

THE VOTE  
APRIL 6, 1917.  
ONE PENNY.

WHERE WE STAND—Special Political Number

# THE VOTE

THE ORGAN OF THE WOMEN'S FREEDOM LEAGUE

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FRIDAY, APRIL 6, 1917

Edited by C. DESPARD.

**OBJECT:** To secure for Women the Parliamentary vote as it is or may be granted to men; to use the power thus obtained to establish equality of rights and opportunities between the sexes and to promote the social and industrial well-being of the community.

## PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

WHERE WE STAND. THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT.

WOMEN'S FREEDOM LEAGUE'S LETTER TO MR. ASQUITH.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE DEPUTATION TO THE PRIME MINISTER.

BEHIND THE GRILLE - - - - - Anne E. Corner.

THE NEW ERA - - - - - C. Despard.

ELECTORAL REFORM: HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATE (MARCH 28)

SOME PRESS COMMENTS. MONEY! MONEY! MONEY!

MONTGOMERY BOROUGH AND SOUTH COAST CAMPAIGNS.

## WHERE WE STAND.

### THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT WITH REGARD TO WOMAN SUFFRAGE AND THE FRANCHISE REFORM BILL.

In reply to the Woman Suffrage Deputation which he received at 10, Downing Street on Thursday afternoon, March 29, the Prime Minister amplified his statement in the House of Commons on the previous day with regard to the position of Woman Suffrage and the coming Franchise Reform Bill. Extracts from his speech are on another page; his own summing-up of his answers to the questions put to him was as follows:—

#### WOMAN SUFFRAGE MUST BE IN THE BILL.

The first question is: Are we going to proceed at once?

Instructions were given this morning for the preparation of the Bill; in fact, that was the first thing I did after receiving the mandate of the House of Commons.

The second question is: What will happen about Woman Suffrage? Will it be in the Bill?

It is bound to be in the Bill, because the Speaker has already ruled that you cannot move it in as an amendment, and therefore, unless you put it in the Bill, there will be no chance of voting upon it, and it is essential even from the drafting point of view that it shall be in because we cannot have a repetition of the disaster that happened before, and I say that after consultation with Mr. Speaker last night.

The third point is: What about Government Whips?

It is not yet determined what the arrangement will be about whipping, because we want the House of Commons to feel that it is not so much a Government Bill as a Bill agreed upon by the House itself through the agency of its presiding Member, the Speaker.

Answering a further question from Mrs. Fawcett as to whether the Women's Suffrage clause will be treated with regard to Whips just in the same way as the other parts of the Bill?

Mr. Lloyd George said: We have not considered the question of Whips at all, and therefore it would not be fair for me to give an answer to that at the present moment. Should any Member of the Government differ from his colleagues, that Member will be free to record his vote on this question. I am not aware of a single Member of the House of Commons who will desire to differ from his colleagues in that respect.



**THE VOTE.**

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**THE NEW ERA.**

Rapidly and with dramatic suddenness events are moving. Every day brings its surprises; and it may be—we dare to hope it—that soon in some unexpected and sudden way, by one of those lightning-strokes of destiny for which we are listening, the horror that is weighing upon our hearts will be lifted, and we shall find ourselves preparing not for war but for peace.

Last week we were acclaiming the Russian Revolution and its splendid programme. This week it is our joy to announce that a British House of Commons has taken the first practical step towards the establishment of a true democracy. By an overwhelming majority Mr. Asquith's resolution—"That legislation should promptly be introduced on the lines of the resolutions reported from the Speaker's Conference"—was passed; and the Prime Minister's answer to the deputation of Suffrage Societies and women-workers which was received by him at Downing Street left no room for doubt as to the intentions of the Government. A Bill following the lines laid down by the Speaker's Conference is already being drafted, and some form of Woman's Suffrage will be included.

There are several points in the debate which deserve special notice. We of the Women's Freedom League have never disguised our conviction that the admission of women, as women, to citizens' rights is part of a larger programme. Not for honour or dignity do we desire to take our place in the councils of the nation and to share the labours of those who control our destinies. It is the power and opportunity to serve in a wider and more permanent manner than we have been able to do in the past that we demand; and we are particularly glad to see that Mr. Asquith recognises this. Having spoken of the value of women's work in war time, he goes on to say: "But what I confess moves me still more in this matter is the problem of reconstruction when the war is over."

Entering into detail, he speaks of the new order which must necessarily arise, and the questions regarding "woman's labour and woman's functions and activities, upon which, in justice, her voice should be heard." That is well; but we would take an even wider range. We know—late events have shown this more clearly than ever—that man and

woman rise and fall together, and that there is no branch of human activity which does not require her thought and care.

We cannot help feeling a little amused by the reference made in this speech to the suggested age-limit. "I myself have always thought," says Mr. Asquith, "that when once you have resolved to ignore the differentia of sex it was difficult to introduce any other discrimination between the case of women and that of men." But why discrimination? That is where our difficulty comes in. It is quite possible that the time will come when Mr. Asquith himself will rise to this larger view. We, in the while rejoicing in the removal of sex-discrimination, hold to our first object: "Equal terms for man and woman."

The opposition was as feeble as were the numbers it represented. Mr. Salter, mover of the amendment, which was merely to throw back the whole question, did not oppose Woman's Suffrage. In fact, moderately, he approved of it. But—we wonder where and how he has been living—he is afraid of "an intense and bitter opposition." This would introduce controversy, engross the time and energy of the House and divert public attention from the big matter in hand, "winning the war."

Mr. Arnold Ward was much more outspoken. "There can be," says this well-trained person, "give-and-take upon registration, upon plural voting and upon redistribution. But there cannot be any give-and-take on the subject of Woman's Suffrage." On which we can only remark that Mr. Arnold Ward must keep his opinion. Were he convinced against his will he would remain of the same opinion still. We would remind him that personal opinions are not arguments.

Mr. Pollock, in support of the resolution, crushes one of the pleas put forward by the Opposition. Mr. Salter had alluded in one of his "purple passages" to the feelings of our soldiers should they see in the trenches "the horrid spectacle of members of this House talking about Woman's Suffrage, the franchise, and so on." Says Mr. Pollock—and some of use have had similar experiences—"A little time ago I had the opportunity of reading a letter from a soldier who wrote from Mesopotamia, and, so far from being satisfied with what was going on in this House, he said, 'As for Westminster, if only Robertson would march a battalion or two and shut the whole place up, he would have done a real service to the war and to the nation.' I believe that if we could explain to those who are fighting for us that, while they are fighting, we are engaged in giving them something which will be useful to them when they return home—we should earn their gratitude and not their obloquy."

That recalls to our mind the story told by a nurse in one of the splendidly managed women's units abroad. A young officer, convalescent after careful and skilled attendance, said to her: "You are all suffragists here. Well! If I had my way, the women should have eight votes to our one."

Mr. Clynes, as representing organised labour, said emphatically that women should enjoy the same citizen-rights as men. He scornfully flouted the idea that if we gave votes to all these millions of women there would be no difference of opinion on the great and varied questions with which they would have to concern themselves. History, experience, and the general working of politics show that women are no more likely to be agreed upon such questions than men. He regards this as a most opportune moment for extending to women the franchise rights that cannot be long delayed.

Purposely we have left the Prime Minister's speech to the last, and we are glad to be able to read it in the light of the answers he gave to us when we went to him on deputation. Like Mr. Asquith

he emphasised that which must follow the war—Reconstruction. What does that mean? Ably he gives his definition of the word. "The trade of this country, the industries of this country, the relations of capital and labour, the relations of one class of labour to another, questions of the conditions of life in this country, the health of the people, the housing of the people, the education of the people, the relations of this country to the whole Empire, and the relations of the Empire to the rest of the world. These are gigantic problems." He points out clearly the unfairness—nay, the impossibility—of dealing with these momentous issues in a Parliament elected on the present basis.

In the course of his plea for the inclusion of women in the new Reform Bill he gives some interesting reminiscences. When he was Minister of Munitions he had to set women and men to some very dangerous work. A new element had to be introduced into the manufacture of shells. There were several fatal accidents. These were amongst the women workers; but there was no panic. They never

finched. "We had some difficulty for two or three days afterwards with some of the men in getting them to work at night, but we had never any difficulty with regard to the women. Why? They said, 'This is our only chance of sharing the dangers with our brothers now in France.' And they helped to save the situation at a very critical time.

"When," he proceeds, "we come to recast the whole of our industrial system, are we going to fling them out without giving them a voice in determining the conditions? All I can say is, it is an outrage, it is ungrateful, unjust, inequitable. I do not believe the people of this country will do it."

Nor do we. But we go farther. We cannot, and will not, believe that the sex-discrimination in politics, which is the last halting-place of the timid, can survive the shock of change. Given this first step and, in a comparatively short period of time, man and woman will stand together true, equal, alert in every nerve for the highest and most arduous service to the race.

C. DESPARD.

**ELECTORAL REFORM DEBATE.**

**House of Commons, March 28, 1917.**

Mr. Asquith received a great ovation on rising to move the following resolution: "That this House records its thanks to Mr. Speaker for his services in presiding over the Electoral Reform Conference, and is of opinion that legislation should promptly be introduced on the lines of the resolutions reported from the Conference." After setting forth the Government's difficulties in dealing with the old register and relating the events which led to the summoning of a representative conference of members of both Houses of Parliament, presided over by the Speaker, Mr. Asquith expressed warm appreciation of Mr. Lowther's success in "a very arduous undertaking," and briefly reviewed its important results. To have achieved unanimity in thirty-four out of thirty-seven resolutions on thorny problems which have been "the subject of embittered controversy during the life-time of a generation," was, he said, "one of the most remarkable concordats in our political history."

**Mr. Asquith's Confession of Faith as a Suffragist.**

I come now, he said, to one question upon which they report they were divided, and that their recommendation represents the opinion of the majority. The majority decided first that some measure of woman suffrage should be adopted, and next, translating that into concrete fact, that any woman who possesses herself or is the wife of a man who possesses the proposed new Local Government qualification, that is to say, six months' occupation as owner or tenant of land or premises, and has attained a specified age, say, thirty, or perhaps thirty-five, shall have the Parliamentary franchise. Here we are on much more delicate ground.

**Greek and Briton.**

The House will not be unprepared to hear that I myself, and I believe many others, no longer regard this question from the standpoint which we occupied before the war. (Cheers.) During the whole of my political life I have opposed the various schemes which have been from time to time presented to Parliament for giving the Parliamentary vote, whether piecemeal or wholesale, to women. It is only right to say I have as consistently advocated, and done my best to promote, the opening out to women of other spheres of activity which have been in the past confined exclusively to men. Why, and in what sense, have I changed my view? There was in ancient Greece a poet named Stesichorus, who was ill-advised enough in a fit of perverted inspiration to compose a lampoon upon the character and conduct of Helen, the wife of Menelaus. She was a lady who had the advantage of being connected by relationship with a god. (Laughter.) The result was that the poet was smitten with blindness. Thereupon, I think, after consulting the oracle, he conceived the happy idea of writing some lines, which are preserved by Plato, and in which he developed the novel theory that it was not Helen but a phantom who had simulated her form who had fascinated Paris of Troy, which led to all the subsequent troubles. Thereupon, by way of

reward the poet had his sight restored. (Laughter.) I am not going to follow the devious and not very candid procedure of the poet. (Laughter.) Some of my friends may think, like him, my eyes, which for years in this matter have been clouded by fallacies, sealed by illusions, have at last been opened to the truth. (Laughter.) In point of fact, as far as I am concerned, there has been no occasion for the intervention of any supernatural agency. I am not in the least ashamed—indeed, I am glad—to have had the opportunity of disclosing the process which has operated upon my mind.

**Women's Indispensable War Service.**

My opposition to woman suffrage has always been based, and based solely, upon considerations of public expediency. Some years ago I happened to use the expression: "Let the women work out their own salvation." They have worked it out during this war. (Cheers.) How could we have carried on the war without them? Short of actually bearing arms in the field, there is hardly a service which has contributed, or is contributing, to the maintenance of our cause in which women have not been at least as active and as efficient as men. (Cheers.) Wherever we turn we see them doing work with success and without any detriment to the prerogatives of their sex which three years ago would have been regarded as falling exclusively within the province of men. What, I confess, moves me still more than sentiment in this matter is the probable reconstruction after the war is over.

**Neither Just nor Expedient to Withhold Votes from Women.**

The questions which will then necessarily arise in regard to women's labour and women's functions and activities in the new order of things—for do not doubt that the old order will be changed—(hear, hear)—are questions in regard to which I for my part feel it impossible, consistently with either justice or expediency, to withhold from women the power and the right of making their voice directly heard. (Cheers.) And let me add, since the war began, now nearly three years ago, we have had no recurrence of that detestable campaign which disfigured the annals of political agitation in this country—(hear, hear)—and no one can now contend that we are yielding to violence what we refused to concede to argument. (Cheers.) I am therefore prepared to acquiesce in the general proposition of the majority of the Conference that some measure of woman suffrage should be conferred. In regard to the form which the recommendation takes, I understand it to be prompted partly by a desire to prevent a preponderance of female as compared with male voters, and partly by a feeling that a discrimination in regard to age is fairer than setting up any class or business qualification. (Hear, hear.) I say nothing on the delicate point of the age or ages which are suggested. A very able and energetic lady—a strong advocate of the cause—came to see me the other day and made the counter suggestion that it was the younger women who most needed enfranchisement, and that if age was to come into the matter at all it should rather be at the other end of the scale. (Laughter.) I do not pronounce any judgment as between those two views. I myself have always thought, and I have often said in this House, that once you have resolved to ignore the difference of sex it is difficult to use any other discrimination than that used in the case of men. (Hear, hear.) That is



FRIDAY,  
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# THE VOTE

ONE  
PENNY  
WEEKLY.

Organ of the Women's Freedom League.

## South Coast Campaigns. After the West the South!!!

To help our Southern branches in their brave struggles to uphold the suffrage banner in a time of special difficulty. Miss Munro and Miss Alix Clark are proceeding this week to Bournemouth, and thence to Portsmouth and Southampton. Drawing-room, public and open-air meetings will be held. Miss Alix Clark will call upon all members and sympathisers immediately on arriving in each branch, so please all rally round the flag of "Votes for Women" and make the South-coast campaign even more successful than that held in Wales.

## IMPORTANT.

In view of the pressure on our space of the House of Commons debate on March 28 and of the deputation to the Prime Minister on March 29, also of the earlier press day owing to the Easter holidays, we are obliged to hold over till next week Branch notes and other usual features.—Ed.

## EASTER HOLIDAYS.—SPECIAL NOTICE.

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