
Fight for your rights

WORKSHEET A

In early colonial New Zealand women were excluded from any involvement in politics. The same applied to women in societies all around the world. Most people accepted the idea that women were naturally suited to keeping a home and raising children, while only men were fit for the rough-and-tumble world of politics.

In the 1800s, however, growing numbers of women began to challenge this narrow view of the world and began to organize the fight for their legal and political rights. They formed a movement for women's suffrage. These campaigners became known as *suffragists*.

The movement gained momentum from the mid 1880s under the leadership of Kate Sheppard. Campaigners organized petitions to Parliament: in 1891 over 9,000 signatures were collected; in 1892 almost 20,000; and finally in 1893, nearly 32,000 – nearly 25% of the adult female population in New Zealand.

Despite opposition from politicians like New Zealand Premier Richard Seddon, who warned that any disturbance to the *natural* roles of men and women could have terrible consequences for society, the suffragists' campaign paid off. On 8th September 1893 the bill was passed by 20 votes to 18, making New Zealand the first self-governing country to allow women the right to vote. Suffragists celebrated throughout the country and around the world.

For women in some countries, the struggle would be an even longer and more difficult one. The success of New Zealand's suffragists inspired Millicent Fawcett to found the *National Union of Women's Suffrage* in Britain in 1897. But her patient campaign moved far too slowly for some. In 1903, Emmeline Pankhurst founded the *Women's Social and Political Union* with her daughters Christabel and Sylvia. These women were prepared to use violence, if necessary, to get what they wanted. They became known as the *Suffragettes* and their arrival ushered in a new era; women were no longer prepared to wait patiently.

The Suffragettes interrupted political meetings carrying banners reading 'Votes for Women', and when they were arrested they opted to go to prison rather than pay a fine. Meanwhile, more Suffragettes chained themselves to railings outside Parliament and, most dramatically, one woman killed herself in public. Emily Wilding Davison threw herself underneath King George V's horse at the 1913 Derby horse race. She was very badly injured and died in hospital four days later.

There is no knowing where the Suffragette movement may have taken their struggle to next, but World War I interrupted their campaign. They suspended their defiance and chose to put all of their strength and energy into helping the war effort. After the war the Government showed their appreciation to these suffrage campaigners-turned-war heroes by passing the Representation of the People Act in 1918, entitling women over the age of 30 the right to vote. It was, at least, a start.

The landmark ruling in New Zealand in 1893 continued to have its effect on women all around the world throughout the twentieth century and continues today in the twenty-first.

Fight for your rights crossword

WORKSHEET B

New Zealand has been led by two women Prime Ministers over the last nine years. Answer the questions. Write the answers in the crossword to reveal their names.

1. The name given to campaigners for women's rights (10)
2. Women in the 19th century were expected to look after the house and raise these (8)
3. Which profession is described as 'rough-and-tumble'? (8)
4. This woman was the leader of the New Zealand movement in the 1880s (4,8)
5. Inspired by events in New Zealand, this woman started up a Union in Britain (9,7)
6. Mrs Pankhurst (her first name) (8)
7. Mrs Pankhurst's daughter (6)
8. Campaigners in Britain held these up demanding 'Votes for Women' (7)
9. The British campaigners preferred to go here than pay a fine (6)
10. He was New Zealand's Prime Minister when women gained the right to vote (7,6)
11. Mrs Pankhurst's other daughter (4)
12. Which country was the first in the world to grant women the right to vote? (3,7)
13. What were the more pro-active campaigners in Britain known as? (12)
14. What did they often chain themselves to? (8)
15. Who did the horse that killed Emily Wilding Davison belong to?