

EMMELINE PETHICK- LAWRENCE (1867 - 1954)

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Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence. Image from Wikipedia (Public Domain).

Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence was born in 1867 in Clifton, Bristol into a Methodist Family. In 1891 she began voluntary social work at the West London Methodist Mission. There she helped run the girl's mission club. During this time she was shocked by the poverty she saw and became a socialist. In 1895 she helped form the Esperance Club; a breakaway organisation not controlled by the constraints of Methodism. It also involved experimentation with dance and drama.

In 1901 she married Frederick Lawrence but only after he had agreed to convert to socialism and adopt the surname of Pethick- Lawrence. In the next few years Emmeline read about the imprisonment of suffragettes Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst. This led to her taking an interest in the suffrage movement. In 1905 she met Annie Kenney and after a discussion with her, joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

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In 1905 she was arrested for the first time for trying to make a speech in the lobby of the House of Commons. In 1907 she and her husband founded the journal Votes for Women. Their home in London became the office for the WSPU. It also became a kind of hospital where women could recover from their prison experience before embarking on more campaigning.

In 1912 the WSPU turned to window smashing as a form of protest. Emmeline did not like the strategy but Christabel Pankhurst, one of the suffragette leaders, ignored her views. Following the start of the campaign, the Government ordered the arrest of leaders of the WSPU, and Emmeline and Frederick were arrested and sent to prison for 9 months. They were also sued for the cost of the damage caused by the suffragettes. Both Emmeline and her husband went on hunger strike and were force fed.

After their release Emmeline and Fredrick began to speak openly about the possibility of the window smashing campaign losing the support of the WSPU. In a meeting, Christabel told Emmeline and Frederick about a proposed arson attack. As a result of their objections Christabel had them expelled from the Union. After their expulsion Emmeline continued to work for the suffrage cause and carried on writing for Votes for Women.

After the First World War Emmeline stood as the Labour Candidate for Rusholme. She came bottom of the poll. In the 1920's and 30's she worked for the Women's International League which was committed to world peace. She also took part in Marie Stopes' birth control campaign to provide advice for working class women. Eventually she had to retire from politics and campaigning after she was involved in a serious accident in 1950. She died 4

Research and written by Elizabeth Strange, Curatorial Research Volunteer.

(1) Simikin John, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, Spartacus Educational, February 2015, Spartacus Education Publishers LTD., <http://spartacus-educational.com/Wpethick.htm>,

(2) Emmeline Pethick- Lawrence, Wikipedia, 26th April 2018,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emmeline_Pethick-Lawrence,_Baroness_Pethick-Lawrence

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