

# “Votes for Women” and the Labour movement

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**A**MONG the many banners raised in Hyde Park on June 28th, 1958, the occasion of the first great national demonstration of the Communist Party for Peace, Work and National Independence, was one on the top of a towering bamboo pole. It was a tricolour triangle of mauve, white and green. Many asked “What does it represent?” They looked at the erect, elderly figure of the woman carrying it, at her cockaded hat carrying a rosette of the same colours. We were looking at a flag and at a woman representing history. For the flag was that of the Women’s Social and Political Union and the woman had been a militant Suffragette.

It was fifty years ago to the month (June 21st, 1908) that the flag was unfurled as the official colours of the Union in the greatest demonstration seen up to that time. Thirty trainloads of women representing seventy provincial centres gathered with women of London and the Home Counties at seven assembly points. They marched, converging around forty platforms in Hyde Park. They called on the Liberal Government to give “Votes to Women”.

Of that demonstration, *The Times* said (22/6/1908):

“Its organisers counted on an audience of 250,000. That expectation was certainly fulfilled and probably it was doubled, and it would be difficult to contradict anyone who asserted it was trebled. Like the distances and the number of the stars, the facts are beyond the threshold of perception.”

What caused the great development of the movement for women’s franchise of which the W.S.P.U. was but one aspect? What stand and what part did the Labour movement play in it? Above all, what lessons does it hold for us today?

## **Class Society and Women**

As man gained increasing knowledge and mastery over nature, as his implements of production developed, a surplus was produced over and above that which was necessary to supply his daily needs. On that basis, man began to emerge from the long age of Primitive Communism; private property began to develop and society to be split into antagonistic classes.

The first to be enslaved were women. Property became the property of men. Men cannot live forever, but in class society private property goes on. As the owner cannot take it with him to enjoy in either heaven or hell, he tried to ensure that none but his own sons should inherit it. Therefore, the subjection and chastity of the wife became an economic necessity.

That was so of slavery and feudalism. But capitalism added to the burden of women. Just as it divorced the mass of men from the means of production, transforming their labour power into a commodity, it added further fetters to those already borne by women. Woman had no existence in law. Unmarried, she was the property of her father. Married, the property of her husband.

In the upper and middle classes, she was expected to live a life of useless idleness. To be a decoration in the home, a soother of man’s troubled brow, a barrier between him and domestic troubles. To have some little education—but not too much. To read and write a little. But a literate female was almost a man. Her value slumped heavily on the marriage market, and that was the be-all-and-end-all of a respectable woman’s life. She should be able to sew, embroider and produce those agonised samplers we still see, listen to her lord and master, and under stress, swoon in a gentle, ladylike way. That such a creature never existed didn’t stop hundreds of thousands of women wasting their lives trying to become such an idealised piece of insipidity.

But even before that arch anti-feminist, Victoria, mounted the throne there were stirrings towards freedom. Before she died, they had become a powerful force with many notable victories to their credit.

Although the parliamentary vote was gradually being extended among men, women were entirely excluded. They were on the local government register on the same restricted basis as men; but when three women—Lady Sandhurst and the Misses Cobden and Vons—stood and were elected to the London County Council in 1888, Lady Sandhurst’s defeated opponent went to law, contending that as a woman she was not eligible for election. Despite five appeals by the London County Council, the law decided that the right to elect and the right to be elected were not synonymous. That was the

position until 1918, though women could elect and be elected to school boards. (This was all on a very restricted franchise; in 1912 it was estimated that only 7 million of Britain's 45 million population had the vote.)

It was an understandable illusion that the women of the exploiting and professional classes should consider their problems those of all women; that they should raise the banner of Feminism, regard womankind as the great exploited, and expect every woman, irrespective of her social position, to leave all and follow them. That is the basis of the women's movement of Feminism and contains that germ of truth—that women, precisely because they are women, are oppressed.

But, and it is a big but, not all women are equally oppressed. For women of the working class, oppression was but the concomitant of bitter and ruthless exploitation. The bourgeoisie and its paid hacks prated of the sanctity of woman, the home, the reverence due to motherhood and the rest. But for a woman of the working class reality was the opposite of these fine sentiments. Her hours of work were long, her wages exceedingly low. Her children were huddled with her in mill, mine and factory, or in the home, in that appalling work euphemistically called "home work". Hours of work were interminably long—twelve to fourteen or more hours a day. Her home was a slum.

The greater truth was the class truth. The women of the working class were and are needed to fight shoulder to shoulder with the men to end exploitation. They were needed in the trade unions, socialist societies and the Co-operative movement. That many men didn't (and don't) recognise this fact, and often actively oppose it, doesn't alter its truth. And at the same time the Labour movement was (and is) needed to give the steadfastness to the women's movement that could and can deepen its understanding and win it as a powerful ally for the working class.

### Policy of the W.S.P.U.

On October 10th, 1903, at 62 Nelson Street, Manchester, a small meeting of mainly I.L.P. women was held. The intention was to form a committee which would have the same aims as the Labour Party, but with women's suffrage as the central point. Its name was to be the Women's Labour Representation Committee.

Mrs. Pankhurst was a leading member of the I.L.P. Her daughters were members. Her husband, Dr. Pankhurst, before his death in 1898, had been identified with every radical and progressive cause, including that of women's suffrage. He was an early member of the I.L.P. and served on its N.A.C.

Christabel, their eldest daughter, had been active in the cause of women's suffrage for two years

previous to 1903. She worked with the Lancashire textile women who were at the forefront of the fight for women's votes. In the nineties they organised a petition which was signed by 67,000 textile workers of Lancashire, Cheshire and Yorkshire.

Under the Pankhursts' influence the new organisation was finally named the Women's Social and Political Union, and its aim was limited to securing the franchise for women.

In October 1905 the W.S.P.U. made national headlines. Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney (an Oldham mill-girl) questioned Sir Edward Grey at Manchester Free Trade Hall. "What," they asked, "would the Liberal Government do in regard to the emancipation of women?" Sir Edward Grey did not and would not reply. So, for the first time in history, two women jumped on chairs, unfurled little white banners with the legend "Votes for Women". Evicted, they tried to address the crowd leaving the meeting and succeeded in Christabel's aim of getting arrested. They refused to be fined, and Annie served three days and Christabel seven days imprisonment. The militant Suffragette movement had been born.

January 1906 saw a general election. The W.S.P.U. policy was for the defeat of the Liberals, and what forces they had were concentrated on N.W. Manchester for the defeat of Winston Churchill (then in his Liberal period). But in Wigan, the Textile Women had a candidate, Thorley Smith, whose central plank was women's suffrage, and whose general programme was that of the Labour Party. Smith polled surprisingly well: he received 2,205 votes to the Tory's 3,575 and the Liberal's 1,900. A victory for Thorley Smith would have had a million times more significance than halving Churchill's majority.

In the choice then made by the W.S.P.U. were all the seeds of its future development.

In the general election the Liberals were returned with an overwhelming majority, and Labour with twenty-eight seats. Christabel Pankhurst insisted that the W.S.P.U. must be transferred to London. It was. She insisted that the policy should be the harrying of the Liberal Government in general and its Ministers in particular; that support should be given to no party or candidate; that there was only one issue—"Votes for Women"—and nothing else should be fought for, agitated for, until that was won. And so this policy was adopted, as the years passed becoming obsessional. "Votes for Women" was for the W.S.P.U. the one and only test of the value and use of every party and politician.

Unemployment was widespread; huge agitations and marches took place. There was neither understanding nor sympathy from Mrs. Pankhurst or her eldest daughter. The unemployed had the vote,

they said, and could redress their wrongs, but the women had no such weapon.

In the stormy period from 1911 to the outbreak of war, the country was seized in a whole series of big and important strikes. Tom Mann issued his famous "Don't Shoot" appeal. But the attitude of the Pankhursts was: "When are the Government going to legislate to stop strikes?" "Why is Tom Mann allowed to get away with only six weeks' imprisonment whilst Suffragettes were being so cruelly sentenced?"

The Irish Party in Parliament were of the opinion that the only hope for the Home Rule Bill becoming law was to keep the Liberals in (as Christabel was convinced the only way to get votes for women was to get the Liberals out and the Tories in), so they deserted their traditional stand in favour of women's franchise. It was a wrong decision; but in reply the W.P.S.U. organised a poster parade round Parliament Square declaring "No Votes for Women, No Home Rule". As Brailsford rightly remarked, the unprincipled stand of the Irish M.P.s did not excuse an equally unprincipled one by the W.S.P.U.

When Carson (who had been Solicitor-General in the previous Tory Government) organised treason in Ulster, supported by one of the leading anti-suffragists in this country, F. E. Smith (later Lord Birkenhead), Carson, casting around for all possible allies, let it be known that the "Ulster Parliament" would grant votes to women on the same basis as that which obtained for local government franchise. Christabel became an enthusiastic supporter of the Ulsterites; not a single militant act was committed there. When, a few short months later, Carson withdrew the pledge, then came the militancy and demand for action against them.

Finally (at the end of 1912) Christabel demanded that Labour be treated in the same way as the Liberals because it was their votes which kept the Government in power. (This was not true. It was the combination of the Irish and the Labour members.) Particular fire was directed against Keir Hardie, their staunchest friend in and out of Parliament.

Today, within the peace movement there is a demand for unilateral disarmament. As with "Votes for Women" for the Suffragettes, in some sections of the movement today support for unilateral disarmament has become the acid test of whether one is or is not for peace. Serious consideration of the lessons of the "Votes for Women" campaign reveals the dangers of such a stand. It shows how an essentially correct demand, divorced from all others, can become in the end a hindrance to the advance of a cause.

### W.S.P.U. Tactics

The W.S.P.U. had one main political aim: to get the Liberals out and the Tories in—though the last part of the aim was never put explicitly.

Deputations were organised to Parliament and Ministers. They were often resisted with brutal, vindictive violence by the Government. At every by-election the W.P.S.U. actively intervened, but not for anyone—it was against the Liberals. Demonstrations and meetings were held, literature was published and sold.

Up to 1910, militancy consisted in these activities, plus heckling Ministers wherever they could be found, and window smashing.

The Government replied with the most repulsively cruel legislation and actions. Forcible feeding was introduced, which enraged everyone with a vestige of humanity.

Up to and including 1912, public opinion began to mount and swing towards support of the women. In 1912, an important advance took place in the position of the Labour Party. Seventy borough and town councils, including Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham, declared, either unanimously or with only small minorities against, for women's franchise. Many organisations of the Labour movement took a similar stand. The Lord Mayor of Dublin, accompanied by his macebearer, took the almost unprecedented step of availing himself of his ancient right to present a petition in person at the Bar of the House. The Australian Senate called upon the Mother of Parliaments to endorse the women of Britain with citizenship.

Yet, in October 1912, a dramatic change of policy took place in the W.S.P.U. Labour was bracketed with the Liberals for attack; the policy of arson was also intensified. Everything short of the destruction of human life was permissible. Whereas previously arrest had been invited, now it was to be avoided.

Mansions went up in flames. Golf courses were burnt with acid, sports pavilions were destroyed by fire, and that strange dedicated woman, Emily Wilding Davison, threw herself under the King's racehorse on Derby Day. Public opinion began to ebb away from the Suffragettes, and the women's suffrage movement as a whole was adversely affected. 1912 was a year of great change, but of a backward sweep for the women's cause.

### W.S.P.U. Organisation

Policy determines organisation. Christabel Pankhurst called the W.S.P.U. an army. So it was—so in fact is every political organisation. As the policy of the W.S.P.U. turned more and more to arson, the forces were deployed at a word of command from one person—and that was Christabel. Mrs. Pankhurst was the outstanding public figure. She

represented everything that a feminist is supposed not to be. She was fragile-looking and feminine: a firm supporter of the combination of the latest fashion with public work. She was courageous and prepared to die for what she believed in. Thirteen times imprisoned, eleven of her releases were when she was utterly exhausted by hunger and thirst strikes. But she did not mould or decide the policy of the W.S.P.U.—that was always in Christabel's hands.

This is most clearly demonstrated in the deliberate change in the social base of the W.S.P.U. and the three great splits which took place in its history—1907 with Mrs. Despard, 1912 with the Pethick Lawrences, and 1914 with Sylvia Pankhurst.

The original constitution of the W.S.P.U. provided for an annual conference and the election of a committee. In 1906 there was restlessness in the organisation on the ground that the constitution was not being carried out. Christabel was thunderstruck! When asked if she did not trust the members of the W.S.P.U., she replied that of course she trusted their splendid members, but could have added that she was sure the members trusted “Mother and me more than any elected committee”. However, she agreed to the first conference, but “electioneering” began before the second was due. This she thought tantamount to treason. A special meeting of members was called which was told flatly that such practices were over for all time: there must be no conferences or elections now or in the future. Those who wanted to follow Mrs. Pankhurst on those terms could stay. Those who didn't could leave. One section departed—and the Women's Freedom League was formed under the leadership of Mrs. Despard and Mrs. How Martyn—both, until the break, joint national secretaries of the W.S.P.U. No polemics took place on the vital question of what must be the relationship between leaders and rank and file, and how that relationship was to be realised.

The leadership of the W.S.P.U. officially was then in the hands of Mrs. and Christabel Pankhurst and the Pethick Lawrences. The key to the working together of these four from then until October 1912 was general agreement with Christabel's outlook. In October 1912, however, the Pankhursts and Lawrences split. It was again on the vital question of policy. Christabel insisted on arson and the harrying of the Labour Party. The Lawrences were opposed to this policy. There were no polemics, but a bold statement was issued covering the facts and the terms under which the partnership was dissolved, signed by all four.

Early in 1914, the East London Federation led by Sylvia Pankhurst was expelled, and she with it. The issue was a twofold one: that the working class women were as nothing compared with the *élite*

of the middle class and upper class, and that Sylvia had dared to speak on platforms on other matters than “Votes for Women”, such as the Dublin Lockout etc. Again, no polemics.

Roger Fulford suggests that those who opposed the Pankhursts had singular forbearance. In my opinion, their forbearance was based on a wrong premise. It was that any polemics, any “washing of dirty linen in public”, would harm the cause and weaken the fight against the enemy. Much experience has been gained before and since then, to show this premise to be wrong and harmful. Marx and Lenin were accused of being capricious, hard to work with, precisely because such vital differences were fought out in a principled way. Our own experience and that of the entire International Communist movement in recent years has but reaffirmed this.

### Social Composition of the W.S.P.U.

In its origin it was intended to be a part of the Labour movement; it was nursed, supported and encouraged by Keir Hardie; its original London strength was organised by Sylvia Pankhurst in the East End. Christabel Pankhurst deliberately changed all this. Its strength and base had to be the middle class. She said that M.P.s, including Labour M.P.s, were much more impressed by a demonstration of bourgeois than of proletarian women.

Then, there is the interesting question of the funds of the W.S.P.U. Without doubt, money came in from working class women, as they also joined in demonstrations, and huge sums were raised by propaganda work. But Christabel confirms that large sums came from exceedingly rich women.

In 1906-7, the income of the W.S.P.U. was £3,000. In 1911-12, the income was £25,494. By 1914 it reached the phenomenal figure of £36,896. Why did rich women—whom the Liberal Government moaned it “could not stop”—contribute so generously? In the main, they were undoubtedly Tories or Tory supporters. The Tories were locked in battle with the Liberals (or would have been had the cowardly Liberal Government been prepared to fight them) especially on Ireland. It is reasonable to suppose that any group which embarrassed the Government without strengthening the working class would be candidates for their support, and that some large proportion of the funds came from that source. Secondly, Christabel, without one single fact to support her—as any analysis of the votes in division lobbies shows—firmly took the stand that a Tory Government would be the way of gaining “Votes for Women”.

And, as subsequent events confirm, her conscious stand was already with the ruling class. Duchesses and countesses all too often have digested radicals

and would-be revolutionaries into the capitalist system. She and her mother unfortunately were not the first nor the last to be so digested.

### The Labour Movement and Women's Suffrage

With the end of the Chartist movement, the independent political stand of the British working class was temporarily lost. The emphasis was on the growth of the trade unions, first in the crafts and then amongst the unskilled. Their political position was with the Liberals, and their main concern to fight restrictive legislation against trade unionism, and to get the trade unions recognised as legal entities. The organisation of women workers developed much more slowly than that of the men. As the skilled man could see nothing good coming out of the organisation of the unskilled, men trade unionists in general saw women as cheap competition against them. In other words, they saw the effect of capitalist exploitation as being the cause of the cheapening of their labour power.

As political stirrings began, the main suffrage issue raised was adult suffrage. In the seventies the T.U.C. meant by that both men and women, but later sections of the movement meant the enlargement of men's franchise first, with women being included if possible.

Many other demands were made, all essential for the enlargement of political democracy.

The I.L.P. in many ways is the ideal sounding board for what took place in the movement. It combined people who genuinely stood for socialism with those like Arthur Henderson who, whilst leaving the Liberal Party, brought their Liberalism with them into the Socialist movement.

Whatever weaknesses the I.L.P. and the Labour Party had (and they were very many) one thing stands out. *They and the socialist societies were the only political organisations in the country that stood for women entering into full citizenship alongside men.* At the 1907 conference of the I.L.P. a discussion arose around that section of the N.A.C. Report which pointed out that women members of the I.L.P., who were also members of the W.S.P.U., were actively intervening in by-elections against the Liberals, but not for the I.L.P. candidates. Feeling was particularly bitter in certain sections of the I.L.P. in regard to the Cocker mouth by-election (August 1906) in which Robert Smillie was I.L.P. candidate. Smillie was a supporter of women's franchise, though his union, the Miners, were amongst the most outspoken opponents of it.

When a resolution was put forward which would have led to disciplining their W.S.P.U. members, Margaret MacMillan read a declaration to the conference, signed by Mrs. Despard and others, assuring it that in all future by-elections and elec-

tions they would support I.L.P. candidates if they were standing.

Mrs. Pankhurst, on the contrary, assured the conference that she would do nothing of the kind. She ended by saying that on the one issue of women's suffrage she was adamant, but on all others she supported the I.L.P.

Conference, in what must be one of the most magnanimous gestures ever made by a political party to one of its leading members, agreed by an overwhelming majority to pass on to next business. Yet, by the end of the year, Mrs. Pankhurst had quietly withdrawn from the I.L.P. and the Labour movement, never to return.

Her attitude was clearly marked in the Lansbury by-election in 1912, when Lansbury applied for the Chiltern Hundreds and contested Bow and Bromley on the single issue of "Votes for Women". Previously, he had circularised every possible organisation in the Labour movement on his own behalf, asking them to insist that Labour refuse to allow any business to be transacted in the House of Commons until women got the vote. This was a demand of the W.S.P.U. He acted independently, too, in embarking on the by-election. No one was consulted except Mrs. Pankhurst and Christabel. His local Party was incensed, and its secretary was very antagonistic to the issue of women's franchise on which the by-election was being fought.

In these circumstances, if ever there was a *must* for the W.S.P.U. it was to get the highest possible vote and, if at all possible, ensure the return of Lansbury to the House. Yet it is clear that this was far from their minds. A young organiser was sent down (whereas clearly the key person to have run and directed the campaign was Sylvia Pankhurst) whose only job was to get the biggest possible propaganda for the W.S.P.U. Mrs. Pankhurst spoke in the constituency, on W.S.P.U. platforms. There was not the slightest attempt to get unity, to win over the Labour and I.L.P. members—in other words, to ensure the re-election of Lansbury.

Polling day was one of torrential rain. Lansbury had few cars, the W.S.P.U. had a fleet of them. The W.S.P.U. asked for lists of supporters, whom they would "knock up"—the Labour agent said: "Send the cars!" And until Mrs. Pankhurst arrived late in the morning and "allowed cars to be so used" the lists and the cars never met. In the last two or three crucial hours of that day, a desperate appeal was made by Lansbury for every possible supporter to be on the doorsteps. It was found that the majority of the W.S.P.U. members had gone home.

It is true that Lansbury should never have behaved in such a high-handed manner. The issue had to be fought out in the movement, and his local Party had the right to be consulted. Such a campaign needed the greatest thought, the maximum winning

of allies, the development of the widest possible unity. And it could have been won. Lansbury had an 800 majority at the December 1910 election; he lost by 700 in the 1912 by-election. In view of the chaotic nature of the campaign, it was a miraculous achievement.

### Adult Suffrage versus Women's Suffrage

The movement was divided on the issue: should the law be amended *now* so as to give women votes on the same restricted basis as men or should it be adult franchise? As with all questions considered in the abstract, the more general is vastly preferable to the restricted. But nothing ever is in the abstract, and those who make political decisions on the basis that they solve all the problems of the world in theory find that in practice none of them are solved.

And in the real world, resolution after resolution of impeccable quality was passed by the Labour Party, the T.U.C. and the I.L.P. in favour of adult suffrage, but not one single hand's stir was made to campaign for adult suffrage. All the campaigning was for women's enfranchisement, and tribute must be paid to both the Women's Co-operative Guild and the Textile Women for the positive role they played throughout, on a far wider basis than the W.S.P.U. But apart from one or two meetings called by the Adult Suffrage Society (which Hardie correctly characterised as a "dog in the manger"), there is little evidence of any other activity. This society was a joint one of Liberals and Labour; G. M. Trevelyan, Arthur Henderson and Margaret Bondfield were amongst its leading members.

In 1911, when the Conciliation Bill was under consideration, which would have conferred suffrage on a restricted number of women (it had the support of 400 M.P.s), Arthur Henderson led a deputation from this society to Asquith, the Prime Minister. The deputation drew attention to the need for adult suffrage (men and women) and for removing many restrictions on democracy. All very good, all very right—in the abstract. But Asquith, an inveterate opponent of women's enfranchisement, jumped to embrace the demand for adult suffrage, saying the Government would sponsor such a Bill, leaving it open to amendments for women's suffrage, such amendments to be left to the free vote of the House. (The Conciliation Bill was a Private Member's Bill, in the hands of Shackleton, the Labour M.P. for Clitheroe.)

This piece of chicanery was made possible by the right wing of the Labour Party. It blew the Conciliation Bill sky high. A Franchise Bill was introduced in Parliament the following year. It was made known that it would be open to amendments and free voting in the way Asquith indicated. Then Balfour, the Tory leader, "innocently" asked the

Speaker if such amendments would be acceptable. The Speaker ruled they couldn't be, as they would alter the meaning and scope of the Bill. Asquith then withdrew the Bill. So did the wily Liberal Government use one issue (adult suffrage) to explode another (women's suffrage), then smash down both. It is not the first nor the last time that sectional interests have been used one against the other to the detriment of the whole, and that then the sectional issues were also lost.

It was arising from this experience mainly that the 1912 conference of the Labour Party categorically declared for the first time that it would neither accept nor support any Suffrage Bill that did not include women.

Where were the Left in the Labour movement? Naturally many were in the I.L.P., but many of those who were leading the great mass movement of the workers were, in general, syndicalists. They despised all those on the political wing as opportunists, time-servers and Liberal hand-rags. It was a very understandable position, and a very wrong one. This issue was only finally cleared up with the birth and development of our own Party in Britain.

The S.D.F. was the Marxist organisation. Its sectarian position has been often discussed before.

On the whole issue of adult suffrage *versus* votes for women, Harry Quelch, a delegate from the London Trades Council and an outstanding member of the S.D.F., unfailingly moved the amendment which was for adult suffrage. He pointed out the dangers of giving married women the vote. It is of no purpose to pursue the ephemeral literature of the time, when one side tried to prove that only married women would benefit. The other side—including Philip Snowden, Keir Hardie, Tom Johnson and others—tried to prove that four times as many working class women would benefit as upper and middle class women. Tens of thousands of women, with big support from men, were campaigning for votes for women. No one was even pretending to campaign for adult suffrage. Snowden was a million times right when he exclaimed that the adult suffragists were trying to get votes for men at the expense of the sufferings of the women.

Secondly, the winning of what had stirred thousands into action and millions into sympathy would have been the most important lever to prise open the whole field of extending political democracy. The Labour and progressive movements, the people of Britain, had to pay a heavy price on many more fronts than that of women's suffrage, when the men and women experienced in mass struggle stood outside the battle for political democracy, unwilling to marry, as only they could, widespread industrial action to conscious political action. Our Party has learnt the lesson well in *The British Road to Socialism*, though in practice it has to be plainly stated that

the electoral front of our work has a long way to go before it occupies its rightful place in our Party's life and activity.

### The Liberal Government

The 1906 Liberal Government was returned with one of the biggest majorities in parliamentary history. It seemed all powerful, but in reality Liberalism was dying, and doing so rapidly. Its great catch calls "Free Enterprise" and "Free Trade" had ceased to be in conformity with the needs of the bourgeoisie. The Tory Party, sprung from the great land monopolists, was becoming the true representative of the monopolist bourgeoisie—the two monopoly interests had an ideal united political weapon in the Tory Party. On the other hand, the working class was breaking away from its Liberal swaddling bands, and beginning a journey not yet ended, of finding its independent political expression.

Asquith was an implacable opponent of women's suffrage. The three consecutive Home Secretaries will stand condemned forever: Herbert Gladstone, who introduced forcible feeding; Winston Churchill, who ordered the police (November 18th, 1910) not to arrest the Suffragettes in Parliament Square, but not to let them through to Westminster—a battle lasting six hours took place in the Square, where women were brutally and indecently illtreated and, in the end, over 200 arrests were made; and McKenna, the author of the "Cat and Mouse" Act which still disgraces our Statute Book.

They were not fools: a more experienced bunch of politicians never disgraced the Front Bench. But only a government of fools would have allowed one of its members, the Right Honourable C. E. Hobhouse, to make the following statement, without realising what would happen:

"In the case of the Suffrage demand, there has not been the kind of popular, sentimental uprising which accounted for Nottingham Castle in 1832 or the Hyde Park railings in 1867. There has been no great ebullition of popular feeling."

In my opinion, it was deliberate provocation, in a period of mass unrest, to tempt the W.S.P.U. to arise in wrath. It succeeded only too well. The Government secured a scapegoat. Accounts of arson, picture slashing, made lush reading in the "popular press". They pummelled, tortured and punished the women, while Carson got away with murder.

If ever the description of the Liberals as "cowardly cravens" fitted a government, it fitted like a glove the Liberal Governments of 1906 and 1910. Craven and cowardly in their attitude to treason in high places, they vented their spleen on striking workers and on women.

The history of the W.S.P.U. stops short at the

point where Britain and Germany became locked in the First World War.

Christabel Pankhurst returned from a self-imposed political exile of two-and-a-half years in Paris just after the war broke out. Her first meeting was on the subject of "The German Peril".

Lloyd George, whom she had regarded as one of the deadliest foes of the women, called her in and asked her to try and organise a great demonstration of women demanding to go into war work. It was financed by the Government. Its aim was to undermine the tenacious stand being taken by the men to preserve their wages and conditions. It was done: the women marched, to be welcomed with open arms by Lloyd George and Winston Churchill on behalf of the Government. Irony could hardly go further.

When it was clear that no new elections could be held at the end of the war on the old register, Asquith (no longer Prime Minister) announced in Parliament that he was a convert to the cause of the women and it was impossible to enfranchise more men without at the same time bringing women into citizenship rights! Mrs. Pankhurst addressed a meeting in which she stated that previously the men had been used to dish the women, now it was the opposite way round. And she would never agree to women being given the vote if it meant that conscientious objectors and shirkers got it!

At the 1918 "Khaki" election, Christabel stood as a "Coupon" candidate, getting over 8,000 votes. She subsequently left the political field and became a propagandist in the United States for the Second Coming of Christ. Mrs. Pankhurst became the prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate for Whitechapel, which she still was when she died in 1929.

The 1918 Act gave men adult suffrage, and enfranchised women at thirty years of age. It was not until 1929 that universal adult suffrage was established, for all men and women, at twenty-one years of age.

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Great deeds were done both by men and women in the early days of this century. Undying glory will always go to those who fought the good fight. When history pays its tribute to all those who gave of their best in the way they thought right, many women's names will stand high amongst them.

Their great struggles need not only to be honoured, but their lessons understood.

The self-sacrifice, the torments, the endurance of many women at that time can only be truly honoured if we deliberately and consciously plan our work so that the same courage, which is undoubtedly possessed by their granddaughters, is given the leadership which will arouse and develop the latent

strength of our class and the general women's movement.

The British proletariat, "the first born child of capitalism", was unable, for historical reasons, to bring Socialism to Britain first in the world. But the overwhelming point made by the history of the early years of the century surely is that if the three great mass movements—the Great Industrial Un-

rest, the fight for the Freedom of Ireland, and Women's Suffrage—could have been drawn together into a powerful fist, it would not only have scattered the Carsonites but would have ensured the passing of political power into the hands of the British working class. What couldn't be done then can, and will, be done now—in building up the only organisation that by its nature can play such a role—the Communist Party.

# Toward an economic interpretation of ethical value

*George Burgher*

**A**N appreciation of the fact that it is the social existence of men which determines their consciousness has enabled Marxist thinkers to trace the connection between many ideological concepts and the material conditions of life of which they are a reflection.<sup>1</sup> It seems reasonable to suppose that the idea of "value" in the ethical sense has a particularly intimate relationship with the economic basis of society. Ethics is the most practical of philosophical studies. It can never turn its back on the market place which in all more or less advanced communities is a major centre of human intercourse. No mere verbal coincidence can account for the fact that terms like "value" and "good", though with different connotations, are to be found in the context of both moral philosophy and political economy.

As an example of the interrelationship between value in its economic and in its ethical sense we may recall a recent discussion in the pages of *Marxism Today*.<sup>2</sup> Commenting on John Lewis's article, "Marxism and the Moral Law", Franz Loeser protested that insufficient attention had been paid to the objective criteria in ethics which must be based on the laws of development of society and mankind. In rebuttal Lewis argued that "the laws of development do not go on inde-

pendently of and outside man. . . There would be no laws of human development if man had no human aims." It is not the purpose of the present article to enter into this debate on the criteria of morals, but simply to point out its similarity to a discussion among economists in the U.S.S.R. on the role of the law of value under socialism. This discussion was immediately concerned with the practical problem of securing a proportionate balance in the all-round development of the national economy; but it touched on the very ethical question raised by Lewis and Loeser when certain economists were rebuked by Stalin for contending that "only because of the conscious action of the Soviet citizens engaged in material production do the economic laws of socialism arise."<sup>3</sup>

If there is, in fact, a close correspondence between certain ethical and economic concepts, and if we assume, as Marxists, that the economic sense is the more fundamental, then a method of examining philosophical problems in respect to the nature of value readily suggests itself: to try to translate these ethical questions into their economic counterpart in order to see if the answers we can thus arrive at may also have a philosophical application. In this article we shall consider, all too briefly, one of these problems—the relation

<sup>1</sup> It need hardly be stressed that this reflection is not passive and mirror-like but dynamic, reacting dialectically on the real situation which gave rise to it.

<sup>2</sup> May and June 1958.

<sup>3</sup> *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.*—particularly, the reply to Comrades A. V. Sanina and V. G. Venzher.