

# The War Paper for Women

# VOTES FOR WOMEN

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE UNITED SUFFRAGISTS

VOL. VIII. (Third Series), No. 365.

FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 1915.

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## BUILDING AGAINST WAR



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(From a message sent by Mr. H. W. Massingham to a mass meeting, held by the United Suffragists in Kingsway Hall, London, on February 25, 1915)



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FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 1915.

## THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

Every week confutes the stagem-old argument of Anti-Suffragists that women must not be enfranchised because international questions of peace and war do not concern them. If they looked at Belgium and a large part of France, to say nothing of devastated Poland, even Anti-Suffragists could hardly be so blind as to assert that the question of peace or war does not concern women into whose country war has actually entered. But they need not look abroad. Let them consider only the most outstanding effects of the present war upon women at home. Even our Anti-Suffragist Government agrees that the upset of ordinary industries has cast the heaviest burden upon women. It is chiefly women who have been thrown out of work by the war or compelled to accept a great reduction of wages. It is chiefly women who have suffered under the alterations in our established laws. It is women upon whom special regulations have been laid on the wildly imaginary charge of their special tendency to drink. It is women whose liberty has been most encroached upon by the courts-martial, and who have been most arbitrarily deprived of such right to fair and open trial as all English people are supposed to possess. It is women who have been subjected by catalogue to the supervision of the police, and are still subjected to it so far as the Government order goes. It is upon women that the anxiety and misery of rising prices inevitably fall. It is they who have to discover how to keep a family in food and fuel when the purchasing value of £1 has fallen to 15s., or even to 14s. Whether or not any Government could find means of alleviation while the Great Powers combined are expending about £10,000,000 a day in destroying life and the necessaries of livelihood is not now the question. All we say is, that the enfranchisement of women would supply a very powerful stimulus to our Government in finding some means; and if none can be found, it is the women who suffer most. And now there is the question of child-labour, debated last Thursday in the House of Commons.

It is no new question, but war has brought it forward in an aggravated form, and even Anti-Suffragists will admit that it pre-eminently concerns women. Already, even in peace time, according to the statistics of the Board of Education, a quarter of a million children of school age work outside the school hours, sometimes for as much as forty hours a week; and another quarter of a million, though of school age, escape school either wholly or in part. Half a million boys and girls under fourteen are, therefore, put to work even in peace time. The present proposal is to allow the local educa-

tional authorities to extend this system of child-labour almost indefinitely during war. The demand comes chiefly from agricultural districts, and is strongest in counties where farmers pay the lowest wages and where the standard of the labourer's way of life is worst. The Nottingham Education Committee has already yielded to the demand on the plea that farm work is a "pleasurable occupation." On the day before the Parliamentary debate the National Farmers' Union met in London to press the demand. They were encouraged by the advice of Sir Luke White, M.P., who had urged them "to take the boys and chance it." They were still more encouraged by the promise of our Anti-Suffragist Prime Minister, who had said last August that the Board of Education would express no disapproval if the local authorities relaxed the standing rules regarding child labour. In the House of Commons Mr. Henry Chaplin supported their claim as a matter of course, for he always casts a fond look back to the times when the labourer was a serf bound to the soil; and the word education appeared from his speech to suggest nothing to him beyond the weary old taunt of playing the piano. But it was a shock to find Mr. Prothero urging that, under certain conditions, child labour might be encouraged "without serious damage to the children themselves." Mr. Prothero is a Member for Oxford University, and one might have expected him to advocate an education different from a scarecrow's. Would he propose sending out the Oxford undergraduates to labour in the fields? That would not be nearly so bad as sending out the children of the poor at twelve years old. Undergraduates might work without serious damage to themselves. They might learn a good deal from such labour. Advocates of this new child labour have held Germany up as an example to us. They say that when war broke out German boys helped to gather the harvest. Yes, but it was well-fed and well-educated University students and boys from the higher classes of secondary schools who helped. Consider the difference between such a boy at eighteen and the child of the English labourer at twelve. For once we agree with Mr. Pease, President of the Board of Education, Anti-Suffragist though he is. In the course of the debate, he said definitely: "Child labour retards physical development, is prejudicial to the morals of the child, is bad educationally, and cannot be justified."

We agree, and it is something to find the Government going back upon the sanction half-promised by Mr. Asquith when the proposal for promoting child labour first came up. "The Government," said Mr. Pease, "absolutely declines to introduce legislation of a retrograde character by allowing the exploitation of boy labour." We note the word "boy" as characteristic of a Government that habitually ignores the claims of one-half of the population. But we can for once applaud the Government's resolve. They have put it in practice by refusing the application of the Darlaston nut and bolt manufacturers to allow child labour at their works. When, however, Mr. Pease says that before the war he had hoped to introduce legislation extending the school age and abolishing "half-time," we would remind him that before the war last year an excellent Bill—"The Children (Employment and School Attendance) Bill"—was introduced with these very objects; that, for very shame, it was allowed to proceed to the report stage last June; that only five hours were then allotted for its debate; and that then the Government, of which Mr. Pease was the member most concerned, allowed it to be talked out, chiefly owing to the opposition of interested Lancashire representatives, who objected to the abolition of "half-time." Let us give Mr. Pease all credit for good intentions; yet here he yielded against his better judgment to the pressure of interested male electors and representatives. If the women of the country had been consulted, if the great majority of them had supported his good intentions for abolishing child labour, and if his Party had been compelled to reckon with their votes, does he suppose that he or the Government would have allowed such a Bill to collapse?

# WAKE UP, PARLIAMENT!

Passages from a Speech made by **Mr. Israel Zangwill** at the **Kingsway Hall, February 25, 1915.**

I confess I feel somewhat embarrassed at having to raise the question of votes for women at this juncture. Instead of condoling with women upon their lack of votes, I feel more like congratulating them upon it. For upon us who have votes—be we English or German, French or Austrian—lies at least some part of the responsibility for the most terrible war in history, the gigantic misery and waste of which not even all the heroism and self-sacrifice it has called forth can redeem, nor all the splendours and profits of victory wipe out. It is with the consent and connivance of us men that millions of educated Europeans are at this moment burrowing underground, and that the era which prated of the Superman has produced the Super-Rabbit. It is with our consent and connivance that colossal sums which might have renewed the whole social fabric of Europe are squandered at an appalling speed in shells and bombs, which in their turn destroy yet more of the slowly-gathered products of labour. It is with our consent and connivance that the noblest and strongest of our sex are being eliminated or mutilated, and that instead of the survival, we have the funeral of the fittest. It is with our consent and connivance that half the human race is at war and the other half caught in the currents of ruin, while the wail of broken bodies goes up from three continents.

I do not say that England could easily have avoided going into this business. All I desire to point out is that we have now before us the results of the male direction of the planet. It is open to argument whether women, or women with men, would have done better; it is beyond question that they could not possibly have done worse. And since what cannot possibly be done worse stands a very large chance of being done better, common sense combines with every dictate of reason and justice to demand that in the business of running the State women should now have an equal hand.

### Foreign Policy and the Home

And though from one point of view their freedom from our blood-guilt is enviable, it is not fair either to them or to us that they should have no share in the responsibility for the Titanic tragedy which they are now asked to endure, alleviate, and pay for. Granted even that woman's place is the home, the waves of war do not draw back at her doorstep. Foreign policy stands in no sharp separation from domestic economy. Bombs and shells do not avoid the home because it is woman's place. Precisely upon the home beat the questions of food prices and coal prices, child labour and war pensions. And all these questions, like the workings of military law upon her sex, find woman without even the protection of the vote. But to-day even for the rabidest Anti-Suffragist the home is not woman's exclusive place—she is indispensable in the firing zone, in the khaki factories, in the hospitals; and England, which so bitterly opposed her entrance into the medical schools, is now thanking God that so many female doctors are available, and is crying for more. Not a few eminent men have gone out to America to champion the cause of the Allies and of British freedom. I know none who has done it more vigorously or effectively than **Christabel Pankhurst**, who said in New York: "You would not have thought much of us Suffragettes, of our intelligence, our patriotism, our love of freedom, if we had let militarism use us in this task of breaking down the world's stronghold of liberty—use us to help destroy the mother of Parliaments." One would have thought that if only in graceful acknowledgment the mother of Parliaments would now remember the daughters of England. Are they, who have so nobly and uncomplainingly taken their place in every department of the national life in order to help wage this war

which was thrust upon them, to have no voice in the peace settlement either?

### Short "Commons"

The resolution I have to move asks for Parliament to pass Women's Suffrage, but there is practically no Parliament in which to pass it. The papers exultingly tell us that Germany is on short commons. But it is England which is on short Commons. There are at Westminster no bells and no Bills, no divisions and no debates, or none that are not talked out; there are numerous by-elections, but no ballots. On such short Commons are we that two hundred M.P.'s have gone to the front. All honour to them; but the front is no place for a Member of Parliament. The place of a Member of Parliament is in Westminster—it is what we pay him for—and if he cannot be in Westminster he must resign. Or, at least, he must give place to a *locum tenens*, the constituency agreeing to keep his place open for him. As a result of this slackness of the People's House we have witnessed the amazing spectacle of the House of Lords meeting in its absence to pick up the fragments into which the Commons had torn Magna Carta. It would not surprise me now to see the Lords forcing Female Suffrage upon a kicking Radical Cabinet. But whether forced by the Lords or forced by the ladies, forced it must be. The notion that this is a dead season in politics, that two hundred members may go off to the war, and that those who do not serve their country in the trenches ought to neglect it on the benches is a notion that cannot bear a moment's criticism.

### "Not Patriotism, but Paralysis"

I quite agree, of course, that in a time of national danger all Parties should stand together. But they should stand together only against the external danger, not against the internal progress of their own country. I admit, too, that on the heads of the Ministers lie terrific burdens and terrific responsibilities. To divert at such a moment a single foot-pound of energy from the struggle against Germany would be almost treason. But for those who cannot bring energy to bear upon the struggle, to be overwhelmed by the burden of other people's activities, is not patriotism, but paralysis. The idea that now we should eat, breathe, sleep nothing but war would be intelligible if, instead of being a great nation, we were a nomadic tribe of scalp-hunters, or even if the war were to be a mere brief interruption of our civilised routine, a spasm of intensity, an affair of three months. But, according to Lord Kitchener, it is to last three years—and even then there is no telling. Are we during this indefinite interval to cease to exist as a civilisation? Surely this is no necessary consequence of the state of war. In still darker ages war was a permanent condition of life. Yet the great international universities taught, the great cathedrals rose, the great tapestries were spun, and the great pictures painted. Even with us "Business as usual" is the motto everywhere—even with our brave merchantmen—everywhere, except in the House of Commons, where, as in a sacred hush, men shut their eyes and open their ears to receive the ukases of the Cabinet. But let me tell the Members that England expects the House to do its duty. Even the Stock Exchange could not be kept permanently closed, nor can we afford to spike our legislative machine at the very moment when it could be most productive.

### Example Better than Artillery

But I suppose, to our panic-stricken Parliament, the mere suggestion that it should perform the functions for which we pay it will seem heretical. And to the world at large our resolution that the House should now proceed to give votes to women will seem positively pro-German. On the contrary, it is *not* giving

votes to women that is pro-German. One would have thought that in view of our perpetual preaching against the German doctrine that Might is Right, we would jump at the opportunity to enfranchise the weaker sex, and to build the fabric of State not on brute force, but on reason and justice. Our war against the Germans, we say, is to prove that this principle of theirs is wrong. How much more logical to prove it to them by our example than by our artillery! And this is a war, we say, on behalf of oppressed nationalities and populations, a war for human freedom. Are the rights of Englishwomen less than the rights of semi-savage Balkan males?

It has been urged that women are just as martial as men, that when Carlyle said the population of England was thirty millions, mostly fools, this concept of the State did for once not forget its female half, and that, therefore, the duplication of the vote would only duplicate the number of enfranchised fools. The answer is that it may duplicate the fools and fire-eaters, but it will duplicate also the number of brave and wise spirits with the status and prestige of voters. And in politics, despite the apparent counting of heads, it is the minority that tells in the long run, the minority that cares and labours and sacrifices. This intensive minority it is that stands to gain from Women's Suffrage. The male fighters for justice and freedom will find their numbers doubled and their courage quadrupled.

### Mr. Asquith Excused from Attendance

In demanding that the Government take advantage of the present party truce to carry into law a non-party measure for women's enfranchisement, neither you nor I have the faintest intention or desire to worry or embarrass the Government. On the contrary, we would gladly excuse Mr. Asquith from attendance. Six hundred able-bodied men—or even four hundred—are quite competent to do the job without the assistance of a single Minister or bureaucrat. Has it not frequently been admitted that they are—the majority of our M.P.'s—in favour of Women's Suffrage if only "militancy" would cease? Well, "militancy" has ceased. It has been replaced by male militancy, militancy in the heavens above and in the earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth, militancy of so appalling a sweep and character that even Lord Curzon and Mrs. Humphrey Ward must look back with a sigh to the good old days of defaced golf greens and incinerated villas. And not only has female militancy ceased, it has been replaced, as we have seen, by female service—service so devoted, so multifarious, so self-sacrificing, and so heroic as to make any further denial of equal footing as futile as it would be ungrateful. Even that arch-priest of Anti-Suffrage, the Kaiser, breaking through all precedent, has conferred the Iron Cross for bravery on some forty female nurses. Everywhere, you see, the distinction between the sexes is being reduced to its proper sphere—which is, with few exceptions, the sphere of privacy. Sex's place is the home.

There is nothing so near the skin as war-paint. Victory or defeat may equally bring us a wave of militarism, of conscription, of further reduction of liberty. Standing as we do under this sinister menace, it is peculiarly necessary at this moment that the concept of the male State should not go unchallenged, and that there should be a vivid and effective extension of the area of human liberty by the triumph of Female Suffrage. In pressing now for votes for women we are fighting equally to keep our votes as men. The cause of women has become the cause of freedom and civilisation, and it is for the sake of these great causes, even more than on behalf of women, that I ask you to pass this resolution.



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