

# Votes for Women at Twenty-one

*THE estimated increase in the Register in Great Britain by the extension of the franchise to include votes for women at 21 years of age is as follows :*

<i>Number of additional voters under 25 years of age</i>	-	1,590,000
<i>Number of additional voters over 25 and under 30</i>	-	1,700,000
<i>Number of additional voters over 30 who are not at present on the Register</i>	-	1,950,000
<i>Total Figure</i>	-	<u>5,240,000</u>

*Number over 25, 3,650,000 ; number under 25, 1,590,000.*

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Extracts from a Speech by the PRIME MINISTER  
at the Albert Hall, London, May 27, 1927.

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# Votes for Women at 21

*Extracts from a Speech*

by the PRIME MINISTER

at the Albert Hall, London

May 27, 1927.

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I HAVE always held the view that our party, of all others, has nothing to fear from any broadening of the basis of representation.

The party has thrived on every extension of the franchise, contrary to the prophecies of our opponents and every club grouser in our party. And the step we propose to take is in harmony with the best traditions handed down by the best men we have had to lead us.

It was Burke who said long before a popular franchise of any kind came into being: "The art of representation is a progressive one." Whoever does not realise that will be swept away.

It can hardly be said that we have been unduly precipitate in extending the franchise either to men or women. The position of the Unionist Party to-day has been made clear by Mr. Bonar Law in 1922, and by myself on subsequent occasions.

Mr. Bonar Law said in 1922:—"I have been a consistent supporter of women's franchise, and even at the time that the Franchise Bill of 1918 was passed I felt that the discrimination in age between men and women should not be permanent. I think so still."

In that small volume of "Unionist Principles," to the preparation of which we devoted our short period out of office in 1924, the words occur that it was the desire of the Unionist Party that women should play their full part in public life.

I stated at the election of 1924 that the Unionist Party was in favour of equal political rights for men and women.

In my view there are one or two things we should all remember. Sex is no longer a disqualification. The principle was conceded in 1918. So it is not unfair to say that the onus lies on the opponents of an extension of the franchise to say why the arbitrary age of 30 should remain.

There is an Act of Parliament, the Sex Disqualification Removal Act of 1919. Under that Act any woman—it does not say whether she is a "flapper" or not—may practise as a solicitor or a barrister or a doctor, or enter the Civil Service or the police, and we know many women not unsuccessful in trade or business.

*Is there anything unfair, foolish, illogical, in saying that women who are qualified in any of these ways by law are unfit to vote?*

A woman of 21 may serve on a jury, she may be a doctor of medicine, she may give a death certificate, she may decide on a question of life or death where an operation may take place, but there are people who say she is not fit to vote. That is rather difficult to defend in public.

It is said there are more women than men if they all had the vote. That is quite obvious. There is no point in the argument unless you believe that the possession of the vote is the beginning of a sex war. No one claims that, and the same argument has been used on every occasion when the franchise has been extended, to suit the case. At one time, "The poor are in the majority, they will swamp the rich." At another time, "The uneducated are in the majority, they will swamp the educated."

*Every attempt to equalize, to make fair that great democratic basis on which we rest has been met by the same kind of arguments repeated ad nauseam in a hundred forms to try and impede, to postpone the inevitable reform.*

In all the Dominions, except South Africa, where there is no woman's vote, in the United States of America—that is to say, in practically all the countries inhabited by the English-speaking peoples—the full franchise from 21 is in force.

I think perhaps the most foolish of the observations which have been made against the proposed change is the inclusion

of all working women, the professional women that will be included in any extension, under the generic term of "flapper."

The figures have been quoted over and over again that the extension of the age to 21 means 5,000,000 more votes, that nearly 2,000,000 of those will be women over 30 who, owing to the peculiar nature of the existing election laws, have so far not been able to get on the register, that something like 1,700,000 are between the ages of 25 and 30, and that the rest belong to that unhappy age from 21 to 25. . . .

*I am quite aware that there is a strong feeling, which has shown itself in many associations, that there should be a franchise for both sexes at the age of 25.*

I can quite understand the feeling and it may well be that were a Government giving the franchise to-day to the people of this country for the first time, that would be a proposal well worth thinking of. And if there be strong feeling in the country that this would be a better thing to do, there will be full opportunity for their representatives to express their opinions in the course of the debate when the Bill is in Parliament.

I will just put this to any provincial candidate at the next election. You will be asked: "Are you in favour of a man having the vote at 21 or not?" He will be a bold man who will stand up and say, "I am not." He will find it politically, in my view, an impossible position to maintain.

"Twenty-one" would immediately be taken as the slogan of both the other parties, and to take away a franchise centuries old in a democratic country is a thing which, in my opinion, is not practical politics.

*I, for one, not only look with no apprehension at the enfranchisement of both sexes at the same age, I welcome it.*

*I believe that a democracy is incomplete and lop-sided until it is representative of the whole people, and that the responsibility rests alike on men and on women.*