



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT



WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

Key Speeches: Past and Present

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Key Speeches presents a selection of speeches made by women – some who have been parliamentarians and some who were not then eligible – over the past 100 years. From passionate campaigns to moving personal testimony, we showcase some of the many women whose contributions have enriched political debate and led to important social reforms.

NB: In a booklet of this size, the examples here are necessarily extracts: sources for the full text of all speeches are provided. We hope to expand this collection in a future publication and would welcome your suggestions for women or particular speeches you would like to see included.

From the 19th century onwards, women and men had campaigned for the franchise to be extended to women. The movement became split between militant and non-militant from 1906 onwards. Here are the leaders of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) making their positions clear.

CAMPAIGNERS FOR VOTES AND REPRESENTATION

EMMELINE PANKHURST

Emeline Pankhurst, leader of the WSPU, delivered this speech in Connecticut USA in 1913, when the WSPU had reached its most radical phase:

“It is about eight years since the word militant was first used to describe what we were doing. It was not militant at all, except that it provoked militancy on the part of those who were opposed to it. When women asked questions in political meetings and failed to get answers, they were not doing anything militant. In Great Britain it is a custom, a time-honored one, to ask questions of candidates for parliament and ask questions of members of the government. No man was ever put out of a public meeting for asking a question. The first people who were put out of a political meeting for asking questions, were women; they were brutally ill-used; they found themselves in jail before 24 hours had expired.

We were called militant, and we were quite willing to accept the name. We were determined to press this question of the enfranchisement of women to the point where we were no longer to be ignored by the politicians”.



Emmeline Pankhurst by John H F Bacon
c.1908, Chalk on paper WOA 5438

MILLICENT FAWCETT

Millicent Fawcett was elected leader of the largest suffrage organisation, formed from regional suffrage societies, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) from 1897. NUWSS members were committed to peaceful methods of campaigning – lobbying, meeting politicians, organising petitions and marches.

She was involved with politics, regularly attended Parliament to support her husband with his Parliamentary duties and was a well-known speaker, involved in the founding of Newnham College. Her husband was an early proponent of women's suffrage, Henry Fawcett MP. She also saw her sister, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, the first women doctor, be barred from entering the profession.

Here she explains the reasons she believes that women should have the vote:

"To women as mothers is given the charge of the home and the care of children. Women are therefore, by nature as well as by training and occupation, more accustomed than men to concentrate their minds on the home and the domestic side of things. But this difference between men and women, instead of being a reason against their disenfranchisement, seems to me to be the strongest possible reason in favour of it; we want to see the home and the domestic side of things to count for more in politics and in the administration of public affairs than they do at present".



She witnessed Parliament equalise the voting age for men and women in the Equal Franchise Act 1928 and said:

"It is almost exactly 61 years ago since I heard John Stuart Mill introduce his suffrage amendment to the Reform Bill on May 20th, 1867. So I have had extraordinary good luck in having seen the struggle from the beginning."

Millicent Fawcett (1847-1929)
Curator's Office Reference Collection

VISCOUNTESS RHONDDA

Viscountess Rhondda inherited her title from her father and attempted to take a seat in the House of Lords. Her case, heard in 1922, was initially approved but the decision was reversed due to opposition from the Lord Chancellor. Hereditary women Peers were only able to sit in the Lords after the Peerage Act 1963.

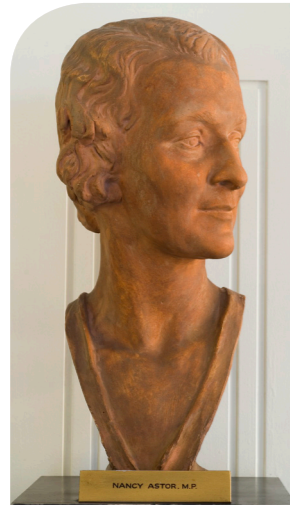
Viscountess Rhondda was a militant suffragette before the First World War. She was imprisoned for setting fire to a post box and went on hunger strike. She reflected on this period of her life in her autobiography, *This Was My World*:

"I had loved, it was true, every minute of that militant fight before the war. That had to be done. There are times when to change a law is the quickest - indeed the only - way to change public opinion. The period of the militant movement had been such a time. But even so that fight of ours was only ostensibly concerned with changing the law. The vote was really a symbol. And the militant fight itself did more to change the status of women - because it did more to alter our own opinion of ourselves - than ever the vote did. In actual fact, in those years we were changing the attitude of a country - nay, of the world; for in that fight England led the way. The other nations followed after. That was infinitely worth the doing... Alter a nation's habit of mind, and the laws will alter of themselves. That at least is how I see it. How in my heart I have always seen it."



Margaret Haig Thomas, 'Viscountess Rhondda'
by Alice Mary Burton, 1931, WOA 7177

WOMEN PIONEERS IN THE COMMONS



Nancy Langhorne Viscountess Astor
1879-1964
MP Plymouth 1919-45
First woman MP,
Plaster bust by Zsigmond Kisfaludi
Strobl WOA S221

NANCY, LADY ASTOR, FIRST WOMAN MP TO TAKE HER SEAT

Nancy Astor was an unlikely woman to have become the first woman MP to participate in the Commons, as an American-born socialite, with no record of suffragist beliefs. Her husband had to relinquish his Commons seat when his father died and he succeeded to the peerage as the second Viscount Astor. The local Conservative party accepted his suggestion that she fight the seat.

Here is an extract from Lady Astor's maiden speech on 24 February 1920:

"I shall not begin by craving the indulgence of the House. I am only too conscious of the indulgence and the courtesy of the House. I know that it was very difficult for some hon. Members to receive the first lady M.P. into the House. ["Not at all!"] It was almost as difficult for some of them as it was for the lady M.P. herself to come in. Hon. Members, however, should not be frightened of what Plymouth sends out into the world. After all, I suppose when Drake and Raleigh wanted to set out on their venturesome careers, some cautious person said, "Do not do it; it has never been tried before. You stay at home, my sons, cruising around in home waters." I have no doubt that the same thing occurred when the Pilgrim Fathers set out. I have no doubt that there were cautious Christian brethren who did not understand their going into the wide seas to worship God in their own way. But, on the whole, the world is all the better for those venturesome and courageous west country people, and I would like to say that I am quite certain that the women of the whole world will not forget that it was the fighting men of Devon who dared to send the first woman to represent women in the Mother of Parliaments".

MARGARET WINTRINGHAM, FIRST LIBERAL MP

The first two women MPs, Nancy Astor and Mrs Wintringham, played a crucial role in ensuring the case for equal guardianship of children was

addressed in legislation. Equal guardianship had long been an issue for women's organisations, and during the long campaign for the vote it was cited as one of the many inequalities that women could change if they had the vote.

Against covert Government opposition, a joint select committee had heard evidence from a wide range of women's organisations about the injustice of the existing law in 1923, but no report was agreed, due to the general election in December.

In the new minority Labour Government of 1924, Mrs Wintringham introduced the Equal Guardianship Bill using the private members bill procedure in April 1924. She said:

"Not only do the women of this country want this bill themselves but they want it essentially for the welfare of the children and on their behalf I make this appeal for a Second Reading. I would like the House for a few minutes to consider the history of the guardianship of children. The last Act was passed in 1886, nearly 40 years ago"

The Bill provided for the mother to be joint guardian with the father, and have equal authority, rights and responsibility. It also allowed for the wife to claim maintenance from the husband, via a court order. The Government accepted the principle of the Bill and it was finally enacted in 1925.

The role of the courts was greatly increased as working-class women could now bring their case

to a magistrates' court, where the Act provided for a mother to have the same power as a father, with the welfare of the child being paramount. And women did make use of this: applications to magistrates' courts for equal guardianship by women rose steadily over the next 20 years.

Margaret Wintringham spoke in her maiden speech during a debate on the economy:

"My reason for intervening at this time, when the House is very pressed to get on with its business, is that the question of economy appeals very much to women [...] True economy is not a question of how little one can spend, but of how wisely one can spend it [...] Women, when they have to pay heavy taxes, either direct or indirect, on tea, sugar or other household commodities, naturally begin to look for the cause. At the same time they do not like to see the reforms on which they are keen, such as health, housing or education, curtailed. If they wish to curtail the expenditure on the home, they do not immediately begin by saying they are not going to have a doctor. They do not think they will have inferior food, or limit their clothing, and certainly they do not think, if they have a leaky roof, that they will let it go on leaking.

All those things women would consider to be not wise economy. They feel that the best investment for the nation at the present time is good education and good health."

ELLEN WILKINSON AND THE JARROW MARCH

Initially a teacher and a suffragist, Ellen Wilkinson was elected in 1924 attracting immediate attention as the only new female Labour MP in that Parliament. She was best known for her high profile work on behalf of her unemployed constituents in the North East town of Jarrow, leading the Jarrow March to London in 1936.

Ellen Wilkinson presented a petition on 4 November 1936, drawing attention to her constituents' basic needs:

"I beg to ask leave to present to this Honourable House the Petition of the people of Jarrow praying for assistance in the resuscitation of its industry. During the last 15 years Jarrow has passed through a period of industrial depression without parallel in the town's history. Its shipyard is closed. Its steelworks have been denied the right to reopen. Where formerly 8,000 people, many of them skilled workers, were employed, only 100 men are now employed on a temporary scheme. The town cannot be left derelict, and therefore your Petitioners humbly pray that His Majesty's Government and this honourable House should realise the urgent need that work should be provided for the town without further delay."

Ellen tried to use all procedural means at her disposal to highlight the huge unemployment in Jarrow. She proposed that the Commons hear

from the marchers directly, during a debate on a proposal to allow them to come to the Bar of the House, breaching parliamentary precedent:

"I suggest to the Prime Minister that, far from taking in any way from the dignity of this House or of the democratic representatives in this House by asking to be heard at the Bar of the House, the petition of these men and women enhances the dignity of the individual Members of this House. We say that there must be parties, that there are such things as Cabinets, and that Executives must rule, and all that, but when it comes to the final stage, the individual Member cannot hand over all his public responsibility to the Government and to the Executive which, for the time being and in 99 cases out of 100, he is anxious to stand by. I suggest that the case of these marchers is just that hundredth case and that this House might very well permit itself to hear the actual statement of these men before the Bar. After all, when it is a matter of life and death in the Law Courts of this country, the very fullest kind of appeals are allowed to be made. When it is a matter of life and death every point is pressed that a man should be heard in his own defence, and I would ask the Prime Minister whether it is not possible to stretch a point in this case, because, quite literally, it is a matter of life and death when the infantile mortality of Jarrow is double and more than double what it is in the rest of the country.

It is insufficient to say that their representatives can be heard in this House. As the hon. Member for



Ellen Catelyn Wilkinson leading the Jarrow Marchers through Cricklewood in London by Fox Photos Ltd modern bromide print from original negative, 31 October 1936, Given by IPC Newspapers Limited, 1971NPG x88278

Gorbals (Mr. Buchanan) has said, with all the good will in the world there are things which we cannot understand. As I marched down that road with those men, all of whom I knew well, whom I had worked with in my own constituency, as I marched with them hour after hour, just talking—I come from the working class myself, and my father was unemployed, but I have never known what it was to miss a meal that I wanted—it was just as we walked and talked so intimately that I began to understand something of what it meant, day after day after day, to get up and not know what you were going to do, and never have a copper in your pocket for anything."

She was unsuccessful in this debate, but the Jarrow marchers achieved impressive publicity for their plight, thanks to the role of their MP.



ELEANOR RATHBONE

Eleanor Rathbone was a social campaigner and suffragist. In 1919, she took over as President from Millicent Fawcett of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (the renamed National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies). She was elected as an Independent as one of two MPs for the Combined English Universities seat in 1929. Miss Rathbone campaigned for several years for the introduction of family allowances, now Child Benefit. This was enacted in the Family Allowances Act 1945 by the wartime coalition government. She opposed the Bill's awarding of the allowance to the father and following a cross-party alliance, the Bill was amended against Government wishes, to require the allowance to be paid to the mother. Her speech on the second reading sets out the principles behind the allowance:

"I am honoured, as a mere Back Bencher, in being allowed by you, Sir, to initiate the Debate on the very interesting statement we have just heard from my right hon. and learned Friend. I know that I owe that honour to the fact that I am, generally, regarded as the grandmother of this proposal, though for the past 25 years not I alone, but many others, and as many men as women, have been working at it. I think this is, in principle, indeed a very great Measure. It is great, because it introduces, not merely as will the National Insurance Bill which we hope is to follow it, the development of an old principle, but a momentous new principle. For the first time, it proposes that the State should make a money contribution, not merely to the bringing of children into the world and their education, but really for maintaining them. By so doing it remedies what I have always considered the fundamental injustice of excluding children from all share of their own in the national income, although children and their mothers together constitute between one-third and one-half of the entire population. It recognises that they have a claim to payment of money from the State."

PIONEERS IN THE LORDS

KATHERINE ELLIOT, BARONESS ELLIOT OF HARWOOD

Katharine Elliot was the first woman to speak in the Lords as a member of the House. The widow of Walter Elliot MP, her peerage acknowledged her long-standing work for prison reform, child care, consumer and international affairs.

Baroness Elliott served on the Home Office Advisory Committee on the Treatment of Offenders, the Advisory Committee on Child Care in Scotland, and was the first chair of the Consumer Council. From 1956-67 she chaired the National Association of Conservative and Unionist Associations (NACUA). Baroness Elliott was awarded the CBE in 1946 and the DBE 1958.

Baroness Elliott's maiden speech—the first speech to be made by a female Member of the House of Lords in the Chamber—focused on Commonwealth and colonial affairs and acknowledged the historic precedence being set:

“My Lords, it was with great trepidation that I put down my name on the list of speakers for the debate this afternoon. It is only a week since the new Life Peers were introduced into this House and it might seem presumptuous on my part to speak so early in this august Assembly. But I have always found in life that if there is something difficult to do it does not get any easier when you do not do it but put it off. I am very conscious of the importance of the first speech to be made by one of the Life Peers.

I am very conscious that, except for Her Majesty's gracious Opening of Parliament, probably this is the first occasion in 900 years that the voice of a woman has been heard in the deliberations of this House.

Before I say any more, however, I should like to respond to the very kind remarks of the noble Viscount, the Leader of the Opposition, and also of the noble Earl, the Leader of the House, in opening this debate, and thank them for the generous welcome which they gave to the Life Peers. I think I can say that all of us who so recently joined the House would wish to express our gratitude for the welcome which has been accorded to us. This Assembly has the reputation of being the greatest debating Chamber in the world; but what has not been said is that this Assembly is also the friendliest assembly in the world. It is, indeed, a great honour to have been chosen to sit with your Lordships and take part in the work of the House, and I hope that we shall not disappoint you too much in the contributions which we shall endeavour to make from time to time.”



BARONESS WOOTTON OF ABINGER

Life Peer Baroness Wootton of Abinger was the first woman to be created life Peer, in July 1958. For this reason, she is said to have been the first female Member of the House of Lords, although Baroness Swanborough was the first woman to take her seat in the House of Lords and Baroness Elliot of Harwood was the first to speak in the Chamber of the House.

Baroness Wootton was an expert on sociology, criminology and penal reform, she wrote 15 books and was awarded 13 honorary degrees. She served on four Royal Commissions and was made a Companion of Honour in 1977. During her time in the House she was a contributor to committees and debates, and is remembered for sponsoring the Bill to abolish capital punishment in 1965. Baroness Wootton moved the Murder (Abolition of Death Penalty) Bill 1965 at second reading:

“My Lords, I beg to move that this Bill be now read a second time. This is an extremely simple Bill and it will require very little exposition. I think I may take it that the substance of it is already familiar to every Member of your Lordships’ House. The main effect of this Bill is to provide that an automatic sentence of life imprisonment shall follow upon any conviction for murder.

Before I deal with the main arguments in support of the Bill, there are one or two things I would say by way of preliminary observations. I would say first that I am very well aware that there are grave moral issues involved

in the principle of this Bill, and if I say very little about the moral issues it is not because I underestimate their force but because I hope that in the subsequent debate there are those whose views on moral questions will command greater respect than I would venture to claim in this House for my own. I wish also to make a certain assumption. I wish to assume—I am sure that your Lordships will endorse the assumption—that there is no civilised person (and that must include every Member of your Lordships’ House) who can contemplate taking the life of another human being in cold blood without deep repugnance. I shall assume that we are all united in our respect for life, and in our desire to preserve the sanctity of life; and that the only thing that can possibly divide us to-day is a difference of opinion as to how best this may be achieved—as to whether the protection of the life and lives of the public may demand that, on occasion, some individual life should be deliberately sacrificed. If that assumption is not justified, I am sure that I shall be made well aware of the fact; but I think I may take it that that is an extremely unlikely contingency.

[...]

The final argument, and to me perhaps the most convincing of all, is the fact that no one can tell what the life might have been of the man whose days are cut short by the execution of the death penalty. Just as it must lie heavy on our consciences that we may have executed the innocent, so I think it lies heavy on our consciences that we may have deprived another human being of the opportunity of expressing his remorse in the subsequent years of his life [...] Let us not forget that if we hang even two or three men each year we may be depriving a fellow human being of the opportunity to live out his remorse in such a life as this. I beg to move.”



Barbara Frances, Baroness Wootton (née Adam) of Abinger
by Walter Bird
bromide print, 20 August 1964
NPG x165303

CAMPAIGNERS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

BESSIE BRADDOCK

Daughter of an active suffragette, Bessie Braddock was a veteran of Liverpool politics. She was a member of the city council from 1930 to 1961 and was elected to Parliament in 1945, the first woman MP for a Liverpool seat.

Mrs Braddock was known as a forthright campaigner for her native Liverpool. Her maiden speech focused on the terrible housing conditions in 1945:

“The cases I have quoted are only a few of those that could be mentioned. I could speak for five or six hours and give case after case in my own Division, and there are other people in Liverpool who could quote similar cases. At the moment, in Liverpool, there is no attempt to meet the housing situation. We need 100,000 houses almost immediately, so bad have the

conditions been allowed to become—not because of the war, because we lost houses before the war. I can remember that in 1918 the Conservative Party won an Election on the cry “Homes for heroes to live in.” These are the homes the people have been given to live in, and, right throughout this country, and particularly in industrial areas, people are living in flea-ridden, bug-ridden, rat-ridden, lousy hell-holes which have been allowed to develop throughout the industrial areas of this country. The back benchers on this side of the House, and I think I can speak for most of them, will continue to agitate, and kick up a row, if necessary, until we are able to assure the people of this country, who have been compelled to live in conditions of this character, that this party has a policy to get rid of some of these evils.”

JENNIE LEE, FOUNDER OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Jennie Lee won a scholarship to university from a Scottish mining background. Her father was blacklisted after the General Strike in 1926, further politicising his daughter. Miss Lee was first elected in a by-election in Lanarkshire in March 1929 aged 24, the youngest MP in the Commons at a point when she was below the voting age herself, as the new register under the Equal Franchise Act 1928 did not take effect until the general election in May 1929.

She was appointed as Minister for the Arts in Harold Wilson’s first administration in 1964 and best known for her role in helping to found the Open University in 1969, an achievement later described by Wilson as the greatest achievement of his premiership.

Miss Lee had to counter much scepticism on the cost and value of the Open University. Here is what she said on 28 July 1966 in response to hostile questions:

“An open university in Great Britain’s circumstances today is not a dream,... is not a luxury: it has become an urgent necessity.”

The white paper sponsored by her ministry emphasised the theme of excellence:

“There can be no question of offering to students a makeshift project inferior in quality to other universities... Its aim will be to provide, in addition to radio and television lectures, correspondence courses of a quality unsurpassed anywhere in the world. These will be reinforced by residential courses and tutorials.”

The Open University has been celebrated for allowing women an opportunity to enter higher education that would have otherwise been unavailable. By the end of 1970s, it was producing 6,000 graduates a year, as well as almost 150 higher degree graduates in the first decade.

Janet Bevan (Jennie Lee), Baroness Lee of Asheridge by Elliott & Fry bromide print, 1940s
6 in. x 4 1/4 in. (153 mm x 109 mm) image size
Purchased, 1996
Photographs Collection NPG x182180



Bessie Braddock MP with Hollywood legend Marlene Dietrich on the House of Commons Terrace, 1955. Parliamentary Archives, PUD/14/100

BARBARA CASTLE

A former journalist, Barbara Castle was elected to Parliament in 1945, the youngest woman member, one of 24 women MPs. She was one of the key figures in the Harold Wilson administrations of the 1960s and 1970s. She became the fourth woman to reach the rank of Cabinet Minister, in October 1964 as Minister for Overseas Development, and held Cabinet posts during Wilson's 1964–70 governments and 1974–76 administration.

Mrs Castle is remembered for having introduced the Equal Pay Act 1970. Here is her speech on second reading:

“There can be no doubt that this afternoon we are witnessing another historic advance in the struggle against discrimination in our society, this time against discrimination on grounds of sex. In introducing the Bill, I hope that there will be no difference between the two sides of the House about the principle. The only difference is that the present Government have had the will to act.

While other people have talked—lots of people have talked—we intend to make equal pay for equal work a reality, and, in doing so, to take women workers progressively out of the sweated labour class. We intend to do it, if the House will back us, in ways which will give a lead to other countries whose governments have left us behind in adopting the principle but who are still striving for effective ways of implementing it.

The concept of equal pay for equal work is so self-evidently right and just that it has been part of our national thinking for a very long time. Here, as in other things, it was the

Trade Union Movement which gave the lead. Indeed, as far back as 1888 the T.U.C. first endorsed the principle of the same wages for the same work—a very courageous avant garde thing to do in those days, long before Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, when women who worked in industry were certainly not considered respectable, even if they were regarded as human beings at all.

Since then the struggle against discrimination against women in rates of pay has had a chequered course. There was that great moment during the war when Mrs. Thelma Cazalet Keir, with strong Labour support, led a successful revolt against the Government on the issue of sex discrimination in teachers' pay, and the great man himself, Winston Churchill, had to come down to the House the next day to make the reimposition of sex discrimination a vote of confidence.

Since then, the cause of equal pay has had its partial victories: the non-industrial Civil Service, non-manual local authority workers and teachers all got the first of seven instalments towards equal pay in 1955, and full equality in 1961. But its extension to that far greater number of women in industry for whom the T.U.C. fought so long ago has so far eluded us. The trade union movement has realised that this can be done only by legislation, and previous Governments have refused to legislate. Up to now, the extension of equal pay in industry has always foundered on three arguments: how should we define equal pay for equal work? How can we enforce it? And: “The economic situation is not right.” It is a tremendous credit to this Government that they have found the answer to all three.”



Barbara Anne Castle, Baroness Castle
by Walter Bird
bromide print, 17 June 1964
image size: 206 mm x 155 mm
Commissioned, 1964
Photographs Collection NPG x166427



WOMEN OFFICE HOLDERS: PRIME MINISTER

MARGARET THATCHER, FIRST WOMAN LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION AND FIRST WOMAN PRIME MINISTER

Margaret Thatcher became the first female Leader of the Opposition in 1975 when she won the Conservative Party leadership contest. At the time, there were only 7 women Conservative MPs in the Commons. Her speech when Leader of the Opposition on the motion of no confidence, which ended the Labour Government on 28 March 1978, was regarded as forceful and influential:

“It is not unusual for minority Governments to carry on for a considerable time, as this Government have. What condemns the Prime Minister now is the justified feeling that the substance of matters before the House takes second place to the survival of the Government. That feeling is widespread, and it robs the Government and the Prime Minister of authority, credibility and dignity. The only way to renew the authority of parliamentary government is to seek a fresh mandate from the people and to seek it quickly. We challenge the Government to do so before this day is through.”

She won the subsequent general election of 1979 with a decisive majority.

As the first female Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher was in power from 1979 to 1990, when she faced a revolt from her parliamentary party and stepped down as leader. Here is her farewell speech in 1990, recalling her Government’s achievements:

“In the past decade, we have given power back to the people on an unprecedented scale. We have given back control to people over their own lives and over their livelihood—over the decisions that matter most to them and their families. We have done it by curbing the monopoly power of trade unions to control, even to victimise, the individual worker. Labour would return us to conflict, confrontation and government by the consent of the TUC. We have done it by enabling families to own their homes, not least through the sale of 1.25 million council houses. Labour opposes our new rents-to-mortgage initiative, which will spread the benefits of ownership wider still. We have done it by giving people choice in public services—which school is right for their children, which training course is best for the school leaver, which doctor they choose to look after their health and which hospital they want for their treatment.”

WOMEN OFFICE HOLDERS: LORD SPEAKER

BARONESS HAYMAN, LORD SPEAKER

Helene Hayman was elected as Labour MP for Welwyn and Hatfield in 1974 and served until 1979. She was the youngest member of the House of Commons and one of 27 women MPs at the time.

In 1996 she became a member of the House of Lords. Her parliamentary roles included Opposition Spokesperson in the Lords for Health (1996-97); Under Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1997-98); Under Secretary of State at the Department of Health (1998-99); and Minister of State at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1999-2001). House of Lords members elected Baroness Hayman as their first Lord Speaker on 4 July 2006. She served one term of office (five years) and was succeeded by Baroness D'Souza in July 2011. Speaking at her election as the first Lord Speaker, Baroness Hayman said:

"My Lords, nobody could take up the position that I have done today without a sense of honour and a sense of history. It is customary on these occasions to say that your predecessor is a very hard act to follow. When you have to talk about several centuries of predecessors who are enormously hard acts to follow there is a tremendous sense of responsibility. I feel that sense and I will do my utmost to live up to the responsibilities with which the House has entrusted me.

One of the things made very clear to me during the debates about the change to a Lord Speaker was that the last thing that the House wanted inside its confines was long speeches from the Woolsack. That mistake I will not make today. However, I wish to add my thanks for, and my tribute to, what has been said already and the very kind words that have been addressed to me.

I am always slightly nervous when one is congratulated and told of one's qualities, even if they are about being a singing nun, in advance of having performed any function whatever. However, they are very gratefully received. I am grateful even to the noble Lord, Lord McNally, although when he spoke about voting for me, I was reminded that, on election day, I met one of his Front-Bench colleagues going into the Moses Room to vote. He said, "The alternative vote, it's a wonderful system. You start with the bottom number and the person you really dislike most". So even if that was the spirit in which the noble Lord, Lord McNally, voted for me, I am seriously aware that the wonderful thing about this election was not only the spirit in which it was conducted—and I pay tribute to everybody who stood and everybody who was involved in the election—but also that, your Lordships' House being what it is, what it was and what it will be, no candidate could have won it without support from all round the House. That is what will sustain me in the time ahead, when I try my very best to do the job well and when, inevitably, I do not do it perfectly at the beginning."



'Baroness Hayman, the Lord Speaker'
by Sergei Pavlenko,
2008
WDA 6806

CONTEMPORARY VOICES

CLARE SHORT AND PAGE 3

Clare Short was a civil servant before deciding to enter politics as MP in Ladywood in 1983, the area where she was born and grew up.

Her campaign to ban the Sun newspaper's page 3 photos of topless women began with a Ten Minute Rule Bill on 12 March 1986.

The Bill was opposed by the Conservative Robert Adley who said that "her speech was a titillating mixture of politics, prejudice and prurience." The Bill was successful when a division was called on second reading, but it made no further progress due to lack of parliamentary time.

She continued her campaign with another Bill on 13 April 1988 which also made no progress. However, the campaign gained Ms Short much popular support.

"I beg to move, that leave be given to bring in a Bill to make illegal the display of pictures of naked or partially naked women in sexually provocative poses in newspapers. This is a simple but important measure. I stress that I should like the rule to apply to newspapers and only newspapers. If some men need or want such pictures, they should be free to buy appropriate magazines, but they have no right to foist them on the rest of us.

It is said that we are free not to buy such newspapers, but things are not as simple as that. I have received several letters from women whose husbands buy such newspapers. Those women object strongly to those newspapers and object to them being left lying round the house for their children to see.

I have also talked to teachers, including my brother. He asks children to bring newspapers to school for use in discussing current affairs or for making papier mâché, and so on. Both he and the children are embarrassed by the children's reaction to the page three pictures."





STELLA CREASY AND PAYDAY LOANS

Stella Creasy was elected in 2010 as a Labour and Co-operative Party MP. Previously, she was campaigns director at the Scout Association, and Labour Party researcher. She found that in her constituency of Walthamstow payday loans had become a major source of debt for her constituents. These work by charging a very high level of interest when loans are rolled over from one payday to the next. She called for a cap on the total cost of credit in a speech on 3 February 2011:

“Above all, this debate is about the spiralling costs at the heart of such loans, because it is the rates that people charge that make this a billion-pound industry. It is all legal, and it is all growing. While some forms of high-cost lending have been with us for generations, we have also seen in this country a rapid expansion in the scale and use of these forms of credit in the past few years alone. That is driven in part by the drying up of mainstream credit. PricewaterhouseCoopers reports a staggering 79% drop in secured lending in the past year. Research by Consumer Focus predicts a rise in payday lending alone of 40% to 45% in the next few years. There has also been a fourfold increase in payday lending since 2008.

I see for myself the impact that this has on my community in Walthamstow. Our high street now has a large number of shops offering short-term loans, hire purchase agreements and credit deals. That is a badge of poverty.”

DIANE ABBOTT AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Diane Abbott was elected in 1987 and became the first black woman MP. She was born in London and worked as a civil servant, in journalism, local politics and the National Council for Civil Liberties before entering Parliament. She represents the constituency of Hackney North and Stoke Newington and was appointed Shadow Secretary of State for International Development in September 2015.

She delivered this speech during the second reading of the Counter Terrorism Bill 2007-08:

“As has been said throughout this debate, the first duty of Parliament is the safety of the realm. It is because I believe that the proposals on 42-day detention will make us less safe, not more safe, that I oppose them. I do not take terrorism lightly. I am a Londoner and I heard the last major IRA bomb, at Canary Wharf, from my kitchen in east London. Like thousands of Londoners, I waited for the early-morning call that assured me that friends and family on their way to work and school had not been caught up in those bombings. I will not take lectures from Ministers about not taking terrorism seriously.

I do not believe, as Ministers continue to insist, that there is some trade-off between our liberties and the safety of the realm. What makes us free is what makes us safe, and what makes us safe is what will make us free.

[...]

It seems to me that, if someone is in detention for six weeks without knowing why, and they therefore have no notion of whether they will be able to get out without being charged, that detention is coercive in itself. We saw in the big miscarriage of justice cases what people will sign after only a few weeks.

[...]

I became active in politics in the 1980s, at a time of enormous turmoil—there were riots in Brixton, Liverpool and Bristol, “Scrap sus” was a huge issue and young black men were seen as the enemy within, just as young Muslim men are today. I came into politics because of my concern about the relationship of the state to communities that are marginalised and suspected. It is easy to stand up for the civil liberties of our friends or of people in our trade union, but it is not easy to stand up for the civil liberties of people who are unpopular, suspected and look suspicious—people the tabloids print a horror story about every day. However, it is a test of Parliament that we are willing to stand up for the civil liberties of the marginalised, the suspect and the unpopular.

I came into politics about those issues, and I believe that if there is any content at all in Ministers’ constant speeches about community cohesion, we must offer every part of our community not just the appearance but the reality of justice and equality before the law. Everybody knows that the provisions will impact disproportionately on the Muslim and ethnic minority communities. Everybody knows that we shall not be detaining the Saudi paymasters



of terror for 42 days; just as happened under internment, we shall be scraping up the flotsam and jetsam of communities. Ministers are talking about people such as my constituents, so when Muslim boys and black converts are in prison and their mothers, some of whom may not even be able to speak English properly, come to me and say, "They have had my son for five weeks and nobody will tell me why", what do Ministers suggest I tell them about a measure that has been brought in only for short-term political convenience?

I did not come into politics to vote for such a stratagem, and despite all the current pressures on the party I will not vote for it. The case has not been made up until now and it has not been made in this debate. Of course the public are in favour of the proposal. Of course the people whose rights some of us are trying to defend are unpopular and suspect. But if we as a Parliament cannot stand up on this issue, and if people from our different ethnic communities cannot come here and genuinely reflect their fears and concerns, what is Parliament for?"

This speech was awarded 'Speech of the Year' by The Spectator. The Human Rights Awards 2008 also gave this speech a special judges mention.



CAROLINE NOKES

Caroline Nokes is chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Body image, which focuses on addressing the linkage between negative body image, psychological problems and eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa. She was first elected in 2010 for Romsey and Southampton North. She began campaigning on this issue in the 2010 Parliament, securing a debate in Westminster Hall on 14 February 2013:

“As chair of the all-party group on body image, I have been privileged to work with a number of leading charities supporting those suffering from eating disorders and their families. I pay particular tribute, during eating disorders awareness week, to Beat; many of its members are in the Public Gallery. I also pay tribute to Anorexia and Bulimia Care and the Succeed Foundation. I vividly recall hearing the moving stories of ABC members at a reception hosted by my hon. Friend the Member for Wells a few months ago. These charities all do fantastic work with sufferers and their families, and to ensure that the wider community—Members of Parliament, the medical profession, schools, colleges and universities—have a better understanding of the signs of eating disorders, and how to help those in the grip of such a disorder and those who may be at risk. They also work with the media to ensure that they understand the importance of the portrayal of responsible images on advertising and in editorials.”

Ms Nokes has been subject to an online abuse campaign on Twitter, and has been awarded damages as a result. Many women MPs find themselves the target of often savage criticism, but are determined to continue campaigning for change.

BARONESS HELIC

Arminka Helic fled her home country, the then war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 1992. She went on to study International History at the London School of Economics, became a Special Adviser to then foreign secretary, William Hague, and helped launch the UK’s Global Sexual Violence Initiative 2012 with the foreign secretary and Angelina Pitt Jolie. In September 2014 she was created a life peer and gave her maiden speech in May 2015—a moving and personal speech based on her own experiences in Bosnia-Herzegovina:

“I gather that it is customary in a maiden speech to say something about myself: to explain how a one-time Bosnian refugee from a town so small that you can hardly find it on a map, who was born in communist Yugoslavia and raised on a diet of brotherhood and unity, [...] has now been afforded the greatest of honours—to serve this country, in her own small way.

[...]

That I stand here is testament to this country—to its tradition of fairness, tolerance, decency and openness. Britain allowed me in, gave me refuge and opportunity, and never once put a wall in front of me.

[...]

My experience has taught me that every one of us who has come to this country and has been given the privilege of calling it our own has responsibilities: to defend it, to respect its laws, to cherish its democracy and to better it when we can.



Being a citizen of the United Kingdom means not just carrying a passport but sharing an obligation to live by the rules and work for the common good.

Looking around the world today, there is much to celebrate. [...] Yet in this same world there [...] are 54 million refugees and stateless people who have only their bare lives and international handouts to hold on to. There are conflicts in which humanitarian law has been replaced by the massacring of civilians and the rape of women, men and children, where nothing is sacred any longer, and where the siege of cities, the starvation of civilians and the flattening of villages and towns have become the new norm. Sadly, there is a lack of collective leadership. Where previously we had grand coalitions and Marshall plans, there are ad hoc arrangements and donor conferences.

[...]

We are told too often that Britain has lost its ambition and influence internationally, but we have the skills and experience needed. [...] We must remain a strong and determined country that has a spine of steel to defend itself as well as international peace and security, and the patience to see through what we have begun.

[...]

I conclude with a final thought. Our strength rests also on our moral authority—on policies that serve our nation's interests through the wider good. [...] I urge the Government [...] to pursue and further expand the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative. It angers and saddens me that 20 years after tens of thousands of women endured hell in rape camps in

Bosnia, the world is tolerating the rampant abuse and enslavement of women and girls in Iraq and Syria, and that rape and torture are becoming the preferred tools of militias and terrorist groups across the world—with impunity.

When I entered this Chamber on 24 November, I fell under its spell. It represents centuries of a country striving to better itself and the world. I am honoured to be here and I look forward to playing my full part.”

GLOSSARY

Act

An Act of Parliament is a new law or a change to the law that has been approved by both Houses of Parliament and has received Royal Assent.

All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal, cross-party groups formed by MPs and Peers who share a common interest in a subject.

Alternative Vote

Alternative Vote is a type of electoral system. Like other forms of proportional representation it is designed to achieve a result that reflects the way votes have been cast.

Backbencher

A backbencher is an MP or member of the Lords who is not a government minister or opposition spokesperson. They are so called because, in the Chamber, they sit in the rows of benches behind their parties' spokespeople who are known as frontbenchers.

Bar of the House

The Bar of the House marks the boundary of the Chamber beyond which guests and visitors may not pass when either House is at work.

Bill

A Bill is a proposal for a new law, or a proposal to change an existing law that has been presented to Parliament.

Cabinet Minister

The Cabinet is the team of 20 or so most senior ministers in the Government who are chosen by the Prime Minister to lead on specific policy areas such as Health, Transport, Foreign Affairs or Defence.

Chamber

The Chamber is where the main business of the day takes place in each House.

Constituencies (Constituents)

A constituency is the specific geographical area that is represented by each MP in the House of Commons. People who live in an MP's constituency are known as their constituents.

Confidence Motion

A motion of no confidence is a way of testing whether a Government still has the support of a majority of MPs in the House of Commons. A Government cannot continue in office if it does not have the confidence of the House.

Debate

A debate is a formal discussion of a specific proposal (motion) in the House of Commons or House of Lords. Members take it in turns to speak and there are rules and conventions that are followed.

Division

A division is a vote by members of the Commons or the Lords where the names of those voting for and against are recorded and counted. Members literally 'divide' by filing through one of two lobbies

to the left and right of the Chamber in order to cast their vote.

Franchise

The right to vote in parliamentary elections.

Hereditary Peer

A person who has inherited their title and, with it, the right to a seat in the House of Lords. In 1922 the House of Lords had wholly hereditary membership. Today, 92 hereditary peers retain their seat in the Lords.

Leader of the Opposition

The Leader of the Opposition is the title given to the leader of the largest political party in the House of Commons that is not in government. This party is known as the Official Opposition.

Life Peer

A life peer is a member of the House of Lords who has been appointed for life under the terms of the Life Peerages Act 1958. Unlike hereditary peers, life peers do not pass their title on to their children.

Lord Speaker

The Lord Speaker presides at sittings in the House of Lords and represents the House externally. The post of Lord Speaker was created under the Constitutional Reform Act 2005, prior to which the Lord Chancellor presided over Lords debates.

Maiden Speech

A maiden speech is the first speech made in the

Chamber by a new member of the House of Commons or the House of Lords.

Mandate

The authority to govern (or to pursue a particular policy) based on demonstrable popular support, usually at an election or referendum.

Majority

A majority is a number that is more than half of the total.

Minority Government

A minority government may be formed where no one party in the Commons has an overall majority of MPs. In order to govern, a minority government must rely on the support of other parties' MPs to pass its legislation.

Parliamentarians

Parliamentarians are people who are (or who have been) members of the House of Commons or the House of Lords.

Petitions

A petition is a formal written request sent to Parliament by members of the public calling for some action by the Government.

Private Members' Bills

Private Members' (or Backbench) Bills are introduced by individual MPs or members of the Lords, rather than by the Government.

Questions

A Parliamentary Question is a question put formally to a government minister about a matter they are responsible for by an MP or Peer. They may be asked orally, during ministerial question time in either Chamber, or in writing. They are used to seek information or to press for action from the Government.

Second Reading

The Second Reading is normally the first opportunity for a Bill to be debated in either House and is the stage where the overall principles of the Bill are considered. If the Bill passes Second Reading it moves on to its Committee Stage.

Select Committee

A select committee is a small group of MPs or members of the Lords that have been chosen to investigate a specific issue in detail or to perform a specific scrutiny role on behalf of the House. They may call in officials and experts for questioning and can demand information from the government. Select committees publish their findings in a report and the government is expected to respond to any recommendations that are made.

Shadow Secretary of State

A Shadow Secretary of State is one of a team chosen by the Leader of the Opposition to mirror the Cabinet in Government and act as lead spokespeople on specific policy areas.

Special Advisor

A Special Advisor is a person appointed to assist a government minister with policy decisions on issues in which they are considered to have particular experience or expertise.

State Opening of Parliament

The State Opening of Parliament marks the formal start of the parliamentary year.

Suffrage

The right to vote in parliamentary elections.

Ten Minute Rule Bill

The ten minute rule allows a backbench MP to make their case for a new Bill in a speech lasting up to ten minutes. An opposing speech may be made before the House decides whether the Bill should be introduced.

Woolsack

The Woolsack is the seat of the Lord Speaker in the House of Lords.

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VOTE100

Interested in finding out more?

Women in Parliament workshops are available from the UK Parliament's Community Outreach and Engagement Service. Email outreach@parliament.uk for details.

Vote 100 is Parliament's project to celebrate the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918 in 2018. Find out more at www.parliament.uk/vote100