus of devoted women, not interested in feminist extremism, but taking every opportunity to present the rational arguments for sexual equality. No complete list of members exists, but judging from the addresses of known suffragettes, and the frequent committee meetings held in private homes, a largely middle-class membership can be assumed. In any case, Britain was still far from being a democracy, and only women of this class would benefit if the vote had been granted without altering the conditions for the male franchise also (Cross 1963, 156). Married and single women worked side by side for the cause. Their initiatives are usually taken in response to stimulus by the national bodies, or to outside events; they meet, they plan, they raise money, they make banners, they wear sashes, they rally in London – but they are not militant in the full sense. Hardly women of vision, yet they persevered and eventually came into their own. A few individuals stand out: Miss Kennedy of 81 Alma Road, seems to have been the mainstay of the WSPU Branch. She is the most frequent contributor to *Votes for Women*, faithfully sending in branch reports. When Mrs Pankhurst came to speak in February 1911, Miss Kennedy presented the bouquet. She also formed part of a national deputation to Mr Asquith after the Black Friday episode. Another notable figure was Mrs Lucia Marion Foster Welch (d 1940) (Fig 2), who put the cause of women's suffrage above party politics. She was indeed 'a pioneer who made history' (Kimber 1949, 224). For many years, this public-spirited doctor's wife had opened her home, 61 Oxford Street, to suffragist committees and not least to Mrs Pankhurst herself. Conservative party functions such as fêtes were regularly held in her garden

It is sad that this house and its surroundings were destroyed to make way for Queensway. Mrs Welch's daughter remembers it as a gracious and beautiful residence. She writes; 'Our house was at 61 Oxford Street where my father was born. This lovely old house had a large garden, four greenhouses, a vinery, stabling for three horses, a tennis court, vegetable garden – all this in Dockland, it was unique.' To complete the story, Mrs Foster Welch became the first women councillor in Southampton in 1918, then in 1922 the first woman Mayor. She was the first woman sheriff in England. Her portrait was painted by Frank Brooks and remains in the Art Gallery (Fig 2). She was also a JP. Her daughter, (Kimber 1949, 23, 148, 225) Mrs McHeffie, acted as her Mayoress, and still lives in Southampton. Perhaps her reminiscences in a recent letter should stand as a last word. 'My mother was an ardent suffragist, and always when referring to this, she added "law-abiding". I seem to remember her saying that women would receive the franchise through their own ability, which is exactly what happened during the First World War – they took the place of men and indeed proved their worth.'

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APPENDIX

List of those mentioned by name in the sources.

Members of WSPU Southampton Branch

Mrs Applin; Miss K S Birstingl, Denzil Avenue; Mrs Blake, who held 'At Homes'; Miss Cumberland, Chairman at Annie Kenney Meetings, who took part in deputation to Mr Asquith after 'Black Friday' (1910); Mrs Dunsford; Mrs Foster Welch, 61 Oxford Street, held reception for Mrs Pankhurst, active committee member, also belonged to NUWSS; Mrs Hartnell, 62 Bedford Place, whose husband owned this house and adjoining no 64 called 'Washington House', helped to make banners for London Procession; Miss Kennedy, 81 Alma Road, whose house belonged to Mr Edwards, Hon Sec of Branch; Miss Marsh, 95 Livingston Road, Chairman, tenant of

house; Mrs May, held 'At Homes'; Mrs Oliver; Miss Schivenfelt, helped to make banner; Mrs Shaw, 62 Bedford Place, founder member and tenant or relative of Mrs Hartnell; Miss Spratt, Chairman 1913; Miss Warner, helped to make banner; Mrs Ethel Harvey.

Members of NUWSS Southampton Branch

Miss Ayling; Miss Margaret Boswell, Treasurer; Miss Dorothy Cooper, Secretary; Mrs Dempster, gave speeches; Mrs Dawson, Secretary, 'The Chestnuts', Swanwick; Mrs Farquharson; Mrs Fox; Mrs Heard; Mrs Mitchell; Miss E J Spencer, President?; Mrs Wall, 'Brookwood', Northland Avenue (meetings held here).

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Author: Pamela Johnston MA (Oxon), Head of History Department, St Swithun's School, Winchester.

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