

No. 59.

VOTES FOR WOMEN

The Women's Social and Political Union. [1]

Head Office: 4, CLEMENTS INN, STRAND, W.C.

Telegraphic Address: "Wospolu London" Telephone No. 2724 Holborn (three lines)

Founder and Hon. Secretary – MRS. PANKHURST

Hon. Treasurer – Mrs. PETHICK LAWRENCE

Joint Hon. Secretary - MRS. TUKE

Organising Secretary - MISS CHRISTABEL PANKHURST, LL.B.

Publishing Office - THE WOMAN'S PRESS

Newspaper - VOTES FOR WOMEN

Bankers - MESSRS. BARCLAY & CO, FLEET STREET, E.C.

Colours - PURPLE, WHITE & GREEN

Treatment of the Suffragettes in Prison.

By F. W. PETHICK LAWRENCE. [2]

By common consent of civilised countries political prisoners receive different treatment from that of ordinary criminals. The object aimed at not so

much punishment as detention. They are accordingly generally allowed books, newspapers, writing materials & c.; they are permitted to see their friends and to write to them; the degrading prison regulations are not enforced; they are allowed their own clothes and their own food. This practice of civilised nations, established by regular usage and defended by British Statesmen, is reversed by the present Liberal Government in dealing with the women who are their political opponents. The Suffragettes have been put in prison in the second or third class and subjected to indignities of ordinary criminals-

What Constitutes a Political Offence?

In the year 1891 an English Court had before it the case of a Swiss subject who had committed an offence in Switzerland, and against whom the Swiss Government wished to put into operation the process of extradition. The English Court had to decide whether his offence was a political one, because if it were so the right of extradition would not apply, and the man could obtain a harbour of refuge in this country. They then laid down the doctrine **that any offence, even that of murder itself, is a political offence if it is committed with a political object.**

In October 1908 during the trial of Mrs. Pankhurst, Christabel Pankhurst, and Mrs. Drummond at Bow Street for issuing a handbill calling on the crowd to "rush" the House of Commons, Mr., Herbert Gladstone stated on oath on the witness box, in answer to Mrs. Pankhurst, that in this opinion they would not have come into that Court except owing to a political motive; yet when they were sent to prison he refused to allow them, to be treated differently from ordinary criminals-

Views of Liberal Statesman as to Treatment of Political Offenders.

In 1889, **Mr. Asquith**, referring to the treatment of the Irish prisoners, rebuked the then Home Secretary, saying: -

After sentence, when he has got them into prison, he has subjected them - men, by his own admission, mistaken and misguided. If you please, but still the victims of a genuine, if perverted enthusiasm - to the lot of the very common felons.

The Rt. Hon. W.E. Gladstone said: -

I am not going to be entangled in argument as to what are and what are not political offences. I know very well that you cannot attempt a legislative definition of political offences [this was said previous to the legal decision given above], but what you can do, and what always has been done, is this, you can say that in certain classes of cases the imprisoned person ought not to be treated as if he had been guilty of base and degrading crime.

The Right Hon. Professor Brice said: -

Whenever the moral judgment of the community at large does not brand an offence as sordid and degrading, and does not feel the offence to be one which destroys its respect

for the personal character of the prisoner, It may there [sic] be held that prison treatment ought to be different from that awarded to ordinary criminals.

Examples of Favoured Treatment

The treatment denied to the Suffragettes has been given to such men as Dr. Jameson , who "raided" the Transvaal in time of peace, to Mr. Ginnell, M.P., imprisoned for encouraging cattle-driving, to Baker Pasha, convicted of a disgraceful assault on a young girl, and recently to a city councillor of Bradford, convicted of seducing and ruining a girl of 15 years of age in his own employ.

Why Suffragettes insist on being treated as political offenders.

No one nowadays is likely to accuse Suffragettes of cowardice or of a desire to shirk responsibility for their actions. Yet some people cannot understand why they refuse to submit to prison discipline. The reason is that they refuse to allow the rights of political prisoners, won for them by the heroism of great men and women of the past, to fall into disuse. They accordingly have protested and will continue to protest against the treatment which the Government have inflicted upon them.

The Hunger Strike

Originally Suffragettes protested in words against their treatment. Finding this useless, they decided to protest by deeds. They rebelled against the prison regulations and they adopted the Russian method of the hunger strike. At tremendous personal cost they refused all food. This placed the Government in a difficulty; they did not want to let their women political opponents die in prison, because they knew that would raise a storm of indignation in the country. They did not want to yield and treat women as political offenders. So instead they released them from gaol after letting them starve, some for 90, other for 100, others for 120 and even 150 hours.

Forcible Feeding

But this did not break the resolution of the women. Therefore Mr. Gladstone in September 1909, determined to employ against them the inhuman practice of forcible feeding by means of **a tube passed through the nostrils into the stomach**. The danger and injury caused by this operation have been attested by many doctors, over a hundred of whom have petitioned the Home Secretary against it.

Sir Victor Horsley says that, apart from the brutality of the proceeding, it has the following consequences:

Pain, congestion of the nose and pharynx, leading, in my own hospital experience, to ulceration of the nasal mucous membrane, retching, vomiting and depression.

He adds that forcible feeding is a miserable expedient of a weak Minister and an outrage on a political offender, and that it will be looked back upon by our children with the pity which the succeeding generations bestow upon the crude ignorance of their forefathers.

Mr. Mansell-Moulling, the famous Surgeon, says: -

It is absolutely inhuman and unjustifiable. It appears to be legal, to the undying shame of our laws and of those who make them.

Mr. Hugh Fenton, M.D., says: "It is an absolutely beastly and revolting procedure."

Mrs. Leigh, who suffered it for one month in Birmingham Gaol, says of it: "The sensation is most painful. The drums of the ears seem to be bursting; there is a horrible pain in the throat and breast."

Nevertheless, from that day to this (Dec. 27, 1909) this operation has been carried out daily in the different prisons of the country, by the instructions of the Government, upon bodies of women political prisoners.

Electors! Mark your detestation of this treatment of women, and vote against Liberal Candidates

Read our paper, "VOTES FOR WOMEN," One Penny Weekly.

Copies of this Leaflet can be obtained from The Woman's Press, price 9d. a hundred, 6/-a thousand, post free.

Published by THE WOMEN'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNION, 4. Clements Inn, Strand, W.C., and Printed by ST. CLEMENTS PRESS Ltd., Portugal St. W.C.

[1] Formed in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and her two daughters Christabel and Sylvia. WSPU soon established itself as a militant version of the many women's suffrage organizations, starting in 1905 when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney refused to follow police orders in a meeting, and were imprisoned for violent behaviour against the police. from now on the members became know as Suffragettes. In 1909 the first incident of hunger strike occurred, and was soon followed by other members of WSPU who were

imprisoned. The violence escalated in the teens, and when E. Pethick Lawrence spoke against the development she was expelled. In 1915, both because of the outbreak of WWI and because all the leaders were either in prison, in exile or ill, the organisation negotiated a treaty with the Government, whereby all prisoners were released and WSPU suspended its activities and concentrated on the war effort.

[2] Frederick W. Pethick Lawrence, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence's husband (when they got married in 1901 they took both surnames!) was a lawyer and editor of several left-wing and union magazines and newspapers. He and Emmeline founded "Votes for Women" in 1907, and worked closely together in WSPU until they in 1912 were both expelled over reluctance to a planned arson campaign (see note 1). Pethick Lawrence remained politically active in the Party for most of his life.