

THE SUFFRAGE CAUSE

The aim of this unit is to examine the campaign by women to win the vote, and to investigate the objectives of different suffrage groups.

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Discuss the origins of the suffrage campaign.
- Outline the objectives of the various suffrage organisations.
- Outline some of the problems which emerged within the suffrage movement.
- Discuss the development of militancy amongst suffragists.
- List some of the objections raised to women's suffrage.
- Account for the eventual success of the suffrage movement.

The required reading for this unit is as follows:

Smith, Bonnie G. 1989 *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700* Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, pp. 246–264, 348–360, 396–398.

Holton, Sandra Stanley 1995 'Women and the vote' in June Purvis (ed.) *Women's History Britain, 1850–1945 An Introduction* London: University College London Press, pp. 277–305.

In this unit we will examine the origins of the suffrage campaign. We will look at the reasons why women wanted the vote. We will investigate why it took women so long to gain the vote, why men and some women resisted it and why the vote was eventually granted to women. We will examine the tactics used by the suffragists and we will examine the rise of suffrage militancy. We will concentrate on the suffrage campaign in England, since the English women's suffrage campaign provided the model for similar campaigns in other European countries. In the next unit we will concentrate on women and politics in Ireland and examine Irish women's fight for the vote.

AIMS

OBJECTIVES

REQUIRED READING

INTRODUCTION

THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

From about the 1850s there was an intensified debate about the role and activities of women in the state, the home and the workplace. One of the major campaigns in which women engaged was the fight for the vote. It took women in England over seventy years to win the vote, and it often took longer in other countries. Historians have written a good deal about the suffrage movement, its origins, its methods, its adherents, about those who opposed the suffrage, about militancy and why women were eventually granted the vote. Historians also distinguish between *suffragists*, men and women who supported the franchise for women, and *suffragettes*, who were women who engaged in militant activity to secure their aims.

The 1832 Reform Act in England significantly broadened the parliamentary franchise for men. However, the majority of men were still not able to vote. No woman had the parliamentary vote. The debates around the passing of the 1832 Act opened up the whole issue of the parliamentary franchise, and women were to play a major role in this debate. A number of middle-class women, including Bessie Rayner Parkes and Barbara Leigh Smith, started meeting in the 1850s at a house in Langham Place, London. They were originally concerned with working for changes in the Married Women's Property Act but soon extended their interests and activities to other women's issues. In 1857 the *English Woman's Journal* was set up. This was a major source of information about issues and the political concerns of women. Another organisation that was significant in extending and broadening the women's movement in England was the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (NAPSS). This organisation was made up of individuals who were interested in promoting social reform. They believed that adequate investigation of social ills, such as unemployment, criminality and so on, would allow for proper solutions to be implemented to resolve these problems. Women were active in the NAPSS. The annual meetings of the NAPSS allowed women activists to meet and discuss in public their ideas. These annual meetings also allowed women to network and organise new campaigns around issues that were of concern to them. The thing to remember is that women were part of a social and intellectual movement of the period. Their ideas were formulated in the light of their experience within organisations such as the NAPSS.

Further agitation in the 1860s over the extension of the franchise to men brought the subject of votes for women alive again. The 1867 Reform Bill enfranchised working-class men and an attempt by John Stuart Mill to put forward a women's suffrage amendment was defeated. It was the defeat of this amendment that led directly to the formation of women's suffrage societies in London, Manchester and Edinburgh. The Manchester society, which was organised in 1868, soon had over 5,000 members. All of these societies were independent but considered themselves part of a national struggle.

ORIGINS

SAQ 1

Outline the origins of the suffrage movement.

The tactics used by these early suffrage groups, and continued by later groups, included organising petitions to parliament, writing letters to MPs and the papers, organising public meetings and arranging 'at homes', where an invited small audience went to an individual's home to hear a suffrage speaker. Another tactic, used in the early years, was to challenge the legality of the exclusion of women as voters. In doing this women attempted to register themselves as voters. The basis of their argument was that an Act of 1850, commonly known as Lord Romilly's Act, provided that in all statutes before or after that date, the word 'male' included females unless the contrary was expressly provided, which it was not in the 1867 Reform Act in other words that the word 'male' meant both men and women. A number of women, therefore, sent in claims to be registered as voters. All such claims were disallowed.

Getting their message across and also allowing different suffrage groups to be kept aware of developments encouraged the publication of suffrage journals. In 1870 Lydia Becker, president of the Manchester Women's Suffrage Society, and a leading figure in the suffrage movement, established the *Women's Suffrage Journal*. This was used as a forum for providing information to other suffragists around the country about the disabilities suffered by women in educational, legal and domestic spheres.

In the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth century, suffrage groups worked through constitutional means to try to achieve their ends. This meant using the existing parliamentary system to lobby MPs and to raise support for their cause. It was not until 1903, with the arrival of the Women's Social and Political Union, that militant tactics became part of the suffrage campaign.

Can you think of reason why suffragists used these 'genteel' kinds of tactics? Think of things like attitudes towards women, the kinds of character traits women were supposed to have and the importance women placed on proper procedures.

SAQ 2

Discuss the tactics used by early suffragists.

METHODS

ACTIVITY

AIMS OF THE MOVEMENT

Many women were angry that men, of a lower class than they, often had the vote. Women also believed that they were considered second-class citizens because they could not vote. Although women paid taxes and rates on property they were not represented in parliament as other ratepayers and taxpayers were. In the early years of the suffrage movement suffragists argued that women property owners should have the same rights as male property owners in exercising the franchise. The aim of these societies was to obtain for women the right to vote on the same terms as men. Notice this aim. Remember that not all men had the vote and certain property qualifications had to be met before men could acquire the vote. The women's suffrage campaign was not looking for the vote for all women, but only for some women, those who had the same property qualifications as men. This limited aim was to be a feature of the women's suffrage campaign throughout its history. Acquiring the vote on the same terms as men was considered a realistic aim by suffragists. It is also a sign of the class considerations that informed the suffrage movement.

In the early years women also looked for the vote for single women with the necessary property qualifications. Thus married women were to be excluded from the franchise. It was not until 1884 that suffragists argued for the inclusion of married women in any franchise bill that was to be proposed.

The suffragists used a number of arguments to promote their cause. These included:

- the franchise was based on property, yet women were property owners without being able to vote;
- because they could not vote women could not influence the making of the laws of the country;
- the vote would help women to protect children;
- the vote would allow women's moral and spiritual values to be influential in terms of legislation.

There were two main approaches to the suffrage issue:

- an equal rights approach based on the common humanity of men and women;
- an approach stressing women's distinctive experience and potential contribution to formal political life.

So arguments were based on the similarities between men and women and also on the differences between men and women. There were therefore two major and contradictory beliefs about women; firstly that men and women were fundamentally different and secondly that women and men were fundamentally the same. Both views were held by suffragists and anti-suffragists alike. In practice suffragists were likely to use both arguments at different times, or even mix them in the same speech. Equal rights for men and women was the commonest argument used in the debate over the franchise. The argument about women's experience as essentially different from men's was also often heard. This approach was based on women's experience as wives and mothers; rather than denying that this was where their primary interests lay, it stressed that women's experience in the domestic sphere and its values should be extended into public life. Central to this argument was the representation of women as the guardians of moral values; their enfranchisement would result in higher standards of public morality.

Women, it was believed, would use their vote to transform the existing social and economic system, through introducing reforms such as better housing, education and promoting lower infant mortality, as well as ending the exploitation of women in the market-place. As precedents for these changes they cited the way men's wages had risen once working men had obtained the vote, together with evidence of social reform in countries where women had already been enfranchised.

For suffragists, indirect representation – in other words, being represented by a man – was inadequate. It was argued that male legislation and democracy had been a complete failure as far as women were concerned. Emmeline Pankhurst, for example, repeatedly pointed out how the state had failed women because of their exclusion from the franchise.

The suffrage campaign was primarily a middle-class campaign from which middle-class and upper-class women would benefit. The benefits for the working-class women were to be felt through the votes of their betters. In other words, middle-class women would instigate legislation which would be of benefit to the women of the poorer classes. However, working-class women did participate in the suffrage movement. In 1903 the Lancashire and Cheshire Women Textile and Other Workers Representation Committee was formed as the first organisation of working women to fight for the vote. Other suffrage groups were formed in the cotton towns amongst working women.

Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, an important suffrage leader, noted in speeches on suffrage platforms that 'not the vote only, but what the vote means – the moral, the mental, economic, the spiritual enfranchisement of Womanhood: the release of women, the repairing, the rebuilding of that great temple of womanhood, which has been so ruined and defaced' (Pethick-Lawrence 1908:4).

There was also a dilemma for the suffragists: what was to be the relationship between adult and woman suffrage. Adult suffrage bills were about extending the vote to more categories of men. The English prime minister, Asquith's introduction of manhood suffrage reform bills – to which parliament could add a woman's suffrage amendment – was viewed by many suffragists as an attempt to undermine their position. Women suffragists did however use adult suffrage campaigns to try and further their own cause. In many ways the issue was one of tactics. Suffragists' demand for the enfranchisement of women was grounded in a principle – equal treatment of men and women – but their approach tended to be based on the pragmatic belief that reform was achievable only in stages – similar to the process in which increasing numbers of men had become enfranchised. In view of the frequently expressed fears of women electors outnumbering men, they stressed they were not looking for the vote for all women. Such an approach was seen as élitist by the labour movement.

SAQ 3

Outline some of the arguments used by suffragists to gain the vote.

By the end of the nineteenth century there was a huge variety of groups and organisations campaigning for women's rights in a number of areas. A number of different suffrage groups had also been organised. Not all members of the various suffrage groups supported the variety of campaigns that interested women. For example, many suffragists shied away from the Contagious Diseases Acts Campaign, believing that the public discussion, by suffragists, of issues of sexual morality would hinder the suffrage cause. In 1888 there was a split in the National Society for Women's Suffrage over whether political groups should be able to affiliate. Many suffragists believed that the organisation must remain non-aligned to any political party. This would allow them to lobby any party that held political power. However, many English women had become involved in party politics by the 1880s. The Women's Liberal Federation had been formed in 1886 and the Primrose League, organised by the Conservatives, had been formed in 1883. Within these groups women were very active. By the late 1880s members of these political organisations wanted to affiliate to the National Women's Suffrage Society. This caused a split in the group with a small breakaway group, the Central National Society for Women's Suffrage which accepted political affiliates, being formed. The National Society for Women's Suffrage remained firm in disallowing party political membership. The two organisations were not reunited until 1897. Thus the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) was formed, under the leadership of Millicent Garrett Fawcett. The NUWSS united many different branches of the suffrage movement. By that time there were sixteen suffrage societies exclusively devoted to securing the vote for women. After the death of Lydia Becker in 1890 there was no journal devoted to the cause until the *Englishwoman's Review* appeared in 1903.

DISSENSION

A number of suffragists were concerned about the limited objectives of some suffrage groups – for instance, confining the vote to either single or married women. The priority given to single women divided English suffragists. In 1889 the Woman's Franchise League was formed, and this was particularly concerned with the rights of married women. Issues of the vote, child custody, divorce and inheritance were of particular concern to its members. In 1897 the conservative National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies was organised and it published a journal called *The Common Cause*. This society was concerned with securing the vote for women of the middle classes.

SAQ 4

Outline some of the disagreements that emerged within the suffrage movement in the nineteenth century.

As you will have read in the last unit, women in England gradually secured various local franchises. Women in England were eligible to vote for Poor Law Guardians (those who managed the workhouses) from 1834 but it was not until 1875 that the first woman was elected as a Poor Law Guardian. By 1900 there were about 1,000 women Poor Law Guardians in England. Women ratepayers were allowed to vote for members of school boards from 1870 and to sit as school board members. The 1894 Local Government Act allowed women to vote and stand for election to rural and urban district councils. So, to some extent at least, women were involved and active in local government. Their work in local government was used by many suffragists as an argument for extending the parliamentary franchise to women.

While women had become much more politically active by the turn of the century the acquisition of the parliamentary franchise still seemed elusive. In 1903 the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed in Manchester by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia. They had split from the Labour Party over its refusal to actively work for women's suffrage. The activities and tactics of the WSPU revitalised interest in the suffrage cause. Their first act of militancy occurred in October 1905 when members of the WSPU disrupted a Liberal meeting and Christabel spat in the face of a policeman in order to be arrested and to gain maximum publicity for the cause. The older suffrage societies believed in using the existing party structures to secure their right to the vote. The WSPU took a different line, actively opposing parties that refused to acknowledge women's right to vote. The Liberal Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, agreed in principle to women's suffrage but refused to commit his government to formal support. Therefore the WSPU policy was to oppose all Liberal candidates and to heckle Liberal speakers by asking them if the Liberal government would give votes to women. The NUWSS disassociated themselves from the suffragettes. However, one of the consequences of the formation of the WSPU was to increase the membership of all the suffrage

WOMEN AND POLITICS

MILITANCY

groups that existed and it stimulated the creation of new suffrage groups. So, although many suffragists remained anti-militant their groups often benefited from the publicity generated by WSPU action.

At the Opening of Parliament in 1906 a group of WSPU women created a disturbance in protest against the Prime Minister's refusal to hold out any hope of legislation for women's enfranchisement in the current or any future session of parliament. Eleven of the group were arrested and imprisoned.

In April 1908 Campbell Bannerman resigned as Prime Minister, due to ill health, and was replaced by Asquith. Asquith completely opposed women's suffrage and thus left himself and his party open to attack by the WSPU.

The WSPU's controversial campaigns won a huge amount of publicity for the suffrage cause, though historians disagree on whether this militancy really achieved anything. The WSPU held weekly strategy meetings and attendance went from 200 in 1907 to 1000 in 1908. The WSPU also printed its own journal, *Votes for Women*, that had a circulation of 35,000 by 1910. The WSPU held massive rallies. For instance, they organised a huge rally in Hyde Park in London in June 1908 which half a million people attended.

Even within the WSPU there was a split. Sylvia Pankhurst had split from her mother and sister to form the East London Federation of Suffragettes (later the Workers' Suffrage Federation), which had its own journal, *The Woman's Dreadnought*.

Militancy was kept very much in the public mind by press reports. Many people were outraged at the actions of the militants. They described the women as unsexed and deranged. Originally, militancy involved heckling politicians at meetings, marches, demonstrations and public meetings. It is interesting to note that heckling at political meetings was a common occurrence, but when women engaged in this activity it was deemed to be militant activity. Members of the WSPU also engaged in other activities. For instance, the suffragettes boycotted the 1911 census to highlight women's exclusion from the state.

SAQ 5

What impact did militancy have on the suffrage movement?

In 1906 the vast majority of MPs stated that they were in favour of votes for women, yet between 1906 and 1913, each time the government considered the issue, the Bills got nowhere. Some Bills managed to get a second reading. Conservatives voted against the bills because they feared that new women voters would vote Liberal rather than Conservative. Liberals voted against the Bills because they feared women would vote Conservative. Ultimately MPs were indifferent to the Bills and the issues involved. They argued that there were more urgent and pressing problems facing the government than women's right to the vote.

In 1910 Parliament seemed to be taking the issue of suffrage very seriously. A committee had been drawn up, with representatives from all the parties, to draft a Bill on women's suffrage. They had drafted a Bill that had the support of all parties although the supporters of women's suffrage had to compromise. Under the Conciliation Bill the vote would be given to women who owned property. It came before parliament for a second reading in June 1910. Some supporters in the Liberal Party opposed the Bill, believing it didn't go far enough. Parliament passed the bill by 299 votes to 189, and it seemed that success was just around the corner. Then in November the government collapsed and Asquith called a general election. The Conciliation Bill was dropped. The Liberals had a big enough majority in the House of Commons to get their Bills through but this was not the case with the House of Lords. A second Conciliation Bill was introduced in May 1911. It also failed to be passed. The failure of these Conciliation Bills encouraged increased militancy.

In February 1912 the WSPU organised a concerted window smashing raid, spread over three days which resulted in more than two hundred arrests and imprisonments. There was extensive press coverage of the trials that followed. As a result of this militant action by the WSPU, a mob of two hundred men and boys marched on the WSPU office in London, breaking the windows. No arrests were made. In 1913 the WSPU began an arson campaign. Fires were set in post boxes, and golf greens were dug up. WSPU speakers often received rough treatment from the crowds; objects were thrown at them and women suffragists, for instance those women who sold suffrage newspapers on the streets, were often verbally and physically assaulted. Crowd disorder at public suffrage meetings was common. At one stage the WSPU charged an entrance fee to a meeting in order to discourage troublemakers.

THE STATUS OF WOMEN'S FRANCHISE AMONGST POLITICIANS

THE CONCILIATION BILL

ESCALATING MILITANCY

A large number of women were arrested and imprisoned between 1906 and 1914. About one thousand ended up in prison. A new tactic adopted by the suffragette prisoners was the hunger strike. Initially women were released before completing their sentences but in some prisons women were forcibly fed. Forcible feeding was carried out in British prisons between 1909 and 1914. It was a very violent process, dangerous and life threatening. The suffragettes began to go on hunger strike from June 1909. The hunger strike was undertaken as a protest against the government's refusal to allow the suffragettes the status of political prisoner. The government of the time adopted forcible feeding as a means of deterring women from joining the suffragette campaign. However, forcible feeding increased public sympathy for suffragettes.

As we have noted there were many individuals who opposed suffrage for women and who were unsympathetic to the cause generally. Opposition to women's suffrage was formalised in anti-suffrage organisations. There were a number of anti-suffrage groups organised in England in the early twentieth century. These included the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage. By 1908 the suffragettes had had such an impact that an Anti-Suffrage League was formed, with Lord Curzon as president.

Numerous arguments were used by the anti-suffragists. In law, women and men had unequal rights in marriage, the result of the concept of '*coverture*' by which a woman's legal existence was subsumed into that of her husband. The notion that a husband legally represented his wife remained and provided a strong basis for anti-suffrage arguments. For anti-suffragists it was enough that a husband had the vote. They deemed it only proper that he should represent the political views of himself and his wife. Therefore women did not need the vote.

A commonly used anti-suffrage argument was that most women did not want the vote, and that those who organised the suffrage movement were not representing the wishes of the majority of women. Anti-suffragists also argued that it would be unjust to enfranchise single and not married women. They believed that married women were somehow 'superior' to single women. They were considered to be more responsible than single women. Anti-suffragists were later to argue that married women did not in fact need the vote, since their husbands could look after their interests.

Humour was used against the suffragists to belittle their activities. To many commentators the spectacle of women taking direct action appears to have remained intrinsically ridiculous. The actions of the suffragettes, in particular, violated society's notions of female propriety.

HUNGER STRIKE

ANTI-SUFFRAGISTS

Anti-suffragists also stressed women's role as custodians of moral values, but feared this would be destroyed by exposure to the political world. In other words, it was believed that women would be corrupted by involvement in party politics. For the anti-suffragists, all of the reforms that would benefit women could be achieved under the current system. Women, as was proper, were represented by men. Men, it was argued, would look after women's real interests. Anti-suffragists argued that women could rely on men to represent them because men and women shared similar interests. Yet behind this anti-suffragism lay the fear that women would indeed act together in opposition to men, and, if full suffrage was granted, would outnumber men in the electorate. Although the NUWSS stressed the importance of men and women working together to achieve women's suffrage, such fears might seem to be justified by the increasingly separatist line adopted by the WSPU nationally.

Anti-suffragists saw any concession as the thin end of the wedge, the logical end of which would be women in parliament. In other words, they believed that if women secured the vote, they would want then to become judges and sit in parliament, amongst other things. To give women the vote, it was believed, would bring an avalanche of unwelcome change to the political scene. Anti-suffragists also argued that women's suffrage should be denied because of women's unalterable physical inferiority and the harm it would do to relations between men and women.

Anti-suffragists frequently countered women's claims to the vote by urging their involvement in local politics, which they said was the proper sphere for women's reforming zeal.

SAQ 6

Outline some of the arguments used by anti-suffragists to deny women the vote.

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 had a profound effect on the suffrage cause. In August 1914 Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst suspended militancy and dropped their suffrage work entirely to throw themselves into the war effort. Their newspaper, the *Suffragette*, became the *Britannia*. The NUWSS was divided over how they should now act and they decided that they would keep their organisation in existence but suspend suffrage activity for the duration of the War. The NUWSS and other groups undertook war work. A number of suffragists remained pacifist and argued for continuing the campaign to secure the vote. But from 1914 it was the rights and wrongs of war that were the major preoccupations of the suffragists.

THE WAR

SECURING THE VOTE

In 1916 the government was considering electoral reform. In August 1916 Asquith gave up his opposition to women's suffrage and an all-party conference was appointed to draw up proposals on the franchise of women. In December 1916 Asquith was succeeded by Lloyd George who had not opposed women's suffrage. What had to be decided was how broad a franchise should be given to women. Many supporters of suffrage at this stage wanted full adult suffrage for those over twenty one. That would mean giving the vote to men and women on equal terms. However, MPs were frightened of this because there were more women than men and because the woman voter was an unknown quantity. No one knew which way she would vote. Eventually the parties agreed that the vote would be given to female householders and the wives of householders over the age of 30. By thus restricting the vote there were six men to four women in the electorate, and women remained in the minority, and this appeased a number of politicians.

Under the Representation of the People Bill (1918) which finally gave women the vote, women could also stand for parliament. The traditional argument has been that men granted women the vote in 1918 out of gratitude for their war work, and that it was not as a result of the political campaign they had waged for decades. However, one historian argues that the work of the constitutional suffragists, for example within the NUWSS, had been much more significant than historians realise. These constitutional groups had built up political alliances over the years that ensured their inclusion in any reform bill produced after the war.

Not everyone was happy with the fact that women had been granted the vote. In the final issue of the *Anti-Suffrage Review* one commentator wrote, 'We were anti-suffragist, and we are so, as God made man to rule; but the vote has been thrust on us, and we must use it, but let us use it prayerfully, carefully and trying to love our neighbour as ourselves' (*Anti-Suffrage Review* 1918).

After 1918 the NUWSS became the National Union of Women for Equal Citizenship. The winning of the vote did not mark the end of feminist activity, nor did it witness the death of feminism.

SAQ 7

Why were women granted the vote in 1918?

The suffrage campaign provided a focus for women’s struggle for greater autonomy, and for their direct political representation rather than their representation by men. The vote was seen as a symbol of women’s equality with men within the state. It was also seen as a practical tool for effecting change in the social and economic sphere. Women’s exclusion was seen as linked with inadequate welfare provision and women’s exploitation in the workplace.

Once you have read through this unit read *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700*, pp. 246–64; 348–60; 396–98. Smith, in these pages, provides some detail about the suffrage cause in European countries. She also provides a lot of information about suffrage in England. In your reading compare the aims and tactics of the different suffrage campaigns in Europe. Remember that the political context of each country is different and that this will have a bearing on the extent of the suffrage movement in each country. See if you can list the similarities and differences between these various campaigns.

Once you have finished this read Holton’s, ‘Women and the vote’ in *Women’s History Britain, 1850–1945 An Introduction*, pp. 277–305. This offers a good summary of the kinds of issues we have discussed in this unit.

If you would like to read further about the issues in this unit, I would recommend reading some of the following:

Bolt, Christine 1995 *Feminist Ferment ‘The Woman Question’ in the USA and England, 1870–1940* London: UCL Press. This is a short pamphlet that compares the activism of feminists in America and England. It is a very good synopsis of what was going on, the issues involved in feminist campaigning and the fight for the vote.

Harrison, Brian 1978 *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women’s Suffrage in Britain* London: Croom Helm. This is the only comprehensive account of anti-suffragism in England. It is very detailed but worth having a look at.

Mrs Pethick-Lawrence, 1908? *The Faith That is in Us* London: Women’s Press.

REVIEW



ADDITIONAL READING

REFERENCES

SAQ 1

Q. Outline the origins of the suffrage movement.

The suffrage movement was greatly influenced by campaigns to extend suffrage to men. Many women believed that they too should have the same voting rights as men. Women's political activism in campaigns around the Married Women's Property Acts, and their involvement in organisations like the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, allowed them to develop political arguments around their exclusion from the parliamentary franchise. It was in the 1860s, in particular, that the issue of votes for women allowed for the development of women's suffrage groups. The extension of the franchise to men under the 1867 Reform Bill was the real impetus in getting women to organise suffrage societies.

SAQ 2

Q. Discuss the tactics used by early suffragists.

The suffrage groups of the nineteenth century believed in working through constitutional means to achieve the franchise. They had a great respect for parliamentary politics and used many of the tactics associated with parliamentary politics. They organised public meetings, lobbied MPs, wrote letters to the press and to MPs. They organised petitions and arranged 'at homes' where suffrage issues were discussed. Women's suffrage groups also propagandised their cause through the journals they initiated such as the 'English Woman's Journal'.

SAQ 3

Q. Outline some of the arguments used by suffragists to gain the vote.

Women used a number of arguments to press their cause. At a practical level they argued that since women paid taxes and were ratepayers they should, in justice, have the same voting rights as men who paid taxes and were ratepayers. Suffragists also argued that women, since they were deemed to be spiritually and morally superior to men, would bring great advantages to public life. They would bring a higher moral tone to politics. They would also be able to look after the needs of women and children through their influence on legislation. This argument was based on the idea of difference between men and women. The other argument that was used was that women and men shared equal values and thus women must be allowed the franchise on the same terms as men.

ANSWERS TO SAQS

SAQ 4

Q. Outline some of the disagreements that emerged within the suffrage movement in the nineteenth century.

A number of issues caused division in the suffrage movement of the nineteenth century. Amongst these was whether the vote should be given only to single women. Particular campaigns, such as the Contagious Diseases Acts Campaign were also divisive as many suffragists believed this was not a suitable campaign for women to be involved in and it would only damage the suffrage cause. One of the major issues to cause dissension within the suffrage movement was the place that women involved in political parties should have in the movement. Many suffragists believed that the movement must be able to lobby and work with all political parties, otherwise they were limiting their effectiveness. Other suffragists believed that party political women must be allowed to affiliate to the suffrage movement.

SAQ 5

Q. What impact did militancy have on the suffrage movement?

Historians disagree on the effect of militancy on the suffrage cause. It does seem clear the militancy attracted a lot of attention to the movement. The numbers of women joining the suffrage movement and the range of suffrage organisations increased after the organisation of the WSPU in 1903. However, many suffragists, particularly those who wanted to work through constitutional means, disassociated themselves from the militant wing seeing it as an unladylike and destructive force.

SAQ 6

Q. Outline some of the arguments used by anti-suffragists to deny women the vote.

It was believed that women were adequately represented by their husbands and did not need the vote in their own right. Anti-suffragists also argued that women would become corrupted by their involvement in politics and they had nothing to gain by such involvement. Many politicians opposed women's suffrage because they were afraid of how women might vote. They also feared that if women were given the vote they would look for further concessions.

SAQ 7

Q. Why were women granted the vote in 1918?

In some measure women were granted the vote because of their war work which supported the government. By 1916 many politicians had been persuaded of the justice of the women's case and recognised their right to the franchise. Even with this recognition, many politicians were fearful of how women might vote so restrictions were placed on their franchise to ensure that male voters outnumbered female voters.