



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

‘SUFFRAGETTES IN TROUSERS’

The men who supported women’s
suffrage in Parliament

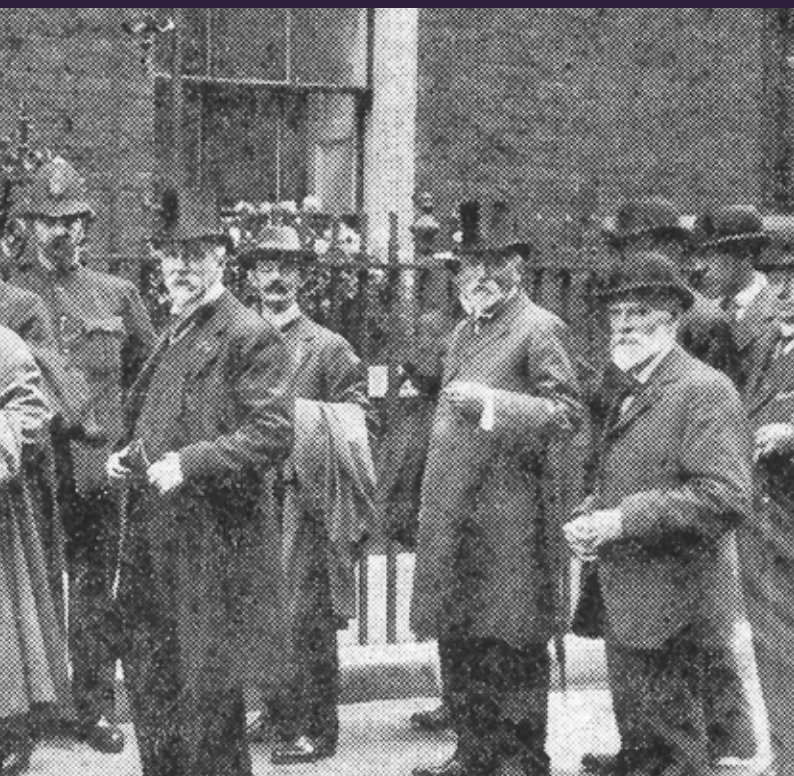
1860–1930



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**NORTHERN MEN'S FEDERATION
DEPUTATION IN DOWNING
STREET, JULY 1913**

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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN PARLIAMENT 1860–1900

The Reform Acts of 1832, 1867 and 1884 led to greater numbers of men voters, and added momentum to appeals to Parliament to similarly enfranchise women.

A growing number of MPs and Peers backed the calls for women's suffrage made by John Stuart Mill, Jacob Bright and others in the 1860s and 1870s. Thirteen Bills proposing legislation on the issue were discussed between 1867 and 1889. In 1888, 169 MPs signed a statement urging the Government to provide time to discuss a women's suffrage Bill. Peter McLagan, MP for Linlithgowshire 1865-1893 was a signatory, unlike the member for nearby East Fife, Herbert Asquith.



PETER MCLAGAN

Parliamentary Archives, PHO/11/1/38/1

MILITANCY AND CONCILIATION 1900–1912

Women's suffrage advocates were encouraged in 1906 by the return to government of the Liberal Party. However, when Prime Minister Henry Campbell Bannerman was replaced by the anti-suffragist Herbert Asquith in 1908, the prospect of reform diminished.

'The women's cause lost a weak friend and gained a determined enemy'

Elizabeth Robins, Actresses' Franchise League, 1908

Beyond Parliament, suffragette militancy had brought new momentum to the campaign. In 1907 a group of male supporters formed the Men's League for Women's Suffrage and some MPs along with the Earl of Lytton became members.

Between 1910 and 1912 an all-party Conciliation Committee, chaired by Lord Lytton sponsored a series of Bills aiming to secure a limited measure of women's suffrage. Each attempt ultimately failed. Some blamed the suffragettes, others held the Government equally culpable.



**VICTOR ALEXANDER GEORGE
ROBERT BULWER-LYTTON,
2ND EARL OF LYTTON, C.1911**

'SUFFRAGETTES IN TROUSERS'

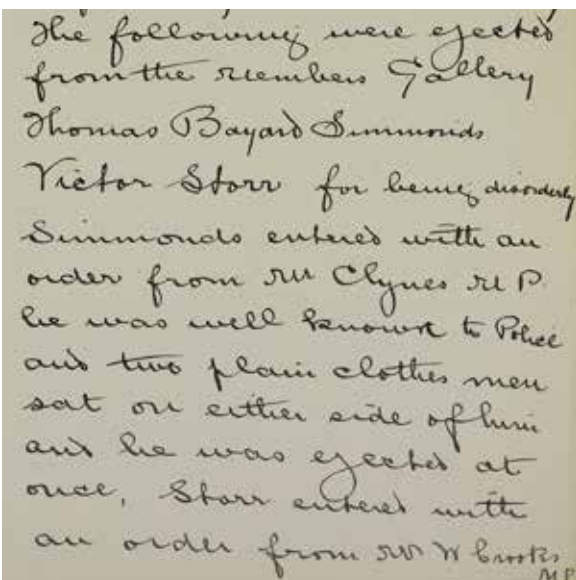
*'The petticoat no longer makes the Suffrage.
We are suffragettes – suffragettes in trousers'.*

*Israel Zangwill, member of the Men's League
for Women's Suffrage, 1907*

Male supporters contributed to the events in Parliament on 28 October 1908 that became known as the 'Grille Protest'. Victor Storr and Thomas Bayard Simmonds using admission orders signed by MPs John Clynes and Will Crooks managed to disturb the sitting House from the Public Gallery. Coordinated protests by women ensued in the Ladies Gallery and St Stephen's Hall, much to the Speaker's displeasure.

Time and again, male supporters demonstrated their commitment to women's suffrage with similar protests in and around Parliament.

The 'suffragettes in trousers' encountered ridicule and slurs on their 'manliness'. They risked their reputations and sometimes their liberty.



The following were ejected
from the members Gallery
Thomas Bayard Simmonds
Victor Storr for being disorderly
Simmonds entered with an
order from Mr Clynes M.P.
he was well known to Police
and two plain clothes men
sat on either side of him
and he was ejected at
once. Storr entered with
an order from Mr W Crooks
M.P.

**POLICE REPORT ON A PLANNED
DEMONSTRATION BY THE MEN'S
LEAGUE IN PARLIAMENT IN APRIL 1914**

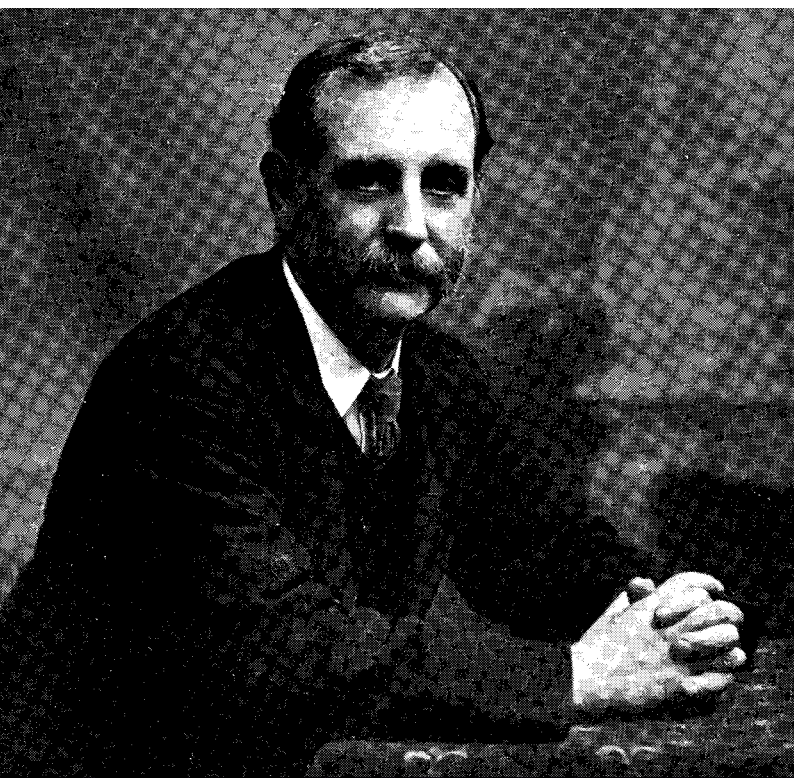
Parliamentary Archives, HC/SA/SJ/10/12/6

GEORGE LANSBURY: A SUFFRAGIST BY-ELECTION

George Lansbury (1859–1940) was a lifelong socialist and supporter of women's rights. He became an MP in 1910 and swiftly affirmed his support for women's suffrage and militancy.

In November 1912, frustrated by the Labour Party's position on the issue, Lansbury resigned his seat in order to seek re-election as a suffragist candidate. The women's suffrage movement enthusiastically supported him, unlike the Labour Party. The result was a narrow victory for the Unionists.

Lansbury continued to campaign for women's suffrage. In April 1913 he was arrested and imprisoned. His decision to refuse food led to his swift release, following vehement complaint from MPs.



**GEORGE LANSBURY, PICTURED BEFORE
THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

Parliamentary Art Collection, Reference Collection

FREDERICK PETHICK LAWRENCE:

From Rebel to Parliamentarian

Frederick Pethick Lawrence (1871-1961) had many identities in his lifetime: rebel – feminist – pacifist – socialist – Parliamentarian. Born Frederick Lawrence he combined his surname with his wife, Emmeline Lawrence in 1901. Both went on to play a prominent role in the militant suffragette movement.

The Government's treatment of Frederick Pethick Lawrence was as harsh as that meted out to suffragette women. Like Emmeline, he was imprisoned and forcibly fed and in addition he also faced bankruptcy.

In 1923 Frederick entered the Commons and later served in the Treasury before moving to the Lords in 1945. He remained committed to feminist causes, notably equal pay.



**EMMELINE AND FREDERICK
PETHICK LAWRENCE**

Parliamentary Archives, ST/286/3

‘MEN FROM THE NORTH’

The Northern Men’s Federation
for Women’s Suffrage, 1913–1918

*We’ve come from the North,
and the heather’s on fire,*

To fight for the women – our only desire;

*At last we’ve been roused thro’
the treachery shown*

By knaves at Westminster – the knaves we disown!

*Extract from verse by John Wilson McLaren,
member of the Northern Men’s Federation, 1913*

In July 1913 a group of bailies and councillors from Glasgow and Edinburgh travelled to London as part of a Northern Men’s Federation for Women’s Suffrage deputation to the Prime Minister. Herbert Asquith’s refusal to meet them was taken as an insult to Scotsmen and to Scotland.

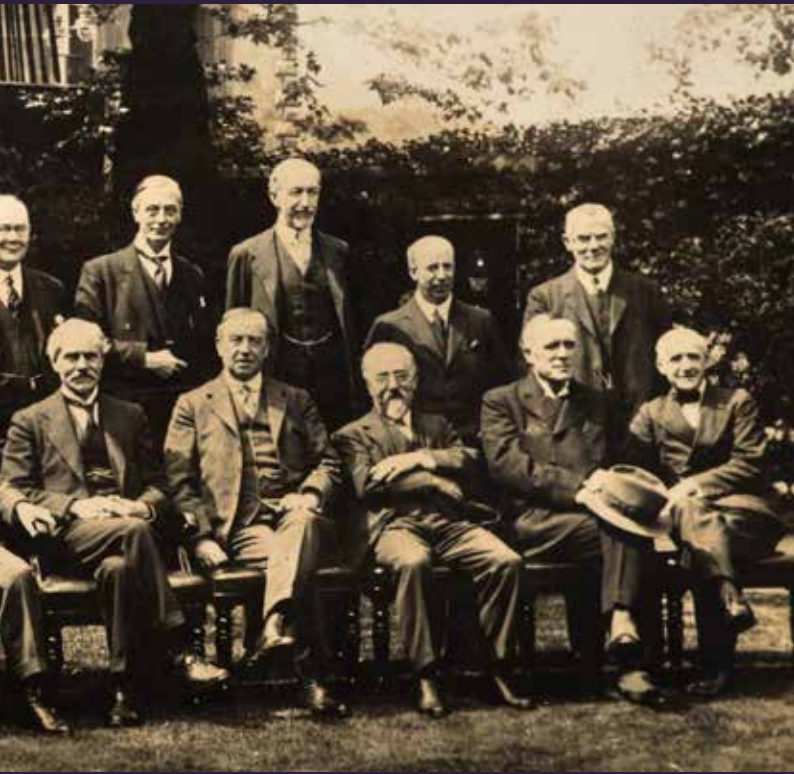
William Graham (1887–1932), a supporter of the Northern Men’s Federation, was later elected to the House of Commons in December 1918. Along with other MPs who had actively supported votes for women, he served in the Labour Cabinet of 1929. For these men and others like them, their commitment to women’s enfranchisement involved disdain, insult and sometimes worse, and yet ultimately they were all embraced as Parliamentarians.



THE LABOUR CABINET, 1929

Parliamentary Archives ST/294/3





THE LABOUR CABINET, 1929

Parliamentary Archives ST/294/3

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The Speaker's Art Fund



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Vote 100 Exhibition Team

Vote 100 is Parliament's project to celebrate the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which gave all men and some women the vote for the first time, in 1918.

Cover image: Frederick William Pethick Lawrence, 1st Baron Pethick-Lawrence (1871-1961), by Henry Collier, 1933.

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