

## How Australia led the way:

### Dora Meeson Coates and British Suffrage

This research monograph was written by Myra Scott for the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women



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### Front cover photograph:

Dora Meeson Coates, [Commonwealth of Australia. "Trust the Women Mother As I Have Done"](#) Women's Suffrage Banner, 1908. Carried by the Australian Contingent in the Women's Suffrage Coronation Procession, London, 1911. Purchased by the Australian Bicentennial Authority 1988. Presented as a Bicentennial gift to the women of Australia and accepted on their behalf by Senator Margaret Reynolds in her capacity as the then Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women. Custodianship formally transferred to the Parliament House Gift Collection on 12 June 2002.

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## 1. Introduction

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The Suffrage Banner: [Commonwealth of Australia](#). “Trust the Women Mother As I Have Done” was carried proudly at the head of the Australian and New Zealand contingent of women suffragists in the Women’s Suffrage Coronation Procession in London in 1911. It was held by the artist, Dora Meeson Coates, with her husband, George Coates, and others, assisting. Leading the contingent were Mrs Margaret Fisher, the wife of the Australian Prime Minister, Mrs Emily McGowen, the wife of the New South Wales’ Premier, and Australian suffragist extraordinaire, Vida Goldstein. Lady Anna Stout, the wife of New Zealand’s Chief Justice and former Prime Minister, led the New Zealand contingent. These were prominent women in Australia and New Zealand - what were they doing in a protest march in London?

The Banner, which is on view in Parliament House Canberra, was purchased in 1988 from the Fawcett Library, London, as a Bicentennial Gift to the Women of Australia by the National Women’s Consultative Council, Canberra. More recently, on 12 June 2002, it was donated to the Parliament House Gift Collection for permanent display in order to celebrate the Centenary of the pioneering *Commonwealth Franchise Act*, which in 1902 granted most Australian women the right to both vote and stand in Commonwealth elections.<sup>1</sup> Australia was the first country in the world to allow women to both vote and to stand for election to Parliament. These electoral rights were achieved after considerable struggle, but without the devastating campaigns, violence and civic turbulence which characterized the movement in what was then known as our ‘mother’ country, Great Britain.

The Banner was a celebration of women’s suffrage in Australia. It depicts a young woman symbolic of Australia, a shield of the Southern Cross at her side, appealing to the maternal Britannia, urging that Britain grant suffrage as New Zealand had granted to its women in 1893, and Australia in 1902.<sup>2</sup> Amongst the Australian States, South Australia followed New Zealand in 1894, then Western Australia in 1899, New South Wales in 1902, Tasmania in 1903, Queensland in 1905, and Victorian women had a hard-fought battle to achieve the franchise in 1908.

This banner is not just a banner for a London suffrage march, as may be thought. It has a great deal more significance for Australia. The women’s movement burgeoned at the same time as the move towards Federation was initiated, and, at the Commonwealth Convention in 1897, it had been suggested that the new nation could enhance its status by leading the world with progressive legislation. The campaign for women’s franchise was a growing world-wide movement, and the young nation establishing its constitution, parliaments and legislations, was viewed as a testing ground for idealistic free-thinking experiment. It was widely believed that the women’s vote would be conducive to greater morality and stability in the community.

In addition, large numbers of Australian women had to work jointly with their husbands to establish home and income, so, comparatively, their menfolk were readier to accept women's equal responsibility for running the nation. The British notion of 'women's sphere', of confinement within the home environment, was not really feasible in the early settlements of Australia. Today the banner celebrates the centenary of the early achievements of Australian women, and the statesmen in Parliament who supported them, who were known within the political context of the time as 'pacemakers for the world'.<sup>3</sup>

Besides proclaiming Australia's success with suffrage, the banner's message was also directed to the Parliament of Great Britain. The history of the banner, and of those associated with it, tells a story of many years of effort by Australians to help the women of Britain achieve the same rights which Australian women already enjoyed. Rejecting Australia's pioneering success with suffrage and proffered leadership, Britain, with its entrenched traditions and refusal to adopt new ideas, granted women partial franchise only in 1918 following the First World War. Full franchise was not obtained until 1928.

Until now, little has been recorded of the part played in Britain by Australia as a nation, and by Australian women and politicians, to help British women achieve enfranchisement. The banner is a focal point of Australia's contribution to their women's campaign. In Britain, the complex interactions within and between the suffrage societies, the political parties and personalities, have been extensively recorded. Now Australia's contribution to Britain should be known and acknowledged proudly as part of our heritage and growth as a young nation keen to establish itself on the world stage as a leader in political innovation.<sup>4</sup> This is the story of the complex web of the women's movement and political events which spanned Australia, New Zealand and Britain, and the story of one woman's involvement and reaction to these events throughout these years.

Dora Meeson, (1869-1955), the painter of the banner, was born in Melbourne in 1869, her father being the headmaster and founder-owner of the now defunct Hawthorn Grammar School. John Meeson returned to London in 1876 with his family to study law and was admitted to the Bar in 1879. Migrating to New Zealand, he practised law in the South Island, eventually moving to Christchurch where his first-born daughter, Dora, showed an early interest in a career as a professional artist. When women's suffrage was being proposed in New Zealand in 1893, the first country in the world to grant it, Meeson was a young woman at art school in Christchurch. She and her fellow students enthusiastically signed the petition for women's franchise forwarded to the New Zealand Parliament. On the question of suffrage, her thinking was moulded by her father, an unusually enlightened man who believed that the processes of the law should give greater consideration to the will of the people, and to their advantage, more than lawmakers usually allowed. Dora Meeson accepted that woman suffrage was reasonable and democratic, although she had no idea then that in future years it would become a dominating passion in her life.

In 1895 the family relocated to Melbourne so that Dora could study at the National Gallery School. She competed for the Travelling Scholarship awarded triennially by the National Gallery of Victoria, and amongst the students was George Coates who won the Scholarship for three years' study in Paris. Meeson and her comfortably-off family also travelled to Paris where she and Coates were students at Julian's Atelier. Marrying in London in 1903, the pair struggled to become part of the art world in London. Their earliest income came from supplying small black-and-white illustrations for encyclopaedias, and this low-paid employment gave Meeson valuable experience for her later graphic work in the suffrage press. The Coates relinquished the comfortable middle-class milieu of her parents to live in Chelsea to experience the bohemian lifestyle of artists which the opera *La Bohème* projected in Paris. With the death of her parents, Meeson distanced herself from her conservative background by adopting the suffrage cause, and in later years observed that 'all her life she had been an ardent feminist.'<sup>5</sup> She described the incident at a studio exhibition opening when Mary Sargent Florence, a suffragist, artist, and pioneer in contemporary tempera painting, and later a good friend, entered their studio by mistake when looking for a suffrage meeting. The couple's involvement with suffrage commenced from that accidental encounter.<sup>6</sup>

Meeson became a founding member of an active local group, the Kensington branch of the Women's Freedom League, a member of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, and by 1913, a member of its Women's Council. The latter organisation was founded primarily 'to form a bond of union between all Conservatives and Unionists who were in favour of the removal of the sex disqualification and the extension of the franchise to all duly-qualified women, and . . . to give active support to official candidates at elections when they are in favour of the enfranchisement of women.'<sup>7</sup> Coates joined the Men's League for Women's Suffrage as a result of Meeson's encouragement. She wrote that:

*George and I both threw ourselves heart and soul into the suffrage movement, for, although he himself cared little for politics, he was keen on fair play and believed in granting the same facilities to women as to men to further their natural abilities.<sup>8</sup>*

The campaign for suffrage in Britain was long and protracted. At the peak of its activism during the years 1906-1914, it was accompanied by considerable conflict and increasing violence. The movement consisted of many organisations with differing emphases, yet despite their differing policies on ways, means, and ultimate ends, they had one common aim - to obtain the Parliamentary Franchise for women 'on the same terms as it is, or may be, granted to men'.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. The emerging movement

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Agitation towards female suffrage commenced in the eighteenth century Age of Enlightenment when new ideas of equality and freedom for both men and women were sweeping the civilised world. In England in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft published her famous *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, attacking the restricted conventions under which women lived, and the conditioning under which women were made to feel inferior and submissive. In law, a man and wife were seen as one person, such that the woman lost her identity, a legal situation known as *femme couverte*, or a 'woman under coverture', which was used as an argument that married women did not need the vote. A woman had no legal rights - she could not make a will or sign a contract. She was under the total control of her father or husband, a situation condoning domestic violence. Her husband had only to provide the minimum food and clothing when alive, and no provision for her upon his death. Divorce laws were severely discriminatory against her. A man had only to prove one instance of adultery by a woman, whereas she had to give evidence against him of multiple adulterous instances with additional physical offence or desertion. A woman had no legal right to her children, her husband could deny her access to them, and she had no legal right to their guardianship after his death. If she left him, a writ of *habeas corpus* could compel her return and cohabitation enforced upon her.<sup>10</sup>

By the early nineteenth century, men were agitating to obtain greater parliamentary franchise and representation for themselves. The *First Reform Act* of 1832, in which limited numbers of men were given the vote, for the first time legally disenfranchised women. Following the Acts of 1867 and 1884 a greater number of men had the vote, but women were expressly excluded by reason of their sex. Questions were already being asked about the legality of these Acts. In 1851, Harriet Taylor Mill, wife of philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1973) wrote in her *Enfranchisement of Women*:

*The real question is, whether it is right or expedient that one-half of the human race should pass through life in a state of forced subordination to the other half . . . (when) the only reason which can be given is, that men like it.*<sup>11</sup>

In 1866 John Stuart Mill and Henry Fawcett, professor of political economy, and both members of Parliament, presented to the House of Commons a petition for women's suffrage signed by 1499 women, and in the following year, 1867, Mill introduced an amendment to the *Second Reform Bill* to substitute the word 'person' in place of the word 'men'. This was defeated, and as a result, a strong movement of Women's Suffrage Societies in London, Edinburgh and Manchester was founded, with other cities following suit. At the first meeting of the London Society, Mrs Millicent Fawcett, the wife of Henry Fawcett, moved the resolution: 'that this society pledges itself to use every lawful means to obtain the extension of the Franchise to women . . .'<sup>12</sup>

The suffrage movement is generally considered to have started actively at this time. Believing that the legal subordination of one sex by the other was wrong, John Stuart Mill published his influential book, *The Subjection of Women* in 1869. In 1886 a Suffrage Bill, passing its second reading in the House of Commons, was then defeated.

By the 1880s the oppression of women had become associated with the growth of capitalism and on reaching maturity, women had only four choices - marriage, domestic service or prostitution, and for the less privileged, the 'sweated trades'. In industry, the 'sweated trades' were oppressive - women earned a wage inadequate to live upon, and this commonly forced them into prostitution. Birth control was needed. Middle class women were allowed to be discreetly educated in contraceptive methods available, but it was a criminal offence to educate the working class - women were expected to breed soldiers and factory workers. The ongoing major concern was the extreme prejudice of the legal system in which women, particularly divorced and widowed women, suffered under crushing inequalities, notably with regard to guardianship, tax, divorce, intestacy and maintenance. Increasingly women of all classes believed that with voting rights they could change the laws and lessen their oppression. Plays such as Ibsen's *Doll's House* (1879) raised these issues of women's restricted lives. By the twentieth century, there was a push to open up new areas of work for women in the fields of medicine, education and philanthropy. The political parties had their own agendas throughout which dictated their changing attitudes to suffrage, but slowly, majorities in the parties became in favour of accepting the inevitable. Prime ministers during this period from the 1880s to the First World War were adamantly opposed.<sup>13</sup>

### **3. The development of suffrage organisations - the demand for suffrage erupts**

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In 1897 Mrs Millicent Fawcett, by then widowed, reformed the existing Women's Suffrage societies and combined them in the non-militant National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). Developed on a non-party-preferred basis, the NUWSS promoted the formation of branches, held meetings, distributed leaflets educating the public, encouraged press reportage, petitioned and lobbied politicians and influential men, and campaigned vigorously. By 1913, the organisation had over 400 societies under its umbrella.<sup>14</sup>



The second largest organisation, Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), was founded in Manchester in October, 1903, by the autocratic Emmeline Pankhurst, and her daughter Christabel. After many years of working for suffrage, Mrs Pankhurst realised that forty years of constitutional agitation since Mill's earlier actions had had no effect, and no private bill or amendment was likely to be successful. Only a sympathetic sitting Government had the power to enfranchise women. In 1906, the Liberal Party toppled the long reign of the Tory government. The Labour Party was a rising phenomenon. The Liberals were mostly committed to manhood suffrage and the abolition of the plural vote, but not to female suffrage. Pankhurst adopted a new strategy - an anti-government attitude to force the incumbent government of the day, fearful of losing seats, to enfranchise women. From 1906 to 1910, the WSPU's tactics were revolutionised. Consistently opposing the Liberal anti-suffrage government, the Union sent deputations to Ministers and, with repeated interjections, disrupted public meetings whenever possible. Progressively it developed militant campaigns with high profile exploits for publicity, and, including the Pankhursts, hundreds of women were imprisoned by police. Unexpectedly, at the annual meeting of the WSPU in 1907 Mrs Pankhurst publicly tore up the constitution of the organisation. She sought a democratic vote, yet paradoxically she announced she would brook no discussion or dissension by members. The organisation of militant tactics required secrecy for their surprise element, and was better known only to her inner circle. As a result of her dictatorial takeover, the wealthy Mrs Charlotte Despard, together with supporters, resigned from the WSPU to found a third organisation, the Women's Freedom League (WFL), in October 1907. Mrs Despard opposed violence, but promoted non-violent militancy.

This melting pot of suffrage activism arose from many divergent philosophies and ideas. For most, the cause was clear - the vote for women. For others, the vote would provide the entrée for reform in many other complex issues involving the emancipation of women. Most of these aims were subjugated to the first, the vote, in order to not detract from the primary aim, but nevertheless they bubbled beneath the surface. Notably, in its charter, the NUWSS sought 'to secure for women the Parliamentary vote as it is, or may be, granted to men',<sup>15</sup> but the WFL and the WSPU additionally included in their charters the aim, 'to use the power thus obtained to establish equality of rights and opportunities between the sexes and to promote the social and industrial wellbeing of the community'.<sup>16</sup> Besides women's inequality in law and the deprivation of industrial women workers, other issues included social darwinism and racial vigour theories, eugenics, contraception, economic disadvantage - these problems raised questions of morality which were considered so 'untouchable' that, had they surfaced, they would have damaged the fight for suffrage. However, increasingly these issues emerged as suffragists realised that bringing to the public awareness these gross inequities which were little spoken of would help both the vote and the issues.<sup>17</sup> Most of all, there were hugely diverging streams of strategy to achieve the franchise. Alert to this crescendo, Mary Lowndes, founder and chairman of the Artists' Suffrage League, described the rising tide: 'Political parties started by women, managed by women, and sustained by women.'<sup>18</sup>

Recognising these diverse currents, the *Daily Mail* in 1906 coined the phrase 'suffragette' to define the militants prepared to use force. Women who did not use force but worked towards change by constitutional means became known as 'suffragists'.

In Chelsea, Dora Meeson had listened to Mrs Pankhurst, but she was at that time in sympathy with Mrs Despard's aims and principles for the WFL, and noted that her conservative father admired Mrs Despard. Meeson lent her studio for a meeting with Mrs Despard as the speaker. While on holiday in Sandwich in 1908, she also helped Mrs Despard who spent five months on lecture tours. Suffrage organisations frequently used political caravans to travel throughout the countryside to spread their message in the villages and industrial areas. Speakers addressed local community gatherings while supporters sold postcards, pamphlets and took up collections. Meeson, despite being jeered at by hooligans at an open-air meeting, spoke about the effects of the women's vote in New Zealand.<sup>19</sup> By doing so, she braved physical abuse from both the public and police, arrest and imprisonment, and she subsequently withdrew from similar public confrontations. Meeson knew she could not afford to be imprisoned as her gentle artist husband depended upon her support.

Suffrage processions from 1907 were a response to the lack of success that the movement was having, despite both its lawful petitions and promotions, and the less lawful publicity-seeking exploits of Mrs Pankhurst's followers. Other factors were relevant: the movement foremost had to convert an antagonistic government which believed women did not want the vote. Secondly, an unconvinced public had to be shown that suffragettes were ordinary 'womanly women', not the shrews projected by the antagonistic press. With the introduction of processions, the movement hoped to gain goodwill from the public's enjoyment of spectacular entertainment and the daily press's hunger for sensational news which would ensure good coverage of the movement's aims.

The first small suffrage march, in retrospect, was an important milestone in liberating women from the restrictive Victorian code of respectability, or 'womanly decorum'.<sup>20</sup> Organised by the NUWSS, the 'Mud March', so-called because of the mud, slush and fog on the day, took place in London on 9 February 1907. Three thousand women, led by Lady Frances Balfour, Lady Strachey and Mrs Fawcett, together with contingents from forty organisations, marched from Hyde Park Corner to the Strand. *The Times* found to its surprise, a diversity of classes and 'representative character', 'plenty of well-dressed ladies and a few persons of distinction'.<sup>21</sup> For the first time, women of all classes had combined for the cause, even though it was felt to be not 'the done thing' and rather degrading to be taking to the streets. They expected to be shamed, lose their reputations and jobs. Nothing dreadful took place and the idea of public demonstrations for suffrage took root from this time.<sup>22</sup>

To assist the NUWSS with this march, the Artists' Suffrage League was established in January 1907 and Meeson was a member, possibly a founding member.<sup>23</sup> Using the work and help of professional artists, the organisers planned that the suffrage march would provide a gala occasion with colourful heraldic flags emblazoned with mottoes and would popularise the cause for Women's Suffrage, changing public apathy and press indifference more successfully than previous militant action had.<sup>24</sup> The cause was to be dramatised by the means of brilliant banners, distinctive costumes, lively performances and public entertainment. The NUWSS and the Artists' Suffrage League recognised the need for professional skills to design and embroider banners, print posters, billboards and additional simple, attractive promotional material. Over seventy artists formed the Artists' Suffrage League to help with propaganda and their first work was to supply a number of original cartoons for posters. Poster and postcard competitions were advertised to attract interested artists who would assist the cause by offering their talents,<sup>25</sup> and posters were even supplied to New York and California to help the American campaigns which were similarly gaining momentum.

Meeson responded to the first competition and her significant contributions commenced at this time. The office of the League, located in the studio of the stained glass designers, Lowndes and Drury, was close to the Coates' Chelsea atelier, and convenient for Meeson's active involvement. The outstanding characteristic of the Artists' Suffrage League was that it was an association of professional women who all lived within walking distance of the League rooms and each other, and who had similar artistic, political and social interests.<sup>26</sup> Many of these women became life-long friends of Meeson. Mary Lowndes, who had studied at the Slade School of Art and trained as a stained glass designer, was Chairman, chief instigator of the League and the designer of a great many banners.

Meeson made a number of artistic contributions. For the competition she designed the poster entitled *Political Help* (1907)<sup>27</sup> for use at Parliamentary election times, winning the first prize of six guineas. The Liberal Party which had had a landslide victory in 1906 had been sympathetic in principle to suffrage but, after gaining office, had retreated from reform. Meeson's poster message was apposite. The cartoon depicts a determined mother, Mrs John Bull, holding an empty 'Votes for Women' bowl, and surrounded by petulant small boys, representing six political organisations, who demand soup from a large tureen labelled 'Political Help'.<sup>28</sup> She responds: 'Now you greedy boys, I shall not give you any more until I have helped myself'. The cartoon now seems amusing, but its intent was not - it threatened that women were not prepared to assist politicians and political organisations which in recent Parliamentary elections had become dependent upon women's campaign activism, yet which continued to refuse support for Suffrage. The women's movement pounced upon the inconsistency of the politicians and publicised the fact that women were considered 'competent to form the opinions of electors, and incompetent to give effect to their own'.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to posters, Meeson illustrated booklets which were sold widely to promote the cause and educate the public. One of these, *Beware! A Warning to Suffragists*, written by Cicely Hamilton, and illustrated by Mary Lowndes, C. Hedley Charlton and Meeson, sets out to counter and ridicule the derisory anti-suffrage imagery of both the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League and the daily press which projected suffragettes as 'men in petticoats' - by implication, lesbian.<sup>30</sup> Together she and her colleagues countered this misinformation by using simple verse and direct cartoons to emphasise that the suffragette who took a public stand was, *per se*, an ordinary woman bound in private life by domestic subservience to the family. Meeson also contributed cartoons to another booklet by Mary Lowndes, *The A.B.C. of Politics for Women Politicians*. Meeson's suffragettes depicted in her cartoons were distinctively lively intelligent young women and university graduates, as distinct from the anti-suffragist imagery of gross harridans wielding gamp umbrellas. Her earlier graphic work had prepared her well for these illustrations.

The popular press had a long tradition of caricature of political and public identities and social 'types'. Suffragettes offered the press an irresistible opportunity, and a powerfully effective tool, to lampoon and caricature women's inferiority, and the women's movement, to which its readership was mostly opposed. It is probable that the women artists of the Artists' Suffrage League were well aware that the well-known journalist, M. H. Spielmann wrote in *The History of Punch* in 1895 that: 'No woman has ever yet been a caricaturist.'<sup>31</sup> Meeson countered that statement decisively - she was amongst the earliest women to enter the field of press illustration and used her draughtsmanship to oppose anti-suffragist contentions and political inaction.

She was photographed in the daily press as [A Woman Poster-Designer at Work](#)<sup>32</sup> and the press recorded that her postcards were 'in great demand'.<sup>33</sup> The Artists' Suffrage League sold postcards for one penny, the posters for fourpence and the booklet, *Beware! A Warning to Suffragists*, for sixpence from their studio in The King's Road. These unsophisticated, lightly amusing publications were planned to attract the uncommitted public. A belief in the effectiveness of this visual propaganda was such that the League in 1910 reported the distribution of 2,708 posters, 6,488 postcards and 65,000 picture leaflets, quite an achievement.<sup>34</sup> Some seventy to eighty banners for the processions were designed and produced under the League's supervision.<sup>35</sup> Many are now preserved in the Women's Library, London. A letter from the NUWSS, 7 July, 1908, thanked the Artists' Suffrage League 'for the designing, printing and presenting to the Procession Committee entirely free of charge 1000 large posters and 1000 small posters of a different design'.<sup>36</sup>

As a result of the League's activities, and those of another group, the WSPU-oriented Suffrage Atelier, women artists became known in time as the first profession to become clearly associated with the women's movement.

## 4. Australians rally to help women in Britain

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The earliest Australian woman to be influential, indirectly, was Louisa Lawson, mother of Henry Lawson and known as the 'mother of woman suffrage in New South Wales'.<sup>37</sup> Her journal *The Dawn*, published from 1888 to 1905, was known throughout Australia and internationally by those who read the polemics and watched developments in the young colony. Lawson corresponded with English and American feminists and disseminated discussion of women's issues, particularly legal, economic, and social problems.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, some years later, Vida Goldstein, an influential campaigner in Victoria from the late nineteenth century, formed an association in 1899 between Australian societies and the NUWSS in London. Goldstein's monthly *Woman's Sphere*, from 1900 to 1905, and the *Woman Voter* from 1909, had a British readership which absorbed information from the Australian press. In 1903 she became one of the first four women candidates in the British Empire to stand for Parliament.<sup>39</sup> Goldstein, Nellie Martel, and Mary Ann Moore Bentley stood for election to the Australian Senate and Selina Anderson stood for the House of Representatives. None was successful. That these women, however, were legally able to be candidates for Parliament highlighted the fact that English women had much to work for - both the right to vote, and to stand for Parliament.

After their experiences in Australian suffrage organisations, three women, who included an Australian and two British-born women, travelled independently to Britain, joining the dispirited but just-stirring English organisations as seasoned campaigners. They moved actively into the vanguard to galvanise action. They were Dora Montefiore (1851-1934), who arrived in 1893, Mrs Nellie Martel (?1855-1940) in 1904, and Muriel Matters (1877-1969) in 1905. Spectacular exploits were seen by these three to be necessary to highlight women's demands. The financially independent Dora Montefiore, born in Surrey and widowed in Australia in 1889, became a committed activist for women's rights on discovering that, as a mother, she had no legal guardianship rights over her two children either in Australia or Britain. She founded the Womanhood Suffrage League of New South Wales in 1891, but returned to Britain in 1893 before the British campaign had gained momentum. She joined the Central Committee for Women's Suffrage and in 1896 the Central National Society for Women's Suffrage which led to the formation of the NUWSS in 1897. Montefiore published in a literary magazine a prologue to coming events, 'Why We Need Woman Suffrage and why we need it now'.<sup>40</sup> She was an experienced activist who, on arrival, promoted attendance at political meetings to question and disrupt speakers to elicit their policies towards women's franchise. Her trail-blazing involvement and ongoing activities were considerable by the time of the establishment of the WSPU in London in March 1906, but she fell out with the Pankhursts, and her substantial involvement was edited to some degree from historical records. Together with Mrs Martel in a group of twenty women, she raided the Lobby in the House of Commons, and after arrest, was imprisoned for two

months. She refused to pay taxes because she had no vote. The auctions of her forcibly distrained household goods in 1904, 1905 and 1906, were forerunners to the establishment of the Women's Tax Resistance League with its motto 'No Tax Without Representation'. The 'Siege of Fort Montefiore' to hold off the bailiffs and twenty-two police in 1906 received prominent press.<sup>41</sup>

Muriel Matters was born in Adelaide and, at the age of 14, had been influenced by reading Ibsen's *Doll's House*. After arrival to study music in England in 1905, she met social reformers who convinced her to campaign with the WSPU and she then became a committed adherent of Charlotte Despard. In October 1908, she put a burglar proof chain around her waist and the key down her back and padlocked herself to 'that vile grille' separating the Women's Gallery from the politicians in Parliament, which Vida Goldstein, later considered 'signified the harem idea of women, and ... it is on that that all legislation affecting women is based'.<sup>42</sup> The removal of the grille, which was necessary to free her from it, she saw as a 'symbol of the breaking down of one of the barriers that are between us and liberty'.<sup>43</sup>

Mrs Nellie Martel, born in Cornwall, came to Sydney in the early 1890s, and became prominent in the suffrage movement there. After her defeat in election to the Senate in New South Wales in 1903, she returned to London in 1904. She was at the founding meeting at Sylvia Pankhurst's house to establish the London WSPU. During the opening of Parliament House in 1909, she flew over in an airship dropping *Votes for Women* pamphlets. Her spectacular action became a well-known symbol of women's protest and attempts to force change.<sup>44</sup> Her booklet, *The Women's Vote in Australia. What it has already accomplished*, contrasted the grinding poverty and down-trodden workers she found in England, with the many reforms in Australia since franchise - old-age pensions, the under-age smoking bill, the infant life protection bills. She compared the sweating industries in England in which women earned 1/- per week, with the Australian Wages Board legislation which raised the wages of women home workers from 5/- to 10/- per week to 16/- to 20/- for the same work.<sup>45</sup>

Other Australian and New Zealand women played an active part in promoting franchise for women in Britain, both writing from home and, when in Britain, speaking at functions and being published in the press. They told of the new legislation being passed in both countries which had particular reference to the problems of women, children and domestic issues. They emphasised the wide general interest in political matters amongst women in these countries. Among these women was Miss Louisa McDonald, M.A., the Principal of the Women's College, Sydney University, who, on visiting London in 1908, spoke eloquently of the franchise's acceptance in Australia where it worked effectively and without fuss.<sup>46</sup>

The first high profile Australian supporter in Britain was Dame Nellie Melba, the opera singer and adored prima donna of all England and Europe. She commented publicly in 1908 that she had been touring some of Britain's great industrial centres where the extreme poverty of women

workers left her distressed, and she believed that factory conditions for women could be bettered if the influence of women could be used in the selection of parliamentary representatives. Melba declared her strong faith in the wisdom of the lawmakers in her native Australia where the parliamentary vote had been given to women.<sup>47</sup> She signed a petition to the King on hearing that Mrs Pankhurst and Christabel had been committed to prison and that, rather than being committed to the division for political prisoners, they had been incarcerated with common criminals, a situation which entailed considerable personal indignities.<sup>48</sup> At the peak of her career a year later, Melba announced she had taken up an interest in horse-racing and that her colours were purple, white and green, the WSPU colours.<sup>49</sup> She was concerned about the 'sweated labour' of the women factory workers and their economic hardship, and believed that only through the vote could better conditions be wrung from their employers.

Vida Goldstein, continuing her promotional campaign by writing from Australia in 1909, proudly publicised in the British press that the last State of Australia, Victoria, had adopted women's suffrage. The Premier, Sir Thomas Bent, had introduced his *Woman Suffrage Bill* into Parliament, and, after passing through the two Houses effortlessly, the Bill had become law on 18 November, 1908. Goldstein's article, 'How We Won in Victoria' in *Votes for Women*, emphasised the ease of the Bill's final adoption after most politicians had become convinced of its rightness, rather than the earlier hardships - the men's attitudes were liberal, not obdurate.<sup>50</sup>

New Zealand women played their part. Not only were letters of rousing support sent to the numerous suffrage organisations from New Zealand's enfranchised women, but the new High Commissioner for New Zealand, Mr Hall-Jones, on arrival in England in 1909, promoted his view that from every aspect it had been a great success in his home country.<sup>51</sup> Lady (Anna) Stout, the wife of former Prime Minister and by then the Chief Justice of New Zealand, had been active in the suffrage campaign in 1893, and on visiting Britain, became active in London. She was interviewed by Adela, Mrs Pankhurst's youngest daughter, shortly before Adela was imprisoned in 1909, and she spoke of the many excellent effects in New Zealand, detailing extensively the good results in various issues, including the enfranchisement of Maori women who contributed effectively to discussions on political questions.<sup>52</sup> Continuing her encouragement of the movement, she enlisted the support of influential visiting countrymen, whose male political opinions may have influence upon the British politicians. Both Dr Chapple, M.P. for Stirlingshire, and the Hon. R. McNab, the ex-Minister of Defence and Lands in New Zealand, wrote favourably of franchise in *Votes for Women*. Lady Stout watched the press for anti-suffrage reports relating to her own country which she would then competently refute.<sup>53</sup> Possibly because she believed that only militancy would be successful, she made the WSPU *Votes for Women* the primary platform for the dissemination of her pro-active information.



## 5. Parliamentary action, obstructions and responses

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In the British Parliament in 1907, a private member's *Women's Enfranchisement Bill* containing simple amendments to the constitution reached the Second Reading and was refused further progress. In 1908, a Liberal member's private bill, *Parliamentary Franchise (Women) Bill* was introduced into Parliament, passed its second reading on 28 February by an overwhelming majority of 179 to 92, and further progress was blocked. Usually the government would provide 'facilities', that is, time for debates in committee, Second and Third Readings and votes, for the furtherance of a bill, but could use the denial of these facilities to prevent the passage of a bill.

The new Prime Minister, Mr Asquith, succeeded Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman following the latter's death in 1908, and repeated his own public assertion made in 1892, that he did not believe women wanted emancipation. Suffrage was not the main problem during Asquith's premiership - the Irish question, strikes, the power of veto used by the House of Lords, labour problems, international tensions, were of primary concern; the question of women's suffrage rated low in his priorities.

Possibly of significance, Asquith's second wife, horsewoman and socialite Margot, with 'a magnetic personality . . . unteachable and splendid', was well known for her political ineptness and public outspokenness.<sup>54</sup> Her unfortunate personality may have had a substantial bearing upon Asquith's attitude to other women. Meeson put out a feeler to test the high-profile woman's rapport with suffrage. She posted Margot her suffrage postcard, *Taxation without Representation*, for the Asquith's morning breakfast table. The postcard shows a respectable middleclass woman approaching the office desk of the Chancellor of the Exchequer who is surrounded by seven policemen. It is captioned: She says, 'I wish to speak to you, sir, about the spending of my money.' The Chancellor replies, 'Madam, all you have to do is pay.' (Aside to the police) 'Chuck her out.'<sup>55</sup> No response is known. Over time, Asquith suffered numerous assaults and was frequently hectorated. He became increasingly antagonistic to the militants as he begrudged these incidents occurring during his private activities. He tried to ignore the suffrage issue.<sup>56</sup>

The Home Secretary, Mr Herbert Gladstone, after the failure of the Second Reading in February, 1908, advised the women that success required more than argument, rather a demonstration of *force majeure* to activate government:

*On the question of women's suffrage, experience shows that predominance of argument alone . . . is not enough to win the political day . . . Looking back at the great political crises in the thirties, the sixties and the eighties it will be found that*



*people . . . assembled in their tens of thousands all over the country . . . Of course it cannot be expected that women can assemble in such masses, but power belongs to the masses, and through this power a government can be influenced into more effective action than a government will be likely to take under present conditions.<sup>57</sup>*

Even though the *Annual Report* of the WSPU in 1908 recorded 5000 meetings had been held, thirteen by-elections contested, 130 women imprisoned, and 100,000 publications sold,<sup>58</sup> still stronger evidence was required. Both the NUWSS and the WSPU noted Gladstone's advice and planned processions to take place in June. During the preparations, the local *West London Press* reported extensive activity in Meeson's area, Chelsea. There were organisational centres established, meetings in the Town Hall, women pavement artists, a parade, a campaign of house visiting, the distribution of pamphlets and cartoons, and nightly meetings in different locations in Chelsea as a lead-up to the march and gathering in Hyde Park. A sober note was sounded by the local policemen who complained of many additional hours of evening work walking the footpaths without pay.<sup>59</sup> Meeson recounted being nearly caught at night by one policeman when she and Coates were pasting notices on public hoardings and pillar boxes.<sup>60</sup>

Meeson's friend, playwright Cicely Hamilton reported in the *Daily Mail*:

*A new force is making its mark upon the history of the race, the force of womanhood conscious of latent capacities and eager, fiercely eager, to develop them - a womanhood that declines to see life henceforth only through the eyes of men, and will take upon its own soul the responsibility for its own actions<sup>61</sup>*

The NUWSS procession took place on 13 June 1908. Special trains brought marchers from all over England. It was planned to surpass the 'Mud March' in its public spectacle. Mrs Fawcett and Lady Frances Balfour led the 10,000 to 15,000 marchers wearing red and white sashes. Provincial societies were followed by international groups, university graduates, business and clerical workers, writers, artists, the medical profession in bright red gowns, nurses with a 'Florence Nightingale' banner, trade Guilds, political societies, the London Society for Women's Suffrage, and Meeson's fellow student in Paris, Irish reformer Countess Markievicz followed in her 'four-in-hand'<sup>62</sup>. A major aspect was the most beautiful 'art exhibition of the year' - the banners of richly embroidered needlework. Reporting widely on its spectacle, the press commented that the procession was also notable for the absence of the 'shrieking sisterhood' which the anti-suffrage writers projected. Besides the pageantry, the social diversity and its organisation, the procession particularly importantly brought to the fore the 'womanliness' of the marchers, and the politics behind the events.

The WSPU exhorted its members in *Votes for Women*, 'We have been challenged by the Government to show numbers. . . We will bring hundreds of thousands of women from all over the country to demonstrate in Hyde Park . . . A monster demonstration . . . (will) be the final

answer to those still wanting proof'.<sup>63</sup> On 21 June, a week following the NUWSS procession, thirty special trains from seventy towns brought marchers to their London termini for seven processions to Hyde Park. Twenty temporary platforms, one hundred yards apart for eighty speakers were established (amplifiers were not yet available). There were an estimated 30,000 marchers, wearing the colours of white, purple and green, with seven hundred silk banners in the seven processions. Mrs Maud Pember Reeves, the wife of the former Agent-General for New Zealand, carried the scarlet banner of the Fabians. The anti-suffrage newspaper, *The Times*, estimated the crowd present at the demonstration in Hyde Park, to be one quarter to one-half million,<sup>64</sup> yet still defended the so-called 'Imperial Argument':

*A great many women are for the time being eagerly desirous of the franchise . . . (but) it would weaken the moral fibre of the nation if the supreme decisions of the State were determined partly by women who could not feel the same responsibilities for seeing them carried through as men . . .*<sup>65</sup>

The spectacle together with the support of the onlookers was planned to have a political impact upon Asquith. On these two days of action, Asquith's claim that suffrage did not have popular support was demonstrably proved wrong, but the extent of his personal hostility was under-estimated.

In Parliament in 1909, another private bill, the *Representation of the People Bill*, again made no further progress.<sup>66</sup> Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Welsh David Lloyd George, was a pro-suffrage Liberal member of government but he was seen in suffrage circles to be a vacillating supporter of women and tool of his party. The WSPU considered the political process to be at a standstill, and stepped up its militancy, while the NUWSS considered militancy was damaging the cause by antagonising the opposed members of government. Mrs Fawcett of the NUWSS, who deprecated violence, emphasised to Lloyd George that the women's movement had been fighting for forty years and it was no time for further procrastination.<sup>67</sup> Meeson responded to this situation with the first cartoon to be published by the NUWSS's newspaper *The Common Cause*. She showed Miss Wales, in national dress, imploring Lloyd George who held in his hands the *Bill for the Enfranchisement of Women*: 'Do justice to the women, David'.<sup>68</sup> The paper emphasised that Lloyd George, who represented Welsh women, was expected to support suffrage for all women. A year later in July 1910, the Second Reading of the *Parliamentary Franchise (Women) Bill*, which offered severely limited franchise to 'women occupiers', was passed, and further facilities were refused again. Lloyd George claimed to be in favour of the women's franchise, but this time in Parliament opposed the bill because it was 'incapable of amendment in committee'.<sup>69</sup> *The Common Cause* reprinted Meeson's cartoon, and this time Miss Wales called upon Lloyd George: 'I am ready, David. I have helped you. When are you going to help me?'<sup>70</sup>

The speeches of prominent British politicians and visitors to Australia who assessed the success or otherwise of the Australian franchise were being reported in Britain, one with important

resonances. Little-known Margaret Hodge, (later a committee member of the Australian and New Zealand Women Voters' Committee) spent eleven years in Australia and voted as an Australian in both Federal and State elections, then returned to London with a powerful argument for future action. In *The Common Cause*, she drew upon the tenuous threads of psychological relationships which men readily acknowledged were more sensitively understood by women. She spelt out the importance of sentiment in these psychological threads in the bonding of Imperial relationships. At the same time she effectively annihilated the 'Imperial Argument', the anti-suffragist theory that 'a petticoat government' would damage the prestige of the British Empire, with perceptively fresh argument. In her experience in Australia 'the entrance of women into political life has greatly stimulated and widely extended the Imperial feeling'. It was considered in Australia that, 'the Commonwealth itself had been more closely connected with the Empire, more eager to show itself a true daughter of Britain, since the woman has had the vote. . . . Our link with our Colonies is wholly a matter of sentiment - the link of a common language, a common race, a common love of liberty, a common pride in a great past, and such links women are best fitted to forge and to preserve. These links . . . stronger than links of iron . . . will serve as in imperishable cement to keep our Empire united.' She quoted the seed of future action sown by Mr Joseph Cook (later Sir Joseph) the Commonwealth Minister for Defence, in 1909, that 'Australia has been long enough a burden, let her now be a buttress of the motherland'.<sup>71</sup> The idea would soon bear fruit.

London-based Australians continued to encourage the women's efforts. An Australian in London, the Hon. Sir John Cockburn, K.C.M.G., M.D., presided at the Inaugural Dinner of the London branch of the International Women's Franchise Club which had been founded in Washington in 1902 to assist women's franchise. By 1910, at the time of the dinner, it had become a world-wide movement.<sup>72</sup> Cockburn, born in Scotland, settled in South Australia and, while Member of Parliament and Premier, was active in the adoption of suffrage in South Australia in 1894. He was Agent-General for South Australia in London from 1898 to 1901, he and his wife remaining resident. Over the years he acted successfully for South Australia as an unofficial ambassador for the cause. Passionate about women's franchise, he became a member of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage, the London Graduates' Union for Women's Suffrage, and later President of the Men's International Alliance for Woman Suffrage. In London in May 1910, *Votes for Women* publicised the news that in the recent elections in Australia, Vida Goldstein had stood again for the Senate and had a close but losing fight, highlighting the fact again that English women still had to work for both the right to vote, and to stand for Parliament.

King Edward VII died in the same month. The young Duke of Cornwall and York, who had toured Australia with his wife for celebrations of the foundation of the Australian Commonwealth and had opened the first Federal Parliament in Melbourne, had become the new King George V. Parliament was adjourned for the period of mourning, and certain parliamentary business necessarily had to be curtailed to suit the changed situation. A private member's *Woman*

*Suffrage Bill*, had been on the list for passage through Parliament. However the Woman Suffrage Conciliation Committee had drafted a new bill to be introduced into the House of Commons which proposed, not the removal of the sex barrier, but a partial franchise to women who were 'occupiers', that is, owners or rent-payers; this became known as the *Representation of the People Bill*.

The parliamentary Woman Suffrage Conciliation Committee believed that, because the Bill needed only two to three days, there would be ample time for its passage through all stages to its accomplishment provided that Mr Asquith was prepared to give it the 'required facilities'. It was considered not an ideal solution but a working compromise, one to which Asquith would agree. Large sections of the press and politicians considered that by then it was time for its acceptance. The *Nation*, a prominent Liberal Party-oriented paper wrote:

*If it is the fair representation of all sections of opinion that democrats postulate as their end, it is more important in the first place to remember that half our adult population is totally unrepresented at present, by reason solely of its sex.*<sup>73</sup>

Christabel Pankhurst in her Editorial in *Votes for Women* pleaded that, with the coming reign of King George V and Queen Mary: 'how better could the opening of the new reign be signalled than by the admission of women to the rights and dignities of citizenship?' She pointed out that the enfranchised women of the Colonies were able to take part in shaping their destiny, whereas the women of the Mother Country were denied the right and privilege of British citizenship.<sup>74</sup> The Royal Proclamation and the report of the Australian elections raised the movement's hopes that the new King, who had visited Australia, might be favourably inclined and would perhaps indicate his approbation of women's franchise. The idea was promoted as leverage. *Votes for Women* front-paged this fervent wish. A cartoon, entitled *Bond and Free*, showed the symbolic figures of the Australian States appealing to the yet-to-be crowned King George V and Queen Mary; an adjacent Britannia was submissive with bowed head. The caption read: 'Australia and New Zealand (speaking): Our women are enfranchised citizens. We claim the same freedom for the women of our Mother Country and of our sister Colonies.'<sup>75</sup> The imagery and intent were clear.

*Votes for Women* published 'Special Messages from Notable Women' to promote in tandem both the Suffrage Bill and the WSPU procession to take place on 18 June. Lady Stout and Lady Cockburn gave rousing messages of encouragement.<sup>76</sup> These women were probably circumscribed in the degree to which they could assist the political process as they were wives of Colonial dignitaries, not British-born, but they could report informally to antipodean contacts.

## 6. Australia's Advice

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Politicians in Australia watched carefully the unfolding of militant events and more violence as the parliamentary legislation was repeatedly hedged, shelved, and evaded in Britain, and determined to help.

In 1910, in the Australian Senate, Senator Arthur Rae introduced a proposed *Resolution* to send to the British House of Parliament to recommend women's franchise. It was a courageous action. Dr Maloney had tried earlier in the year unsuccessfully in the House of Representatives although his draft *Resolution* had been received with prolonged cheers.<sup>77</sup> This time the *Resolution* captured the minds of the politicians. The first clause, *Votes for Women Resolution*, was passed unanimously in the Australian Senate on 17 November, 1910. The second clause, 'that a copy of the foregoing resolution be cabled to the British Prime Minister' was carried by a majority. In the House of Representatives on 25 November 1910, the *Resolution* was put in similar terms and also passed. It was cabled to the British Government in sufficient time for its consideration while the revised *Conciliation Bill*, with new modifications, was being debated. The *Resolution* stated:

1. That this Senate is of opinion that the extension of the suffrage to the women of Australia for States and Commonwealth Parliament, on the same terms as to men, has had the most beneficial results. It has led to the more orderly conduct of elections, and, at the last Federal elections, the women's vote in a majority of the States showed a greater proportionate increase than that cast by men. It has given a greater prominence to legislation particularly affecting women and children, although the women have not taken up such questions to the exclusion of others of wider significance. In matters of Defence and Imperial concern they have proved themselves as far-seeing and discriminating as men. Because the reform has brought nothing but good, though disaster was freely prophesied, we respectfully urge that all nations enjoying representative government would be well advised in granting votes to women.
2. That a copy of the foregoing resolution be cabled to the British Prime Minister.<sup>78</sup>

During the Parliamentary Debate, Senator Rae argued that women had been found to vote not on grounds of sex, but on practical grounds. He argued that the matter had been prolonged for so long in Britain, a speedy settlement would enable much needed social and economic reforms to follow. As Senator Henderson indicated, 'it would assist in getting Great Britain out of that political mist and darkness in which she is living today'.<sup>79</sup> On such grounds, Senator Rae held that:

*the least we can do is to send word to our kith and kin in Great Britain that we have found this great measure of freedom, which has been granted to our women, to work very well in every particular, and that it has falsified every prediction which was urged against its acceptance.*<sup>80</sup>

Opponents of the *Resolution* argued that, the British Parliament being known as the Mother of Parliaments, it was a shameful thing that 'a child' should tell its parent what to do. Some disagreed with 'the principle of the Parliament of this young nation tendering advice to the mother of Parliaments'. They questioned the desirability of assuming 'the duties of a mentor to the British Parliament'.<sup>81</sup> Senator de Largie, when asked whether Australia had the right to interfere in the politics of the Mother Country, replied to the opposition:

*Yes, we have the best possible right. We have, in this matter, the right of our experience of woman suffrage . . . In this respect, being politically older than the Mother Country, we have the right to give this advice.*<sup>82</sup>

Senator de Largie was aware that other nations considered Australia as an experimental laboratory for social and political reform and were watching its progress in political development closely. He said Australia had a right to voice its opinions because, although the youngest nation, 'we are, in politics, the pacemakers for the world'.<sup>83</sup>

Australia also considered it had a right to voice its opinions because the Prime Minister had been petitioned for help by cable from Mrs Pankhurst.<sup>84</sup> Aware of Australian and New Zealand's progressive legislation, Mrs Pankhurst, assisted by accompanying suffragettes, as early as 1907 had called upon Australia's Agents General resident in London appealing for their assistance.<sup>85</sup> By then Prime Minister Deakin was tiring and not well, and individual members unofficially had written with advice. Andrew Fisher became the new Prime Minister in 1908 and at the Federal Conference in the same year, he had promoted the place of women in the Australian parliament. He argued: 'I trust that not another Federal election will take place without there being a woman endorsed as a Labour candidate for the Senate.'<sup>86</sup> Aware of his promotion of women's position, Christabel Pankhurst had more recently cabled Prime Minister Fisher asking him to advise her on his assessment of women's enfranchisement.<sup>87</sup> Senator Rae, promoting his *Resolution*, argued that while individual members had given advice, 'the advice of the Senate was greater than any single person'. Persuasively he argued the *Resolution* was:

*a clear expression of the National Parliament of this young Democracy in favour of this reform, which places men in a higher and more dignified position, and gives women a nobler position than any they have had in time past.*<sup>88</sup>

Senator Rae ensured that the *Resolution* was widely known in Britain; he sent copies of *Hansard* containing the debate to Mrs Pankhurst, Mrs Fawcett, Mrs Muriel Matters, and to people in other

cities and countries fighting for franchise - including Chicago, Boston, New York, Holland and Denmark.<sup>89</sup> Senators anticipated that it would be a factor in increasing the force of public opinion and 'some influence with the people to whom, through the Prime Minister of Great Britain, it is to be addressed'.<sup>90</sup> The *Resolution* and subsequent debates in the two Australian Houses of Parliament were widely reported in the suffrage newspapers.<sup>91</sup> In Victoria, the Women's Political Association allied with teaching and civil service organisations sent a cable to Mr Asquith to provide further support.

In London some weeks later, the women's press pointed out the fact that the *Resolution* sent to Mr Asquith had been virtually ignored in the general newspapers was evidence of a press boycott dictated by powerful politicians, but the women continued to draw attention to the *Resolution* and its omission in the following weeks.<sup>92</sup> Six months later, on 4 May 1911, Mr Asquith in Parliament finally admitted having received the *Resolution* but was dismissive - he was too busy. His concealment of the Australian Government's cable and later belittlement of its suppressed content would have been an affront to the Australians.<sup>93</sup> Undoubtedly, with old-fashioned British traditions and entrenched privilege to cocoon him, Asquith viewed Australia's progressive legislation as evidence of colonial brashness, or 'frontier phenomena', that he could ignore.<sup>94</sup>

The *Resolution*, and the point at issue that Australia and New Zealand had set a precedent, did, however, spark a vigorous response, indirectly, but from another adamant opponent. Lord Curzon of Kedleston, spokesman in the House of Lords for the anti-suffrage brigade, then published his *Fifteen Reasons Against Women Suffrage* early in 1911.<sup>95</sup> The Australian and New Zealand representatives in London at the Imperial conference following soon after were approached to counter these arguments with responses which were aired widely during their speaking engagements, ventilated in the women's press, and broadcast by the WFL in J. Malcolm Mitchell's *Colonial statesmen and votes for women: Lord Curzon answered*.<sup>96</sup>

To counter Curzon's claims, the first question in Mitchell's pamphlet was, 'do you believe in the principle of Women's Suffrage?' The Hon. John Murray, the Premier of Victoria (1909-1912), stated that 'the political enfranchisement of women would tend to a truer formulation of the spirit and will of the nation'. The Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon. Andrew Fisher confirmed that, 'having seen it in operation in Australia, he is delighted with the results. That it has been beneficial to the Commonwealth of Australia, he has no doubt.' The Hon. A. A. Kirkpatrick, the Agent-General for South Australia in London considered, 'The reform is so secure in Australia that I doubt very much whether one single candidate could secure his return to either House of Parliament in Commonwealth or State if he proposed to repeal it.'<sup>97</sup> The pamphlet named additional prominent politicians who had previously given individual advice to UK, including Sir Alfred Deakin; Mr Best, Vice-President of the Executive Council; Mr Waddel, Colonial Secretary of NSW (formerly an opponent); Mr Peake, Attorney-General of South Australia; the Bishop of Tasmania and the Hon W. Pember Reeves, former Agent-General for New Zealand.



Australian politicians had made an emphatic official statement by means of the *Resolution* to the British Parliament, a stronger action than the advice of individuals. This was an unusual step in imperial relationships. The Australians were shocked that, after its reception, existence of their *Resolution* had been concealed by the British Parliament. The pamphlet exposed this suppression. 'It would be rather interesting to know how many people, how many members of Parliament even, ever heard of it, and yet it constitutes an official answer, overwhelming in its official statements, to all the anti-suffragist contentions . . .'<sup>98</sup>

Herein lies an essential intent of Meeson's *Banner* - to proclaim to the widest possible audience the politicians' intractability, the lack of parliamentary courtesy which must have shocked the Australians, and, above all, to symbolise and promote Australia's active support for the women's campaign.

Anti-suffragists were opposed to John Stuart Mill's concept of 'natural rights', that women as members of humanity were equal to men, so they down-played the Mill's argument of equality by extending the concept of 'natural rights' to one of 'equal but different' - the popular notion of the sexes inhabiting 'separate spheres'. Their concept of 'an equal but different sphere' differed from that of the Australians' notion of the women's sphere, in which womanly qualities of moral concern, guardianship, caring and tenderness, were seen to be desirable in antipodean public life to better express the will and spirit of the nation. British anti-suffragists believed that women's nature was inferior to men's. Curzon pointed out that, 'women have not, as a sex, or a class, the calmness of temperament or the balance of mind, nor have they the training necessary to qualify them to exercise a weighty judgement in political affairs.'<sup>99</sup> Nature had made them not fit for it by reason of those 'indelible differences of faculty and function', that is, their inferior intelligence, lack of education, physiological frailty and economic dependence.<sup>100</sup> Curzon argued that women were so fragile that to participate in the vulgar processes of government law-making, women could not remain 'womanly'. His first point emphasised that they would be distracted from their 'proper sphere and highest duty, which is maternity'.<sup>101</sup> He continued that, 'It will tend, by the division it will introduce, to break up the harmony of the home.'<sup>102</sup> He believed that society would be worse off because women would be diverted from their home duties or at odds with their husbands, leaving middle-class homes neglected and families wretched, and the working-class home in even greater distress.<sup>103</sup>

To this alleged deterioration of womanhood, Murray replied, 'It has certainly not had a deteriorating effect in any way, but has greatly enlarged their knowledge in political questions, without impairing their capacity or lessening their interest in homework.'<sup>104</sup> To the deterioration in their 'highest sphere', maternity, statistics were given to show that New Zealand had the lowest infant mortality rate in the world, falling in the years 1895 to 1904 from 117 to 79 per thousand births, whereas England's rate at the same time compared badly with figures 149-150.<sup>105</sup>



Curzon claimed that the chivalry customarily accorded by men to women would be forfeited because women would no longer be on their pedestal, to be looked up to.<sup>106</sup> The concept of chivalry was a nineteenth century construct which had an ideological basis to regulate sexual relations - middle-class women were excluded from their class if they didn't show the right code of decorum, a fitting level of refinement, a submissive demeanour and a lack of intellectual ambition, etc; but it didn't apply to men's sexual and economic exploitation of working class women.<sup>107</sup>

The colonials considered Curzon's claim that with the vote women would forfeit men's chivalry as preposterous. Since enfranchisement in New Zealand, public houses were closed on polling day, so 'rowdiness has become unknown . . . the tone of elections has improved'.<sup>108</sup> With enfranchisement, men's respectful behaviour to women was more evident, and women's inherent tendencies as moral guardians brought the benefit of stability to elections.

Curzon emphasised the 'Physical Force' argument - that women, by their nature, were 'incapacitated from discharging the ultimate obligations of citizenship' in the police service and armed forces.<sup>109</sup> Therefore women ought not to make laws if they could not join in enforcing them. Popular social darwinism considered international conflict was inevitable and necessary for the 'survival of the fittest'. Meeson's cartoon in the *Women's Franchise* shows a male voter at the poll confronted by boxer John Jones whom he has to tackle first to gain eligibility to vote at the polling booth.<sup>110</sup> Her cartoon ridicules the argument.

Curzon stated the so-called 'Imperial Argument', that the women's vote 'would weaken Great Britain in the estimation of foreign Powers', and would prove a 'source of weakness in India' where it would be gravely misunderstood. 'No precedent exists for giving women, as a class, an active stand in the government of a great country or empire and it is not for Great Britain, whose stake is the greatest, and in whose case the results of failure be the most tremendous, to make the experiment.' He believed that, due to the larger number of women in the population than men, on 'occasions of emotional excitement', a suffrage bill could, 'dangerously disturb the balance of political power'.<sup>111</sup> The inference was that all women would vote one way in opposition to the men's vote!

The Australians answered the 'Imperial question': 'Will our soldiers and sailors fight less courageously or with less skill because our women are voters?'<sup>112</sup> No representative agreed with Curzon's contention, and emphasised that Australia and New Zealand had sent forces supporting the British in the South African war just as significantly as those countries with solely male electorates.

Curzon argued that women's legislative interests could be looked after by men without women's participation. 'The vote is not required for the removal of hardships or disabilities from which women are now known to suffer. Where any such exists, they can equally be removed or alleviated by a legislature elected by men.'<sup>113</sup> The Australian representatives responded that the

Australian experience was contrary to this paternalistic view. Most of the progressive legislation in Australia and New Zealand was due to the initiative of women. 'Regarding the evils that were freely predicted . . . such as dissension in families, "Blue Stockingism", neglect of the home, etc, the prophets were wrong in every single item of their catalogue. Such statements could be added *ad infinitum*, but it will probably be of more service to give a list of legislative reforms due at least to some measure of their influence'.<sup>114</sup> The response listed:

A Legislative reforms in Australia:

1. Improvement of laws dealing with gambling and drinking (e.g. betting prohibited under the age of 21)
2. Minimum wage for women as well as men
3. Raising the age of consent
4. Regulation of hours of labour for wage-earning children
5. Prohibition of smoking under 16 years
6. Protection of children from indecent literature, and the suppression of indecent advertisements
7. An Affiliation Act, extending the remedies against fathers of illegitimate children by making it necessary for them to contribute £10 towards the expenses connected with the mother's confinement
8. A children's court established
9. Appointment of women as inspectors of Government institutions
10. Prohibition of the opium trade
11. Penalties for trading in prostitution

B Legislative reforms in New Zealand:

12. (a) Testator's Family Maintenance Act by which the Supreme Court may cancel any will which does not make suitable provision for husband, wife or family  
(b) The Succession Act compels the fair distribution of property between wife (or husband) and family
13. Conditions of divorce made equal for both sexes
14. Elaborate Old Age Pensions Act
15. Asylums for inebriates established
16. Infant Life Protection Act, preventing baby-farming
17. Adoption of children legally regulated<sup>115</sup>

Curzon had strong support from the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, a conservative stronghold with Mrs Humphrey Ward at the head, which wielded a lot of influence. Mrs Ward claimed that 'the political ignorance of women is irreparable and imposed by nature'.<sup>116</sup> The movement had an opposing operation on a wide front and distributed pamphlets such as *Why Women Should Not Have the Vote or The KEY to the Whole Situation*.<sup>117</sup> Central to its arguments was the belief that women's sphere was in the home; the women's job was to counter the falling birthrate in order to provide workers and soldiers for the Imperial Empire. Identifying the women's cause with the rising Labour movement and left-wing elements, the League appealed to the patriotism of Englishwomen to stand aloof from the country's management because they were unfit to judge its needs and interests.<sup>118</sup> Meeson retaliated, also with a call for patriotism. Her poster depicted Britannia with outstretched arms, shield and trident beneath her feet, appealing for help. At the top of the poster are the words, 'Men, your country needs you' and beneath it, 'Protect your family and homes.' The poster combined patriotic imagery, a rousing army-style call to arms, an appeal to protective male sentiment towards their womenfolk, and was praised as 'a noble and impressive call to patriotism'.<sup>119</sup> Her poster differed from the anti-suffrage League's argument by incorporating a play upon the nation's male voters' emotions in order to make a cleverly camouflaged appeal for male support for Women's Suffrage.

While the latest *Conciliation Bill* was still before Parliament, the militants had agreed to suspend their militancy. The clever, evasive Asquith again shelved the bill on 10 November, 1910, with further promises, just before the impending end of Parliament. A deputation of five hundred angry, disillusioned WSPU members walked to the House of Commons on 18 November, the day now historically known as 'Black Friday'. Additional police, unaccustomed to middleclass women, had been brought in from the rough docklands in the East End to keep them at bay, and treated them with considerable brutality. After six hours one hundred and fifteen women were arrested. One hundred and thirty-nine women gave statements alleging brutality and sexual indecencies. Four days later a deputation of two hundred women again marched to Downing Street to protest the outrages on the Friday. Again, conflict and manhandling was repeated. Most were released on the following day as police realised that excess aggression had taken place. Horrified about the events, the Women's Progressive League in New South Wales, the Women's Political Association of South Australia and the Women of the Goldfields (WA) sent messages of sympathy and confidence in the WSPU.<sup>120</sup>

The general election in December 1910, left the parliamentary status little changed. On 2 April 1911, a household census was taken throughout Britain. Large numbers of women throughout Britain made careful arrangements to be away from their abode on the night, with suffrage organisations providing havens, and argued that, as they were not citizens, they could not be numbered in the census.



Reproduced in Dora Meeson Coates, *George Coates, His Art & His Life*, 1937. 750.994 National Library of Australia  
Dora Meeson Coates



La Trobe Newspaper Collection, State Library of Victoria

Dora Meeson, aged 26, in *The Australian Town and Country Journal*, 1895.



Private Collection, Canberra

Dora Meeson Coates, illustration in Cicely Hamilton, *Beware! A Warning to Suffragists*, illustrated by Mary Lowndes, C. Hedley Charlton and Dora Meeson, London, The Artists' Suffrage League.





Mary Evans Picture Library/The Women's Library, London

Dora Meeson Coates, illustration in Mary Lowndes, *The A.B.C. of Politics for Women Politicians*, London, The Artists' Suffrage League, 1909.

ENJOY --- A CUP OF **RASAWATTE TEA!**

The Australian

# Woman's Sphere

*Flow a flower being and I honey-making tastes is solely my option.—TASSER.*  
 Registered at the General Post Office, Melbourne, for Transmission by Post as a Newspaper.

Vol. III, No. 10

MELBOURNE, WEDNESDAY 15, 1900.

Price, Two Pence.

### Comments.

We have in evidence in our regular columns the usual frolicsome criticism of the Government and its various departments. It is the duty, however, nevertheless, to give consideration to the points which are raised by the writers of the "Woman's Sphere" and to discuss the various and sundry items which do not find their way into the regular columns. The editor of the "Woman's Sphere" writes: "Will the editor please inform us how the Government intend to deal with the various items mentioned in the "Woman's Sphere"?" It is the duty of the editor of the "Woman's Sphere" to inform us how the Government intend to deal with the various items mentioned in the "Woman's Sphere".



MISS VIDA GOLDSTEIN,  
 First Woman Candidate for the Senate.

...in the ... ..  
 ... ..  
 ... ..

### MR. DEakin AT BELLARAT.

Mr. Deakin, in a speech at Bellarat, Victoria, on the 12th inst., before the election of the members of the Federal Government, said that the Government intend to be guided by the views of the people of the Commonwealth. There is a possibility that the Government will be guided by the views of the people of the Commonwealth. There is a possibility that the Government will be guided by the views of the people of the Commonwealth.

UNDER ROYAL WARRANT  
**FEDERAL FLORAL STUDIO.**  
 Messrs L. E. Taylor and A. Wilson  
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Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales  
 Vida Goldstein on the cover of the *Australian Woman's Sphere*, the journal she edited from 1900-1905.



## Taxation without Representation.



### THE RETORT COURTEOUS.

*Woman Taxpayer.* "I wish to speak to you, sir, about the spending of my money."

*Chancellor of the Exchequer.* "Madam, all you have to do is to pay." (*Aside to Police*)  
"Chuck her out."

*Printed and published by the Artists' Suffrage League.*

Private Collection, Canberra

Dora Meeson Coates, suffrage postcard: Taxation without Representation.

## BOND AND FREE.



AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND (speaking): Our women are enfranchised citizens. We claim the same freedom for the women of our Mother Country and of our Sister Colonies.

Mary Evans Picture Library/The Women's Library, London

Cartoon by 'A. Patriot' in *Votes for Women*, 27 May, 1910.



Mary Evans Picture Library/The Women's Library, London

The Women's Suffrage Coronation Procession, 1911, approaching Hyde Park Corner.



La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

The Women's Suffrage Coronation Procession, 1911. A float, The Pageant of the Empire.





La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

Centre – right: Margaret Fisher (wife of the Australian Prime Minister), Emily McGowen (wife of the New South Wales' Premier) and Vida Goldstein before the Women's Suffrage Coronation Procession in 1911.



La Trobe Newspaper Collection, State Library of Victoria

Dora Meeson, Poster of Minerva, in *The Australian Town and Country Journal*, 1895



Mary Evans Picture Library/The Women's Library, London

Cartoon by Will Dyson, in *Votes for Women*, 30 May 1913. This cartoon is one of many dealing with the 'Cat and Mouse Act'. Australian Will Dyson was famous in London for his cartoons which were published in the *Daily Herald*. Dyson and George Coates were good friends.

## 7. A great Suffrage Procession is planned

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A redrafted *Conciliation Bill* passed its Second reading on 5 May 1911, and although Asquith continued his prevaricating tricks, when pressed by parliamentary suffragists, he promised in writing to give further 'facilities' in 1912. The violence lessened at this point, the WSPU called a 'truce' in anticipation of Asquith allowing the bill to proceed. Small processions had been held in 1909 and 1910, but in 1911 the WSPU, WFL and the NUWSS agreed to combine for the most spectacular and extravagant procession ever held. The organisers of this new, bigger procession drew upon precedents in public life - the large Royal rituals and pageantry loved by the populace and used to enhance the public standing of the Monarchy.

The largest and most spectacular march of all, the Women's Suffrage Coronation Procession of 17th June 1911, was planned to achieve the utmost publicity when national leaders, politicians and diplomats from around the world would be in London. Two events of international importance were taking place in June - the Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary, and the Imperial Conference of the Empire's leaders. London was alive with International, Commonwealth and State Parliamentary delegates and included important Australian men and women invited for the Coronation and Imperial Conference. Numerous prominent visitors expressed their surprise that English men seemed unable to understand the reasonableness of the women's claim.

The Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon. Andrew Fisher was in great demand as a speaker. At dinner at the International Women's Franchise Club, the tumultuous applause which greeted him 'would have filled with envy the heart of Mr Asquith; who, as he dare not face the righteous wrath of the outraged womanhood of his country, is obliged to hold his "public" meetings for men only'. Fisher diplomatically commented that he was not there to tell women what to do, or how to do it, but declared his total support for them. He 'very much doubted whether any country could make any real progress beyond the stage this country had reached unless it took women into its confidence and secured their assistance with the vote'.<sup>121</sup> Fisher reassured a deputation, from the NUWSS, lead by Mrs Fawcett, that amongst the results of women's franchise in Australia, the vote had undoubtedly raised women's economic condition. A minimum wage for men and women of equal pay for equal work in government employment was being initiated (this was later withdrawn). Women's work relationships with antagonistic trade unions were improving.<sup>122</sup>

More publicly and significantly, the Australian Prime Minister spoke at the all male Labour Banquet given in his honour. He stated:

*We in Australia include the women not merely in our industrial movement but also in our democracy. I am happy to be able to say that not a single representative of*



*any political party in Australia would dare to suggest that giving the franchise to women has been anything but good for the Commonwealth. They have helped us in many ways and they will help you in many ways when they have the vote in your country. I do not say that they belong entirely to any political party, but I have never expressed any other view than that a true democracy can only be maintained honestly and fairly by including women as well as men in the electorate of the country.*<sup>123</sup>

With him at the banquet, the Premier of New South Wales, the Hon. J.S.T. McGowen, confirmed the value of the women's vote.<sup>124</sup> Fisher further emphasised reasonableness of equal rights in the *Labour Leader* on 2 June. He said:

*How any man of advanced views can fail to see the justice of the claim the women are working for - the power to vote on the same terms as men - I cannot understand. It is not the fault of the women that your franchise is not democratic. The only logical position they can take up is to demand equal rights with men. I am surprised that every Labour man cannot see that.*<sup>125</sup>

Two weeks later, Mr McGowen, was also interviewed by the *Labour Leader* and spoke of its success in New South Wales.<sup>126</sup> The two leading Australians could not have proclaimed their support more clearly to the British Parliament than publicly at the banquet and in the press.

Sir John Cockburn actively spoke of its success in South Australia, quoting statistics. In 1893 the number of babies who died under twelve months old in South Australia was 1,245. In 1894, women obtained the vote; new laws and regulations were brought in, and in 1908, the number of babies who died under twelve months was 616, less than half of what it had been.<sup>127</sup> Lady Stout, with her husband, was still in London preparing her detailed book, *Woman Suffrage in New Zealand*. The social reform legislations enacted since 1893, largely due to women's activism, can hardly have failed to impress anyone but the most obdurate.<sup>128</sup>

Vida Goldstein, whose diminutive, charming appearance belied her indomitability, arrived in Britain in March at the invitation of the WSPU. She was reported to be the 'biggest thing that has happened to the woman movement for some time in England'.<sup>129</sup> Described as the greatest of the Victorian, and perhaps of the Australian suffragists,<sup>130</sup> Goldstein stayed eight months, speaking widely throughout Britain to women's groups, firstly at the Albert Hall packed with 10,000 listeners, in London on 23 March,<sup>131</sup> and again as guest speaker of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage dinner on 4 May when the three disunited leaders, Mrs Pankhurst, Mrs Despard, and Mrs Fawcett, with rare congruence, welcomed her commitment to the British cause.<sup>132</sup>

Goldstein bombarded readers of the suffrage press with five major articles, such as 'Message from Australia', 'How Australia Gave Women Votes', regarding the effects since franchise was

achieved and similar messages of support.<sup>133</sup> She demolished the main arguments of the anti-suffragists clearly. She pointed out that 'it has fallen to us in our young country, where prejudices have not had time to solidify to the same extent as in older countries, to gain the charter of our womanhood by a comparatively easy road, the road of persistence, certainly, but not of martyrdom'. She answered Mrs Humphrey Ward's argument that 'women cannot grasp the broad lines and main point of public questions', but could only cope with side-issues, by pointing out that, in Australia, party politics were irrelevant to women. However, it was solely due to the work of women voters that 'side-issues' which men overlooked, were put in place. These 'issues' were social reform legislations such as the protection of children, conditions of working women's employment, marriage and divorce bills, and equal pay for men and women for equal work reform. In England, the *Married Women's Property Act* (1882), the benefits of which women such as Mrs Ward enjoyed, was solely due to the suffragists of an earlier generation. She further countered the 'Imperial Argument', arguing that women were even more than men concerned that military forces for defence were maintained, and had supported the Australian forces in South Africa.<sup>134</sup>

In her second article Goldstein claimed British suffragists had the same difficulties that the Australian women had experienced: newspaper misrepresentation, the suppression of suffrage news, political parties' own self-protecting agendas, weak-kneed supporters, and the male notion of women's inferiority. She wrote of 'How the Vote was Won':

*Because of the silence of the Press, the great educationalist on public questions in these days, it took twenty-five, thirty, thirty-nine years in the different States to reach the men electors. Once our case was presented fairly to them by our women, they readily responded. There is a sense of freedom in the very atmosphere of Australia that one does not feel in England. (Of the last State, Victoria, to grant suffrage, she added:) Although militancy was not required in Australia, the militant spirit was there, and militancy was prevented only by the Premier recognising in time that he must yield to the inevitable. The women who had borne the burden and heat of the Suffrage fight in Victoria had no doubt from the first of the ethical and spiritual necessity of the militant policy in England.*<sup>135</sup>

Thirdly, in 'Women and the Imperial Conference', she pointed out that women in Australia obtained the vote because 'it is easier to overcome the anti-suffrage forces, ignorance, tradition, and prejudice, in a young, unfettered country'.<sup>136</sup> Fourthly, she emphasised that women won in the recalcitrant state, Victoria, because women worked together for the Parliamentary vote before all other political issues. As this was also the general policy of the British campaigns, she believed that legislation to better the lives of women and children would eventually follow in England.<sup>137</sup>

These articles were published shortly after her arrival in Britain, and her choice of newspaper was the press of the militant WSPU, rather than the newspapers of the more constitutionally oriented

societies. The Women's Press published her book, *Woman Suffrage in Australia*, as a guide and inspiration to her British colleagues.

Mrs Nellie Martel's pamphlet, *The Women's Vote in Australia* also had publicised the many bills in the individual states which improved the conditions of women, families, employees, reforms brought about as a consequence of the women's vote.<sup>138</sup> Information in letters, newspapers, pamphlets from Australia in large quantities were sent to England which leaders such as Mrs Fawcett, Mrs Pankhurst and Mrs Despard, incorporated in their arguments.

These Australians were determined to help British women obtain franchise, but they became aware of a problem with the potential to significantly affect their own status. The Australian *Naturalisation Act* passed in 1903 did not differentiate between men and women. In Britain the *Imperial Naturalisation Act* and a new draft *Naturalisation Act* would. Under these Imperial acts, on marrying, a woman took the nationality of her husband. Should she marry a foreign national, she became a foreigner in her own country; divorce and widowhood would not alter her status as an alien. A married woman had no nationality of her own; she merely reflected the nationality of her husband. An Australian man could be a voter in England; his wife may never be one. Meeson and these Australian women felt keenly their loss of political status since coming to England. This legislation was being made more restrictive, and uniformity of this legislation throughout the empire was being proposed at the Imperial conference - an even worse scenario. Mr Fisher had deputations from Australian women indicating their concern.<sup>139</sup> The Australians saw that to remove this current stigma, and potentially worse discrimination, they must fight even more strongly for the vote for British women.

On 11 May 1911, at the instigation of Goldstein, together with Lady Cockburn, Lady Stout, Lady McMillan, Meeson and others, the Australian and New Zealand Women Voters' Committee (ANZWVC) (London), was formed at a well-attended meeting at the International Franchise Club. The aims were:

*To watch over the interests of Australian and New Zealand women under Imperial Legislation, and to promote their welfare generally from this side of the world.  
To help forward the Woman's Movement in every part of the British Empire.*<sup>140</sup>

Meeson was a founding member. The Committee was formed to deal primarily with three aspects. It intended to be a pressure group for voting rights, to protest to the Premier, Mr Asquith, against the loss of political status of antipodean women in England under the *Naturalisation Act*, and to marshal an Australian and New Zealand contingent in the Women's Suffrage Coronation Procession on 17 June.<sup>141</sup>

In addition, the Committee resolved that, to deal with their position under the *Naturalisation Act*,

Mr Fisher should be asked to receive a deputation, in order that he might be acquainted with the situation before the commencement of the Imperial Conference.<sup>142</sup> Secondly, a meeting held at the home of Lady Brassey, the wife of Lord Brassey, a former Governor of Victoria, on 20 May, resolved that Prime Minister Asquith be asked to receive a deputation to discuss the position of women from Australia and New Zealand under the existing and newly proposed *Naturalisation Acts* which were on the agenda at the Imperial conference.<sup>143</sup>

Lady Brassey's home in Park Lane, a central venue, was again chosen for a meeting by the Committee in campaign mode, keen to enlist as many Australian and New Zealand women in London as possible. Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst explained the philosophy behind the militant tactics of the WSPU. Mrs Fawcett introduced Australia's Prime Minister, Mr Andrew Fisher, who spoke about the beneficial effects of women's vote in Australia.<sup>144</sup> On the eve of the march, Lady Cockburn and Lady Stout published messages of support from Australia and New Zealand.<sup>145</sup>

The second reading of the *Women's Enfranchisement Bill* was passed in Parliament by a larger than ever majority of 167. The press reported extensively. The *Daily News* recorded:

*The Suffrage Bill contains two clauses only, and a very few days would see it through the Commons. It is as certain as anything can be that the House of Commons will have ample leisure towards the end of the Session, and it could in any case be asked to sit a few days longer to put through a Bill which it has repeatedly sanctioned. There is an overwhelming case, therefore, for the granting of facilities, and we trust that Mr Asquith will see the justice of appointing this Session for the carrying out of his pledge.*<sup>146</sup>

Yet on 2 June, the *Women's Enfranchisement Bill* was again denied facilities during the current parliamentary session by Asquith.<sup>147</sup>

## 8. The Women's Suffrage Coronation Procession, 17 June, 1911

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A widely distributed map of The Great Demonstration detailed arrangements for the Women's Suffrage Coronation Procession on 17 June 1911. Open air and other meetings were being held continuously during the week beforehand to arouse people's interest in the coming event. The march took place on Saturday before the Coronation. Public viewing stands lining the route

for the Coronation procession facilitated ideal viewing conditions for the suffrage march. Such a favourable arrangement was unlikely to present itself again to the women's movement. The march started at 5.30pm and the marchers, five abreast, took an estimated three hours to pass any given point. Forty thousand marchers from at least twenty-eight women's organisations in a procession seven miles long marched from the Embankment through Trafalgar Square, along Pall Mall, up St James's, the straight mile and a-half of Piccadilly and along Knightsbridge to Albert Hall.<sup>148</sup> The women all wore white dresses, with the colours of their own organisation. Department stores had widely advertised white dresses and walking skirts. Pageant floats were part of the parade - the 'new Crusaders', dressed in robes to represent famous women martyrs; the Prisoners' Pageant representing seven hundred prisoners or their proxies; the Historical Pageant; and the Pageant of the Empire in which the Pankhursts cleverly targetted the enthusiasm of women, both local and of the colonies, by demonstrating in front of the Empire, at its heart, 'their sense of patriotism, and their readiness for public service in the interests of their country'. Students at art schools including the Slade, the Royal Academy and the Royal College, were recruited to work on the pageants and floats.<sup>149</sup>

Besides the banners first embroidered in 1908, there were many new ones. Meeson's good friend, Emily Ford, alone designed eighty new banners for various municipalities, professional and trade organisations.<sup>150</sup> Mary Lowndes published a pamphlet with instructions on banner-making to ensure that all banners were of a high standard. Her close colleagues at the Artists' Suffrage League, all 'fine artists', designed many for participating organisations to ensure that the panorama throughout the march was outstanding. So distinct from commercial banners, these beautifully designed and handcrafted banners were further evidence of women's aspirations and high mindedness.<sup>151</sup> Besides the pageants of the militant groups, there was also a 'Truce Banner' to remind onlookers that during the course of the *Conciliation Bill* through Parliament, the militants had agreed to suspend their actions. Massed musical bands spread throughout the procession played the song of freedom, *March of the Women*, written especially for the occasion by the eminent musician, Dr Ethel Smyth. International contingents included representatives from France, Germany, Switzerland, USA, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Hungary and Italy.<sup>152</sup>

## 9. The Commonwealth of Australia. "Trust the Women Mother" Banner

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Meeson's banner, the [Commonwealth of Australia. "Trust the Women Mother as I Have Done"](#) was carried at the head of the Australian and New Zealand march contingents. As first in the world to grant women's suffrage, the New Zealand contingent, led by the indefatigable Lady Stout, was accorded first position amongst the Imperial dominions. Australia was led by Mrs Margaret Fisher, wife of the Prime Minister, Mrs Emily McGowen, wife of the New South Wales' Premier, and Vida Goldstein.

The Banner makes public the advice from the Commonwealth of Australia to the people of Britain, which, due to Prime Minister Asquith, remained almost undivulged. Although disappointment in his action must have been a major motivating force behind its creation, the Banner is even more a triumphant celebration of Australia's leadership in political reform and generously offered advice - to be widely proclaimed - that women's franchise was a success in Australia and should be adopted in Britain.

With the message, the [Commonwealth of Australia. "Trust the Women Mother As I Have Done"](#) the banner depicts a young woman symbolic of Australia, a shield of the Southern Cross at her side, appealing to the maternal Britannia, urging that Britain grant suffrage following the example of New Zealand in 1893, and Australia in 1902. Meeson's message was multi-faceted. The banner also drew attention to both the enlightened attitudes of the young nation compared with the mother country's inflexibility, and, by the use of these two figures, the banner made symbolic appeal from one government to another at a level of international diplomacy. By her use of the symbolic figures, Australia and Britannia, she was attempting to redefine the issue from one of internal politics between women and male politicians to one of statesmanship and discussion between the two countries.

Meeson, in searching for an appropriate imagery, undoubtedly looked to her early depiction of the classical figure of Minerva as suitable for a symbolic representation of Britannia. As a young student in Melbourne she had won a prize for the figure in an interstate competition, but she found greater significance in the crescent-shaped murals of the Exhibition Building in Melbourne which depicted symbolically Federation and the newly created Australian Commonwealth. These had been prepared for the opening of the First Federal Parliament in Melbourne performed by the then Duke of Cornwall and York, (now to be King George V) on 9 May 1901. In the principal mural [Federation](#), Britannia, represented by the figure known in classical studies as Athena, or Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, welcomed the six States carrying their emblematic shields. The panel symbolically depicted England granting nationhood to Australia

in 1901, and offering her wisdom to the young nation. Meeson reversed the roles on her banner. She drew upon the [Federation](#) panel's imagery to depict, instead, Australia as mentor to Britain. Australia was appealing to the Mother Country to accept the young country's experience and wisdom on the question of suffrage.

The British government would have been well aware that on the following day after the Australian Parliament was opened by the Duke of York, the first Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun, announced in Parliament that a measure was in preparation 'for the grant of a uniform suffrage in all Federal elections by the adoption of adult suffrage'. This Bill became law on 12 June 1902.<sup>153</sup> The origin and significance of her imagery would have been widely recognised in political circles. It would not have been appreciated by a hostile British Prime Minister. To his mind, Australia's provincial status should have proscribed its attempt, the *Resolution*, to dictate to the mother country.

On another level, her depiction of two 'womanly women', also illustrated the important message of the campaign that, unlike their press portrayal, they were not an aggressive rabble but normal, feminine women who simply sought the vote and women's emancipation. The banner was unusual among the seven hundred and seventy banners in that it was composed of oil painted on hessian whereas most were hand-embroidered. Its principal colours were green, red and white, colours which had been officially adopted by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies earlier in 1909.<sup>154</sup> The background colour of the banner of green represented 'regeneration', symbolising Britain's need to change with the times. The use of constitutional colours had been encouraged to give a sense of identity to the individual organisations and a massive advertisement for the overall women's movement.<sup>155</sup> Christabel Pankhurst in *Votes for Women* promoted the idea and wrote of the great success of the emblematic colours in bringing the strength and size of the movement to public attention.<sup>156</sup> The colours of the Pankhurst's organisation, the Women's Social and Political Union, were the probably better-known suffrage colours of purple and green and white.

Whereas most banners represented specific women's organisations, professional and trade bodies, Meeson's banner differed from these in its appeal to a higher level of statesmanship. Coates walked alongside, supporting Meeson's efforts to carry her heavy banner, which was carried on two poles requiring four bearers, in the procession.<sup>157</sup> At the mass meeting following at Albert Hall, Mrs Pankhurst voiced their confidence that victory was very near. She referred to Asquith's pledge to give an 'elastic' week for the committee stage and third reading of the Bill, the first time a Bill would go past the Second Reading. Australia's Mrs Fisher and Lady Brassey were prominent among the notables and supportive Members of Parliament.<sup>158</sup> Vida Goldstein also spoke.

The procession was widely reported in the daily papers. The usually antagonistic press were provided a great spectacle for photography and reportage by the mass circulation newspapers



which could not be missed.<sup>159</sup> Throughout these years, although the NUWSS and the WSPU enlisted the facilities of the daily press as much as possible, the press had ignored the campaign unless noteworthy damage was done by suffragettes to public buildings or at events. But most newspapers gave glowing reports of the spectacular, lavish procession, the magnificently embroidered silken flags and fluttering pennons, in the following day's papers - the *Daily Chronicle*, *Daily Graphic*, the *Westminster Gazette*, and others. The *Daily News* declared that 'this unity of women and this universality of the cause lifted the movement into the rank of the great revolutions'. Even *The Times*, which was anti-suffrage throughout these years to the outbreak of war, gave, if somewhat confused, an 'impassioned plea for Imperial citizenship' but not the women's vote.<sup>160</sup>

## 9. The Aftermath

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The ANZWC continued to act as agitators and lobbyists. A deputation which included Goldstein, Lady Stout, and Lady Cockburn, waited on Fisher to gauge the progress of the proposed *Naturalisation Law* at the Conference. The question of married women's status was being pressed privately on the notice of ministers by Colonial statesmen. Fisher was concerned but hopeful that the law, if passed, would eventually be found satisfactory.<sup>161</sup>

Further meetings of the Women Voters' Committee are known to have been held in Meeson's studio, one in February 1912, and one following in May, prior to another, smaller, march.<sup>162</sup> A meeting on 16 November re-confirmed that the primary need of the Committee, as long as men had such preponderant influence in Imperial legislation, was to help the British women gain franchise.<sup>163</sup> The Committee adopted a badge of wattle and fern leaf sprays united by a tiny Union Jack.<sup>164</sup> The organisation advertised its activities and meetings in the press, advising women to join to help safeguard their interests as Colonial women with regard to the *Naturalisation Act*.<sup>165</sup> In August 1912, the Committee held a public meeting in Hyde Park which attracted a large crowd, the speakers being members of the executive committee, Miss Margaret Hodge and Mrs Merivale Mayer. It voted to send a resolution to the Prime Minister 'respectfully requesting the Premier make Woman Suffrage a Government measure in the interests of the Empire'.<sup>166</sup>

The Colonial politicians were conscious that the Imperial Conference brought about 'the admission of the dominions to the innermost part of the "Imperial household"'. It was their first introduction to world politics, and while 'an unexampled mark of confidence and of family

feeling, it imposed corresponding obligations'.<sup>167</sup> Unable to confront the British Parliament aggressively, the Australian politicians continued high profile pressure upon the government through committees and large public meetings reported in the press. In August, Sir William Lyne, who had introduced the *Commonwealth Franchise Bill* into Federal Parliament in 1902, was the principal speaker at the meeting of the WSPU presided over by Christabel Pankhurst at the London Pavilion.<sup>168</sup> The Hon. Sir John Cockburn continued to use every opportunity, speaking in Chelsea at a public meeting of the Men's League for Woman Suffrage organised in support of the *Conciliation Bill*<sup>169</sup>, and at the Annual Dinner of the International Women's Franchise Club on 26 October.<sup>170</sup>

During the period of passage of the *Conciliation Bill* in Parliament, the WSPU had agreed to a truce with the Government. The Bill had passed its second reading when Mr Asquith refused the necessary facilities for the furtherance of the Bill, but promised to allow time, an 'elastic' week, for debate and its passage in the next session in the following year.<sup>171</sup> After the procession, on 23 June, Premier Asquith's letter, as published, confirmed his previous offer to allow facilities for the Women's *Enfranchisement Bill* - 'the Government . . . are unanimous in their intention to give effect not only in the letter but in the spirit to the promise in regard to facilities which I made on their behalf before the last General Election'.<sup>172</sup> But on 7 November, Mr Asquith announced his intention to introduce a *Conciliation Bill for Manhood Suffrage*, but no Womanhood suffrage, although it would be 'open to a women's amendment'.<sup>173</sup> The women felt betrayed and enraged; the WSPU immediately recommenced their militant tactics. In the following March, the unpopular bill was defeated.

From 1912 -1914, marches continued in a quieter key, but agitation and arson became more radical. The WSPU stepped up its militancy, with extensive damage to property. Houses, grandstands, railway stations, and cricket pavilions were burnt down, paintings in art galleries damaged, chemicals poured into pillar post boxes, windows broken, golf greens poisoned, flower beds in garden suburbs destroyed, bombings were renewed. Lloyd George's partly built house was destroyed in February 1913. Precedents established by men were cited as justification for the women's activism. In 1832, during the 'Franchise Agitation', which included the burning of Nottingham Castle, the Mansion House and public buildings in the City of Bristol, many acts of arson and militancy by men seeking the vote preceded the passing of the *First Reform Act*. Women now followed suit, claiming similar just cause.<sup>174</sup> Arrests and prison sentences increased.

The violence alienated the public. Had the women's militancy still had popular support, the government would have been forced to give way, but supported by the public, the government believed that, by using police convictions under criminal law, they could break the militancy of the comparatively small numbers of women involved.<sup>175</sup> As the jail terms were effectively being terminated by women's hunger strikes, the *Prisoners' Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health Act*, popularly known as the Cat and Mouse Act, was legislated on 25 April 1913. Women, as their

health deteriorated in prison from hunger-striking, were released to their families to regain strength, and then re-arrested to continue their sentence. Repeated re-arrests, hunger-striking, and violent force-feeding by prison authorities, led to significant damage to their health. In just over a year from 1913 to the outbreak of war in 1914, Mrs Pankhurst was imprisoned, force-fed and released ten times, thus demolishing fictitious beliefs about the so-called 'frailty of women'.<sup>176</sup> The Australian House of Representatives debated the treatment of suffragettes by forcible feeding, but an official representation to the Imperial Government probably would have been ignored again. It was dealt with by more informal methods: Dr Maloney, who had moved the *Resolution* in Australia's House of Representatives, told an (un-named) Committee in the British House of Commons that 'they could not call themselves other than barbarians until they gave every man and woman a vote'.<sup>177</sup> Strong words from the child to its mother!

In the press, the constitutionalists appealed both to the militants to cease their activities as they disadvantaged the cause by creating more alienation, but also to the politicians, arguing that the lack of integrity in their promises, and lack of action, was the cause of the increased militancy. The Labour Party warned of a 'Sex War', agitating to force the incumbent Liberal Party to withdraw the present Bill and substitute a new one including full women's suffrage.<sup>178</sup> Mrs Fawcett, still trying by parliamentary negotiation what the WSPU believed could only be achieved by violence, appealed to the militants during the passage of the *Franchise Bill*. The differences between their two organisations widened.

However in 1913, an event seen to be an affront to the colonials occurred. The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr Lewis Harcourt, attended an Anti-Suffrage Demonstration at Albert Hall. As a result, the ANZWVC forwarded a resolution to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs:

*We, Australian and New Zealand women, now resident in England, who deeply deplore the loss of our political freedom since coming to the Mother Country, desire to record our deep indignation at the fact that we are represented in the Cabinet by a Minister who holds such contemptuous views of the policy which our Dominions have thought fit to adopt, and our deep regret at the failure of the Government to fulfil their pledges to facilitate legislation giving votes to women. We demand the introduction during the present session of Government of a Bill to enfranchise women on the same terms as men.*<sup>179</sup>

The Committee despatched to Mr Harcourt the following *Resolution*:

*That this meeting . . . deeply regrets that the Colonial Secretary should appear on the platform at an Anti-Suffrage Demonstration, holding as they do that his public opposition to the enfranchisement of women is a slight upon those two Dominions in which equal suffrage is an integral part of the Constitution.*<sup>180</sup>

Never ceasing her lobbying, Vida Goldstein mailed her protest from Melbourne to Harcourt, with copies to the premiers of Australia and New Zealand. She sent a petition to a member of parliament for presentation in the House of Commons: 'It is a reflection on Australian women that our representative in the British Cabinet should be amongst those personally responsible for placing them on a lower political level in England than Australian men.'<sup>181</sup>

By 1912, the Australian politicians at the Imperial conference had returned home, but some of Meeson's artist friends took up the baton with biting cartoons in the press. Whilst most of the British daily press traditionally ignored suffrage questions, a new Labour oriented paper, the *Daily Herald*, was founded in July 1912 by George Lansbury, who was committed to suffrage. The paper advertised that, 'the *Daily Herald* will daily champion the women's cause; it will daily place your case before the public; it is here to help at all times; . . . it is the only London daily that champions your case.'<sup>182</sup> The brilliant Australian satirist Will Dyson joined the staff and his searing cartoons of political events soon became eagerly awaited by his readers. In the period 1912 to 1914 when the violence on both sides became more extreme, *Daily Herald* cartoons were reproduced in *The Suffragette*. His "For what you are about to receive . . ." shows the hunger-striking suffragette being force-fed in goal, but his fluid line and caustic wit convey the event with horrifying humour.<sup>183</sup> Both his wife, artist Ruby Lind, and May Gibbs, who is little known as a suffrage supporter and better known as the inventor of the delightful children's series, *Snugglypot and Cuddlepie*, and *The Gum Nut Babies*, contributed pungent cartoons to the women's press.<sup>184</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that Meeson and her equally committed husband Coates influenced his good friend Will Dyson, with whom he shared holidays, to take up the depiction of powerful images of these brutal events, yet the possibility remains.

On 27 January 1913, despite progressive amendments, Cabinet acted on a Speaker's ruling and withdrew the whole *Franchise Bill*, creating an uproar both within and without Parliament. To this date, besides resolutions, thirteen Bills had been introduced to the House, of which seven passed their second reading and were then blocked. It is estimated that over one million signatures had been obtained on the numerous petitions and appeals, and that there had been at least two thousand petitions.<sup>185</sup> Nothing further could be achieved until after the next election in 1915. Asquith triumphantly recorded in a private letter, 'The Speaker's *coup d'état* has bowled over the Women for this session - a great relief'.<sup>186</sup>

The WSPU programme of arson, bombing and militancy, continued with renewed vigour. The police, under instructions from Parliament, stepped up their aggressive attacks on the suffragists. 'Political police' acting as spies attended women's meetings in private premises or hired meeting rooms.<sup>187</sup> On 4 June 1913, Emily Wilding Davison became the first martyr for the Cause. At the Epsom Races, she ran under the King's horse in view of thousands and died. Her funeral cortège was the last massive public display, and the most solemn, of the women's movement.<sup>188</sup>

Two stalwarts of the ANZWC, Miss Margaret Hodge and Miss Harriet Newcomb, after a visit to Australia, returned to London, writing articles, and speaking to public groups as much as possible to press the English reform.<sup>189</sup>

In June, shortly before the outbreak of war, Mr Asquith's antipathy appeared to be softening. He accepted a deputation of working women, organised by Sylvia Pankhurst at the time weakened by a hunger strike, which represented the East End Federation of Suffragettes. They told of the harsh economic conditions under which women laboured in the East End, and pointed out that without the vote, they were unable to fight successfully for improved conditions. For the first time, Asquith showed a crack in his armour of unremitting opposition, and admitted that if the franchise were to be given to women it should be on the same terms as for men.<sup>190</sup>

As stated earlier, the *Naturalisation Bill* included the law that a woman on marriage to a foreigner, ceased to be British. It appeared that a loophole discovered in the Australian legislation indicated that the proposed British legislation might also apply throughout the Dominions, and potentially started to become a bigger issue than it had been. It was 'arousing a storm of protest in Australia'.<sup>191</sup> The law was passed immediately before the outbreak of war, with minor concessions in particular cases, and British women marrying foreigners assumed their husbands' nationality.<sup>192</sup> However with negotiation, the Dominions were left free to grant local nationality under their own terms of qualification.<sup>193</sup>

The outbreak of war brought change of direction to suffrage activities. Apart from some pacifist elements, the activism was suspended as the women's movement massively reconstituted itself in new organisations to assist the war effort. Meeson joined Nina Boyle to form a founding group of the first Women Police Force to relieve the depleted men's forces. By mid 1914, the ANZWC had been reformed as the British Dominion Woman Suffrage Union (BDWSU) with an extensive agenda on international women's issues.<sup>194</sup> The original group changed its name slightly to Australian and New Zealand Women Voters' Association. Meeson remained a member of the original group, 'the only organisation in Britain of women who are voters'<sup>195</sup>, for a period of time, but she later became Australian representative in London for the British Dominion Woman Suffrage Union.<sup>196</sup> In the postwar years, the BDWSU received little publicity in the press and Meeson's presence was occasionally noted at meetings when a discussion was usually held on topics such as the White Australia policy, women's disadvantage in India, and similar international issues.

As well as Meeson's name being listed for various contributions to the Artists' Suffrage League, the Women's Freedom League, and the Australia and New Zealand Women Voters' Committee, she also merits an entry in the list of prominent women in *The Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who* (1913). This included the following artistic contributions, 'prize poster N.U.W.S.S. in 1907; Australian and other banners for Women's Suffrage processions, Suffrage posters and postcards; poster for National Service League'. She also designed banners, posters and postcards, additional to the ones already discussed.

In 1918 after the First World War, the British Prime Minister was Lloyd George who replaced Asquith in 1916. The politicians again held off 'petticoat government', successfully shelving full suffrage by passing partial enfranchisement, giving the vote to men, and only women over the age of thirty who were municipal ratepayers, married to ratepayers, or university graduates. That this restricted franchise was given involves more complex issues than is immediately apparent, and was a less than generous thank-you for the most apparent reason, women's contribution to the war effort. These lesser understood issues included the women constitutionalists' intent to aid Labour politicians, not the Liberals, a major consideration of Lloyd George's government. In addition, the threat of renewed militancy was associated with the post-war period of demobilisation, massive strikes and industrial unrest, a depressed population, and the fear that the Russian revolution might spread to Britain. Electoral reform was necessary to include returning men, and the women who had competently filled their jobs could not be excluded. The vote was a sop to women with expertise in the defence and manufacturing fields now being forced to return to the domestic hearth, but the criteria limited the vote to mature women with, presumably, conservative inclinations.<sup>197</sup>

The full franchise for women was granted finally in 1928.

The Suffrage Movement had significantly enlisted and utilised the work of women artists for its promotional needs with the result that women artists were seen to be in the forefront of the emancipation of professional women. Quite apart from the pioneering legislative aspects of the Suffrage Movement itself, this was the first time in England that art had been co-opted for a mass people's movement, with cultural and ideological issues, for political ends, and also the first time that exploitation of the daily press and group feminine consciousness had been brought into play.<sup>198</sup>

Until now, little recognition has been given in British suffrage literature to the contribution by Australia and Australians to the long and bitter campaign. The Banner and the men and women of Australia did not change the course of parliamentary events. Fisher and his Parliamentary colleagues, with diplomatic discretion, undoubtedly gave convincing arguments to the British Labour Party which was more amenable to change than the conservative parties. The Australian women who joined the early campaigning believed in dramatic events attracting publicity to highlight their cause, but the more effective later arrivals to the British campaign promoted a constitutionally acceptable activism by means of public meetings, lobbying, deputations and use of the public press. The Australian experience provided confidence that success was possible and boosted British women psychologically to believe their campaign was reasonable and justified.

Meeson's banner was a public proclamation of Australia's enlightened attitude and its preparedness to seek new political solutions to age-old problems. The Australian Parliament, proud of its record as a pace-setter to the world in modern legislation, and the successful experiment, offered its advice to the British Parliament and was rebuffed. Asquith certainly

disapproved of Australia's action, yet the Australians responded vigorously within their means. The Commonwealth of Australia. "Trust the Women Mother As I Have Done" Banner challenged him on the women's behalf, and very publicly proclaimed the need for change.

This account also touches upon the co-operation which enfranchisement in 1902 engendered between men and women in Australia after the legislation was passed, and the determination to pass more progressive legislation particularly relevant to women, children and social problems, which were far-reaching reforms so long needed.

Words and events may be forgotten, but the physical presence of the Australian Banner remains an enduring symbol of those times, the women's achievements, the obstacles they faced, and a proud symbol of the Australian Parliament's pace-setting legislation ahead of most of the civilised world. The Banner was created by a woman, on the instigation and forward thinking of a number of women, on behalf of all women, and is displayed in Parliament House for all to see and be uplifted by the indomitability of earlier women against powerful opposition. It remains a symbol of Australia's early far-sighted progressiveness one hundred years ago, and offers inspiration to advance the full participation of women in society today.



## Endnotes

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- 1 *Centenary of Women's Suffrage 1902-2002*, brochure, Canberra, Office of the Status of Women, 2002. Although some states had granted Indigenous women limited voting rights prior to 1902, full voting rights for Indigenous women were not granted until the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* was amended in 1962.
- 2 Women's enfranchisement was obtained in New Zealand in 1893, the first country in the world to grant it, but women were not granted the right of parliamentary candidature until 1919. Women were enfranchised in state elections in Wyoming, USA, in 1869, Colorado in 1893, Utah and Idaho in 1896. The United States did not grant full franchise to women until 1920.
- 3 *Commonwealth of Australia. Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 59. 17 Nov., 1910, p. 6305. (CAPD)
- 4 Audrey Oldfield recognised that research in this area may be rewarding. (Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia. A Gift or a Struggle?* Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 232.)
- 5 'An Australian Artist, Dora Meeson', *Argus*, 2 Mar., 1928.
- 6 D. M. Coates, *George Coates, His Art and His Life*, London, Dent, 1937, pp. 38-39, 43.
- 7 A. J. R. (ed), *The Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who*, London, Stanley Paul, 1913, pp. 23-31.
- 8 Coates, p. 39.
- 9 A. J. R., pp. 39, 52, 113, 137.
- 10 Oldfield, pp. 4-6.
- 11 Harriet Taylor Mill, *Enfranchisement of Women*, 1851, in John Stuart Mill & Harriet Taylor Mill, *Essays on sex equality*, edited by Alice S. Rossi, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 107.
- 12 A. J. R., p. 91.
- 13 *Les Garner, Stepping Stones to Women's Liberty. Feminist Ideas in the Women's Suffrage Movement 1900-1918*, London, Heinemann Educational, 1984, *passim*.
- 14 Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women. Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1987, p. 7.
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- 18 Mary Lowndes, 'Banners & Banner-making', *Englishwoman*, Sept., 1909, reproduced in *Women's Banners*, p. 4, pamphlet, Women's Library.
- 19 Coates, pp. 40, 50. *The British Australasian*, 24 September, 1908, p. 18
- 20 Liz Whitelaw, *The Life & Rebellious Times of Cicely Hamilton*, London, The Women's Press, 1990, p. 49.
- 21 Tickner, p. 75.
- 22 Tickner, p. 78.
- 23 A. J. R., pp. 11, 208.
- 24 A. J. R., p. 12.
- 25 'Artists' Suffrage League. Postcard Competition', *The Common Cause*, 30 Sept., 1909, p. 315.
- 26 Tickner, p. 19.

- 27 Illus., Tickner, p. 17.
- 28 The six organisations comprised the Primrose League, the Trade Unions, Women's Liberal Association, the Independent Labour Party, the Social Democratic Federation, and the Women's Liberal Federation.
- 29 *The Pageant of Women's Trades and Professions*, 27 Apr., 1909, in Tickner, p. 5, fn. 14.
- 30 Whitelaw, p. 51.
- 31 Tickner, p. 163.
- 32 *Daily Sketch*, 22 Jan., 1910.
- 33 *British-Australasian*, 12 Mar, 1907, p. 14.
- 34 'The Artists' Suffrage League', *The Common Cause*, 3 Feb., 1910, p. 599.
- 35 Tickner, p. 18.
- 36 Letter, Philippa Strachey to Mary Lowndes, 7 July, 1908, Artists' Suffrage League, Box 153, Women's Library, London.
- 37 Oldfield, p. 78.
- 38 Nairn, Bede and Geoffrey Serle (eds), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 10: 1891-1939, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1972-, pp. 23-5.
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- 40 Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement. A Reference Guide 1866-1928*, London, Routledge, 2001, pp. 418-23.
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- 42 Vida Goldstein, 'A Message from Australia', *Votes for Women*, 31 Mar., 1911, p. 419.
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- 45 Mrs Nellie Martel, *The Women's Vote in Australia. What it has already accomplished*, London, WSPU, 1910.
- 46 'The Progress of Women', *Votes for Women*, 26 Nov., 1908, p. 153.
- 47 'Madame Melba and Votes for Women', *Votes for Women*, 12 Nov., 1908, p. 111.
- 48 Elsie M. Lang, *British Women in the twentieth century*, London, T. Werner Laurie, 1929, pp. 100-1.
- 49 'Madame Melba and Votes for Women', *Votes for Women*, 15 Oct., 1909, p. 46.
- 50 'How We Won in Victoria', *Votes for Women*, 7 Jan., 1909, p. 252.
- 51 'Good Wishes from New Zealand', 'New Zealand and Woman Suffrage', *Votes for Women*, 11 Feb., 1909, p. 341.
- 52 Adela Pankhurst, 'Woman Suffrage in New Zealand', *Votes for Women*, 29 Nov., 1909, p. 66.
- 53 'The Results of Woman Suffrage in New Zealand', *Votes for Women*, 29 April, 1910, p. 495.
- 54 *The Concise Dictionary of National Biography from earliest times to 1895*, vol. 1: A-F, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 85.
- 55 Private collection.
- 56 Roy Jenkins, *Asquith*, London, Collins, 1964, rev. ed., 1978, p. 245-8.
- 57 Tickner, p. 79, footnote 79.
- 58 *WSPU Report*, 1908, quoted in Tickner, p. 293, fn. 121.
- 59 'Guarded Suffragettes. Peaceful Meeting at Chelsea Town Hall', 24 January, 1908, p. 5; 'Chelsea Gossip', 29 May, 1908, p. 5; 'The Suffragistes. Increased Activity in Chelsea', 12 June, 1908, p. 5, all in *West London Press*.
- 60 Coates, p. 43.

- 61 Cicely Hamilton, 'Women's Franchise', Daily Mail, 15 June, 1908.
- 62 Countess Markiewitz was the first woman elected to a seat in the British Parliament in 1918, but, as an Irish national, refused to take her seat. In 1916 she became a fighter for Irish Independence, was condemned to death, pardoned, and later became the Minister of Labour in the Irish Republic.
- 63 Tickner, p. 91.
- 64 Tickner, p. 97
- 65 Editorial, *The Times*, 22 June, 1908.
- 66 These were all private Member's bills and increasingly it was realised that no private member's bill would succeed against the government of the day. In 1907, the *Women's Enfranchisement Bill* was introduced by Liberal Mr W. H. Dickinson. In 1908 the Liberal Member, Mr York Stanger, introduced the *Parliamentary Franchise (Women) Bill*. In 1909 Hon. Geoffrey Howard's *Representation of the People Bill* was similarly blocked. In 1910 Mr D. J. Shackleton introduced the *Conciliation Bill* and was refused 'facilities' again after the second reading. A. J. R., pp. 158-60.
- 67 A. J. R., p. 158.
- 68 'Our Cartoon', *The Common Cause*, 30 Sept., 1909, pp. 309-10.
- 69 'Debate on the Second Reading of the Parliamentary Franchise (Women) Bill', *The Common Cause*, 4 August, 1910, p. 240. This was a private Conciliation Bill introduced by D. J. Shackleton.
- 70 Cartoon, *The Common Cause*, 3 Nov., 1910, p. 1.
- 71 'Women Voters in Britain Overseas', *The Common Cause*, 6 Jan., 1910, p. 528.
- 72 'The International Women's Franchise Club', *The Common Cause*, 14 April, 1910, p. 9.
- 73 'The Outlook', *Votes for Women*, 27 May, 1910, p. 529.
- 74 'A Constitutional King', *Votes for Women*, 13 May, 1910, p. 536.
- 75 *ibid.*
- 76 'The Procession and the Suffrage Bill', *Votes for Women*, 17 June, 1910, p. 615.
- 77 'The Parliament of Australia on Votes for Women', *Votes for Women*, 21 Jan., 1910, p. 258.
- 78 *Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 59, 17 Nov., 1910, pp. 6300-14; vol. 59, 25 Nov., 1910, p. 6886, (CAPD). *Australia's Advice (abridged from the official report of the Senate.)*, London, The Woman's Press, c. 1912.
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- 80 CAPD, p. 6302.
- 81 CAPD, p. 6302, 6310.
- 82 CAPD, p. 6304.
- 83 CAPD, p. 6305.
- 84 CAPD, p. 6311.
- 85 *British Australasian*, 10 January, 1907, p. 18.
- 86 *British Australasian*, 10 January, 1907, p. 18. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 8: 1891-1939, 'Fisher', p. 504.
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- 91 'Australia Advises the Mother Country. A Precis of the Debate in the Australian Senate', *Votes for Women*, 13 Jan., 1911, p. 240; Emmeline Pankhurst, 'The New Year', Editorial, *Votes for Women*, 6 Jan., 1911, p. 228; 'Australia's Advice', *Votes for Women*, 24 Feb., 1911, p. 334.
- 92 'Australia's Advice', *Votes for Women*, 24 Feb., 1911, p. 337. 'Suffrage Week in the Papers', *The Common Cause*, 17 Nov., 1910, p. 514. 'Australian Experience', *The Common Cause*, 12 Jan., 1911, p. 652.
- 93 'Resolution of the Australian Senate', *The Common Cause*, 11 May, 1911, p. 81.
- 94 Oldfield, p. 231.
- 95 Lord Curzon, G. N., *Fifteen Reasons Against Women Suffrage*, National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, London, c. 1909-12; reprinted in: The Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, *Refutation of Lord Curzon's arguments against the enfranchisement of women*, London, The Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association, c. 1908-12.
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- 98 Mitchell, p. 3.
- 99 *Refutation*, n. pag.
- 100 Tickner, p. 154.
- 101 *Refutation*, n. pag.
- 102 *Refutation*, n. pag.
- 103 Tickner, p. 155.
- 104 Mitchell, p. 3.
- 105 Mitchell, p. 4.
- 106 *Refutation*, n. pag.
- 107 Tickner, p. 158.
- 108 Mitchell, p. 4.
- 109 *Refutation*, n. pag.
- 110 Women's Franchise, 17 Sept., 1908, quoted in Tickner, pp. 159-60, f/n 48.
- 111 *Refutation*, n. pag.
- 112 Mitchell, p. 5.
- 113 *Refutation*, n. pag.
- 114 Mitchell, p. 7.
- 115 Mitchell, p. 7.
- 116 Elsie M. Lang, *British women in the twentieth century*, London, T. Werner Laurie, 1929, p. 84.
- 117 *Why Women Should Not Have the Vote or The KEY to the Whole Situation.*, London, Women's Library, n.p., c. 1909.
- 118 Robert F. Cholmeley, M.A., *The Women's Anti-Suffrage Movement*, (London, National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 1908), p. 15. The formation of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League took place in July, 1908, and, in 1910, it amalgamated with the Men's League for Opposing Female Suffrage, becoming known as the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage (Tickner, pp. 99-100).
- 119 *British Australasian*, 27 April, 1911, p. 18.
- 120 'Encouragement from Australia', *Votes for Women*, 23 Dec., 1910, p. 194.
- 121 'Reception to Miss Vida Goldstein', *The Vote*, 17 June, 1911, p. 101.

- 122 'Suffragist Deputation to the Prime Minister of Australia', *The Common Cause*, 8 June, 1911, p. 154.
- 123 'The Hon. Andrew Fisher on Woman Suffrage', *Votes for Women*, 2 June, 1911, p. 577.
- 124 'The Premier of Australia on Woman Suffrage', *Votes for Women*, 2 June, 1911, p. 574.
- 125 'The Australian Premier and Adult Suffrage', *Votes for Women*, 9 June, 1911, p. 590.
- 126 'Prime Ministers and Votes for Women', *Votes for Women*, 17 June, 1911, p. 605.
- 127 'For These We Fight', *Votes for Women*, 26 May, 1911, p. 557.
- 128 Lady Stout (Anna), *Woman Suffrage in New Zealand*, London, Woman's Press, c. 1912.
- 129 Letter, Stella Miles Franklin to Isabella Goldstein, quoted in Janette Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman. Vida Goldstein*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1993, p. 112.
- 130 Oldfield, p. 145.
- 131 'A Message from Australia', *Votes for Women*, 31 March, 1911, p. 419.
- 132 'Men's League for Women's Suffrage', *The Common Cause*, 11 May, 1911, pp. 86-7.
- 133 Goldstein, *Votes for Women*, 'Message from Australia', 23 March, 1911, p. 419; 'How Australia gave Women Votes', 5 May, 1911, p. 513; 'Women and the Imperial Conference', 26 May, 1911, p. 557; 'Before and Since Woman Suffrage, I', 18 Aug., 1911, p. 747; 'Before and Since Woman Suffrage, II', 25 Aug., 1911, p. 759.
- 134 Goldstein, 'A Message from Australia', *Votes for Women*, 31 March, 1911, p. 419.
- 135 Goldstein, 'How Australia gave Women Votes', *Votes for Women*, 5 May, 1911, p. 513.
- 136 Goldstein, 'Women and the Imperial Conference', *Votes for Women*, 26 May, 1911, p. 557. Goldstein listed bills passed in South Australia alone since 1894, including: *Married Women's Protection, Workmen's Liens Amendment, Gaming Suppression, Indecent Advertisement Suppression, Police Pensions, Opium Amendment, Legitimation of Children, Married Women's Property, Workmen's Wages, Workmen's Compensation, Children's Protection re Smoking, State Children's Amendment, Early Closing, Children's Protection*.
- 137 Goldstein, 'Before and Since Woman Suffrage, II', *Votes for Women*, 25 Aug., 1911, p. 759.
- 138 Mrs Nellie Martel, *The Women's Vote in Australia*, London, (N)WSPU, 1910, p. 9.
- 139 Goldstein, 'Women and the Imperial Conference', *Votes for Women*, 26 May, 1911, p. 558. 'Mr Fisher on Votes for Women', *Votes for Women*, 16 June, 1911, p. 609. 'Australian Premier and Naturalisation Laws', *Votes for Women*, 23 June, 1911, p. 622. 'Australian Women and Naturalisation Laws', *Votes for Women*, 23 June, 1911, p. 633.
- 140 A. J. R., pp. 13-15. The first meeting was held at the International Women's Franchise Club. Apart from published reports, no records of the meetings of the ANZWC appear to have been saved.
- 141 A. J. R., pp. 14-15. Also 'Australian and New Zealand Voters' Committee', *The Vote*, 22 July, 1911, p. 164.
- 142 'Meeting of Australian and New Zealand Women', *The Common Cause*, 18 May, 1911, p. 105.
- 143 'Women Voters' Petition', *Votes for Women*, 26 May, 1911, p. 559. It is not known if this planned meeting with Prime Minister Asquith took place.
- 144 Peggy, 'An Interesting Suffrage Meeting', *British Australasian*, 8 June, 1911, p. 17.
- 145 'The Procession and the Suffrage Bill', *Votes for Women*, 17 June, 1910, p. 615.
- 146 'The Press', *The Common Cause*, 11 May, 1911, p. 86.
- 147 'Government's Statement in the House', *Votes for Women*, 2 June, 1911, p. 576.
- 148 'The March of the Women', *Votes for Women*, 23 June, 1911, p. 623. Tickner, p. 122.
- 149 Tickner, p. 124, fn. 229, and p. 128.
- 150 Tickner, p. 129.
- 151 'Mary Lowndes—Banner Making', *English Woman*, Sept., 1910, rpt *Women's Banners*, Women's Library, London.
- 152 Tickner, p. 597, fn. 74.

- 153 *Commonwealth of Australia. Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 7, 19 May, 1901, p. 29.
- 154 'Suffrage Colours,' *The Common Cause*, 25 Nov., 1909, p. 433.
- 155 Crawford, pp. 136-7.
- 156 Christabel Pankhurst 'The Importance of the Colours', *Votes for Women*, 7 May, 1909.
- 157 Coates, p. 63.
- 158 'Mass Meeting in the Albert Hall', *Votes for Women*, 23 June, 1911, p. 630.
- 159 Tickner, p. 56-8.
- 160 'Leading Articles in the Press', *Votes for Women*, 23 June, 1911, p. 631. 'The News of the Week', *The Common Cause*, 19 Aug., 1909, p. 237.
- 161 'Australian Premier and Naturalisation Laws', p. 622, and 'Australian Women and Naturalisation Laws', p. 633, *Votes for Women*, 23 June, 1911.
- 162 *British Australasian*, 29 February, p. 21, 1912; 9 May, 1912, p. 16. Meetings were held at a number of venues, including the houses of members.
- 163 *Votes for Women*, 8 Dec., 1911, p. 166.
- 164 'Australians in Europe', *British Australasian*, 7 Mar., 1912, p. 18.
- 165 *Votes for Women*, 3 Nov., p. 74; 29 Dec., 1911, p. 214.
- 166 'ANZ Women Voters' Association (London)', *Votes for Women*, 23 August, 1912, p. 767.
- 167 Editorial, *The Argus*, 26 June, 1911, p. 6.
- 168 *British Australasian*, 3 August, 1911, p. 21.
- 169 'The Men's League for Woman Suffrage', *Votes for Women*, 20 Oct, 1911, p. 42.
- 170 'The International Women's Franchise Club. Annual Dinner', *The Common Cause*, 9 Nov., 1911. Other leading Australian politicians continued throughout these years, when visiting London, to promote Australia's success and example in the English press, for example: 'Australian Premier Interviewed', *The Suffragette*, 28 Mar., 1913, p. 381; 'A Lesson for Mr Asquith', *The Suffragette*, 18 April 1913, p. 458.
- 171 *The Common Cause*, 22 June, 1911, p. 188; 20 July 1911, pp. 263, 279.
- 172 'The Premier's Statement', *Votes for Women*, 23 June, 1911, p. 622.
- 173 'Women's Suffrage. A Survey 1908-1912', *The Common Cause*, 15 Feb., 1912, p. 767.
- 174 'What Men Did to Get the Vote', *The Suffragette*, 28 Feb., 1913, p. 302.
- 175 Tickner, p. 135.
- 176 Garner, p. 49.
- 177 'Australian Parliament Discusses Forcible Feeding. An Animated Debate', *Votes for Women*, 4 Oct., 1912, p. 842.
- 178 'Mr Lansbury's Letter to Labour Organisations', *Votes for Women*, 4 Oct., 1912, p. 849.
- 179 'Enfranchised Women in England', *Votes for Women*, 14 Feb., 1913, p. 397.
- 180 A. J. R., p. 15. *British Australasian*, 13 Feb., 1913, p. 18.
- 181 'Australian Women to Mr Harcourt', *Votes for Women*, 11 April, 1913, p. 397; 'Australian Women and Mr Harcourt', *The Suffragette*, 18 April, 1913, p. 458; 'An Australian Petition', *Votes for Women*, 25 October, 1912, p. 61; Goldstein's strong letter to Mr Lloyd George, 'How Women Won the Vote in Australia. An Answer to Lloyd George', *The Suffragette*, 16 Jan., 1914, p. 306.
- 182 'Another Platform', *Votes for Women*, 5 July, 1912, p. 656.
- 183 For what you are about to receive..., *Votes for Women*, 30 May, 1913, p. 505. Also Forcible Feeding, *The Suffragette*, 30 May, 1913, p. 547.



- 184 The author is indebted to Professor Joan Kerr for information regarding the cartoons of May Gibbs and Ruby Dyson.
- 185 A. J. R., p. 93.
- 186 Jenkins, p. 250.
- 187 'The Political Police at Public Meetings', *The Suffragette*, 27 Feb., 1914, p. 441.
- 188 Tickner, pp. 136-8.
- 189 'Suffragist Travellers from Overseas, *Votes for Women*, 16 Jan., 1914, p. 232. Margaret Hodge, 'The Effect of Woman Suffrage in Australia. Part I. Use of the Vote', *Votes for Women*, 23 Jan., 1914, p. 253; 'The Effect of Woman Suffrage in Australia. Part II. Results in Laws and Social Conditions', *Votes for Women*, 30 Jan., 1914, p. 263. Evelyn Isitt, 'From an Australian', *Votes for Women*, 27 March, 1914, p. 397.
- 190 'More Liberal Humbug. Mr Asquith Changes His Mind', *The Suffragette*, 26 June, 1914, p. 178.
- 191 CAPD, 9 Oct., 1913, p. 1971; 15 May, 1914, p. 1045; 20 May, 1914, p. 1185-89.
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- 194 Angela Woollacott, 'Australian women's metropolitan activism, from suffrage, to imperial vanguard, to Commonwealth feminism', in Ian Christopher Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine, (eds) *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire. Citizenship, nation, and race*, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, ch. 13.
- 195 *The Vote*, 7 Aug., 1914, p. 475. The ANZWWA obtained a new address, c/- The Suffrage Club, 3 York Street, St. James's.
- 196 The writer is indebted to Elizabeth Crawford for this information.
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