

THE ASQUITH CABINET AND WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE
1908-1914

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THE ASQUITH CABINET AND WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE

1908-1914

by



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ABSTRACT

The agitation for Woman's Suffrage in Britain came into renewed prominence with the advent of the Liberal party to power in 1906. In 1914 with the declaration of war between Britain and Germany the agitation ceased with women still unenfranchised. This thesis deals with the failure of the Liberal government and more particularly the Asquith Cabinet, to solve the issue in the intervening years.

The Asquith ministry (1908-1916) was divided on the issue and the Prime Minister, in particular, was an avowed opponent of women's votes. This division in the Cabinet resulted in a vacillating policy which failed to satisfy the demands made by the women. The women, in their turn adopted militant actions to publicize their cause reaching a climax in the renowned anti-government militancy of the Woman's Social and Political Union. The failure of the Cabinet to come to grips with the problem through government legislation, coupled with the tendency of the militant women to resort to yet more militant tactics, led eventually to a situation where compromise became extremely difficult and solution became impossible.

The thesis opens with a sketch of the political and social background of the period in order to place the problem in its proper perspective. The individual positions of the Cabinet ministers on the question are then dealt with. The greater part of the thesis is an in depth investigation into the role played by the individual ministers when Woman's Suffrage bills came before the House of Commons. Stress is placed on the growing importance of Woman's Suffrage as a political problem which eventually threatened the stability of the government. The conclusion is that the Cabinet ministers played an important role in exacerbating the issue through the adoption of negative policies of procrastination.

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PREFACE

The Woman's Suffrage issue belongs to the political history of Britain as much as any of the other issues which came to the fore in the years 1906-1914. As such it was a problem which the Liberal government would have to face, however reluctantly. The means by which such a controversy could be resolved were by no means clear cut since the issue had strong emotional overtones and the methods which the militant suffragists had employed up to 1908 naturally affected the attitudes of the politicians. The unacceptable features of these methods were barely perceptible in 1906, but by 1908 when Herbert Henry Asquith came to the premiership they were being increasingly resented by the politicians.¹ Procrastination in the past had only aggravated the issue and this was only slowly being realized in 1908.

What the Asquith Cabinet did about this vexatious problem and the policies they employed to solve it will be

¹During the debate on Henry York Stanger's female suffrage bill in 1908 militancy was an important issue and these methods were deprecated as much by the supporters of Woman's Suffrage as by the opponents. The supporters, however, used militancy as an argument to show the injustice on the government's part in denying women political rights. See a speech by Philip Snowden, Labour M.P. for Blackburn in: House of Commons Debates, Vol. 185, 4th Series, 1908, C265-270. Hereafter H.C. Deb. Vol. 185, 4S, 1908, C265-270.

the subject which this thesis will consider. It is hoped that a study of these policies will shed some light on the subsequent deterioration of the Woman's Suffrage issue into violent confrontation. The policy adopted was basically contrary to the women's demands, for Asquith, like Campbell-Bannerman before him, left the question to be decided by the free vote of each individual member of both the Commons and the Cabinet. The Asquith ministry was prepared only to grant parliamentary time for the consideration of private member's bills favouring female suffrage, and for debating female suffrage amendments to male franchise bills. This policy meant the question would not be dealt with by government legislation and consequently left it outside the protection of party in the House of Commons. This had increasingly adverse effects. The deterioration in the situation reflected a poor political strategy which from the beginning resulted in the problem being mishandled.

Several other historians have already treated this complex problem in varying degrees and their viewpoints should be briefly reviewed. George Dangerfield attempted to show that the Woman's Suffrage question was one reason why the Liberal government began to lose its grip on the country from 1910 onwards to the war.² His analysis falls

²George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, Constable, 1936).

short in that he saw the Woman's Suffrage issue as only symptomatic of greater loss of control in other areas such as Ulster and the Labour scene and to these topics he gives greater emphasis. Consequently the suffrage issue is depicted as only a minor problem. In the writer's view this is not the case. Roger Fulford has also made a notable attempt to grapple with this issue and gives a searching and carefully constructed synthesis of the Woman's Suffrage movement from 1866 to 1918.³ However, his scope is much too broad for in depth analysis. Consequently all he offers in the 1908-14 period is a general outline, with only occasional examination of issues in detail. Constance Rover has covered the same period as Roger Fulford.⁴ Since her conclusions are invariably coloured by her fixed conviction that the government was entirely to blame and the women were always right, her study lacks objectivity.

The agitation for Woman's Suffrage which raged in Britain in the six or seven years prior to World War I is thus worthy of further investigation particularly from the

³Roger Fulford, Votes for Women (London, Faber & Faber, 1967).

⁴Constance Rover, Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain 1866-1918 (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).

point of view of the relationship of the Asquith ministry to it. It is my contention that the Woman's Suffrage question was not resolved because of the nature and character of the individuals who made up the Asquith Cabinet and who produced a weak and vacillating policy. This thesis, therefore, is directed towards determining the attitudes and opinions of the Liberal ministers, what changes they underwent as the agitation proceeded and their influence on the development of government policy in regard to Woman's Suffrage.

CHAPTER I

THE NEW LIBERAL GOVERNMENT, 1906-1908

The British general election of 1906 resulted in the triumphant return to the House of Commons of a Liberal majority unprecedented in the history of that party. Of a possible 670 seats the Liberals won 400 and their allies, the Irish Nationalists and Labour, 83 and 30 respectively.¹ The Conservatives, who had been in office since 1895, were drastically reduced to a mere 157 seats. Some of their leading figures suffered defeat including A.J. Balfour,²

¹Information concerning the returns of the 1906 general election has been taken from the following: Colin Cross, The Liberals in Power 1905-14 (London, Barrie and Rockliff, 1963), Chapter I; David Butler & Jennie Freeman, British Political Facts 1900-1968 (London, Macmillan, 1969), 3rd ed., p. 141; J.A. Thomas, The House of Commons 1906-1911 (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1958), pp. 6-12.

²Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930) Conservative M.P. for Hertford 1874-75, for East Manchester 1885-1906, for City of London 1906-22, President of Local Government Board 1885-86, Secretary for Scotland 1886-87, Chief Secretary for Ireland 1887-91, First Lord of the Treasury 1891-92, Leader of the Conservative party in the House of Commons, 1891-1902, Leader of the Conservative party 1902-11, Prime Minister 1902-05, First Lord of the Admiralty 1915-16, Foreign Secretary 1916-19, Lord President of the Council 1919-22, 1925-29.

the Prime Minister from 1902 to 1905. He had resigned from office in December, prior to the election being called. His Liberal successor was Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman,³ a reserved and timid politician, who came to power with newly discovered energy and set the scene for one of the most dramatic and complex eras of change in English history.

When Parliament convened on February 20, 1906 it provided tangible evidence that the general election had been a veritable watershed. For the first time the Commons was a largely middle-class assembly, the majority of whom worked for a living. Not unnaturally, one of the first legislative measures to be discussed was that M.P.s be paid a salary. Of the 377 Liberal M.P.s, not counting the 23 Lib-Labs who accepted the Liberal whip, 154 were businessmen, 85 were barristers and solicitors, 69 were gentlemen possessing independent means, 25 were writers and journalists and 22 were Army officers. The remaining 22 included 9 university professors, 8 trade unionists, and 5 doctors of medicine.⁴ Several members,

³Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (1836-1908) Liberal M.P. for Stirling 1868-1908, Financial Secretary War Office 1871-74, 1880-82, Secretary to Admiralty 1882-84, Chief Secretary for Ireland 1884-85, Secretary for War 1886, 1892-95, Prime Minister 1905-08, Leader of the Liberal party 1899-1908.

⁴Peter Rowland, The Last Liberal Governments; The Promised Land 1905-1910 (London, Barrie and Rockliff, 1968), p. 33.

like David Lloyd George,⁵ who had come from lower middle-class backgrounds were given Cabinet rank. The democratization of government thus manifested was carried further by the inclusion in the Cabinet of John Burns,⁶ an ardent trade unionist. In Burns the working class was directly represented at cabinet level - an indication of growing concern for the masses of the citizens. In the Conservative parliamentary party the greater number of seats were, as in the past, still held by gentlemen, businessmen and Army officers.⁷ This brought out the contrast between that party's parliamentary personnel and that of the Liberals, whose members, though composed largely of businessmen, also included many members of diverse middle-class backgrounds.

⁵David Lloyd George (1863-1945) Liberal M.P. for Caernarvon Boroughs 1890-1944, President of the Board of Trade 1905-08, Chancellor of the Exchequer 1908-15, Minister of Munitions 1915-16, Secretary for War 1916, Prime Minister 1916-22, Leader of the Liberal party 1926-31.

⁶John Burns (1858-1943) Labour M.P. for Battersea 1891-1918, President of the Local Government Board 1905-14, President of the Board of Trade 1914.

⁷According to Peter Rowland, the Conservative parliamentary party was composed of 48 "gentlemen", 32 service officers, 26 businessmen who had inherited their businesses and 13 who were self made, 21 barristers, 6 journalists and writers, 5 solicitors, 3 dons, 2 doctors of medicine and 1 accountant. Rowland, *op. cit.*, p. 46. See also: Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 30, Table IA and p. 23.

The radical change in parliamentary personnel brought about by the election was emphasized by the appearance of religious non-conformists in record numbers. An institution traditionally dominated by members of the established church now saw increased political influence wielded by the dissenting churches. Sixty-five Congregationalists, 56 Methodists, 18 Baptists, 10 Unitarians, 6 Quakers, and 3 Presbyterians were to be found in the parliamentary ranks, especially those of the Liberal Party.⁸ The election of 318 new members never before returned to Parliament reflected changing social conditions.⁹

The new initiatives in government which soon became evident resulted also from changing circumstances which from the 1890s began to manifest themselves in British society and politics generally. The rising power of workers coupled with increased middle-class concern about the conditions of the working class produced a new social consciousness. The increasing influence of trade unionism plus the more wide-spread development of socialist societies, like the Fabian Society, gave impetus to this awakening concern for the once neglected lower classes.

⁸Cross, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

⁹The new members, by Peter Rowland's calculations, consisted of 220 Liberals, 46 Unionists, 25 Labour men, 14 Lib-Labs and 13 Irish Nationalists. Rowland, op. cit., p. 31.

A number of social reformers in particular aroused the conscience of the middle class, among them, J.R. Rowntree,¹⁰ Charles Booth,¹¹ Sidney and Beatrice Webb,¹² C.F.G. Masterman¹³ and G.B. Shaw.¹⁴ They brought to public attention the results of private and parliamentary investigations of living conditions in the working class areas of the cities which awakened deep concern over the deplorable facts revealed.

As early as 1903 steps had been taken by the Liberal party to secure the goodwill of the rising labour leaders. In the negotiations which began at this time and lasted up

¹⁰J.R. Rowntree (1836-1925) English manufacturer and philanthropist, established social welfare organizations, founded model village and wrote books on temperance.

¹¹Charles Booth (1840-1916) Shipowner and sociological writer. Author of Life and Labour of the People in London. Instrumental in obtaining passage of old age pensions act (1908).

¹²Sidney and Beatrice Webb.. Founders of the Fabian Society. Wrote History of Trade Unionism and The State and the Doctor, English Poor Law History.

¹³C.F.G. Masterman (1873-1927) Liberal M.P. for West Ham 1906-11, for Southwest Bethnal Green 1911-14, Parliamentary Secretary Local Government Board 1908-09, Home Undersecretary 1909-12, Financial Secretary to Treasury 1912-14. Author of The Condition of England.

¹⁴G.B. Shaw (1856-1950) Playwright, novelist and critic. Novels usually written with a socialist theme.

until the advent of the 1906 election, Herbert Gladstone,¹⁵ the Liberal chief whip, arranged with Ramsay MacDonald,¹⁶ the Secretary of the Labour Representation Committee, that no Labour candidates would contest the same seats for which Liberals were running. Gladstone in return promised that when the Liberals formed the new government, the Taff-Vale Judgement of 1901 would be reversed.¹⁷ This court decision had made unions liable to be sued for damages because of actions of their officers and it had tended to act to the detriment of the unions in industrial disputes. This MacDonald-Gladstone pact meant that the newly formed Labour party of 1906 had a position of advantage whose effectiveness was proved by the subsequent passage of the Trades Disputes bill. Further legislation which reflected the concerns of the Labour party was expected as a matter of course.

Another party in the parliament of 1906 which supported the Liberals, the Irish Nationalists, constantly

¹⁵Herbert Gladstone (1854-1930) Liberal M.P. for Leeds West 1880-1910, Viscount 1910, Financial Secretary War Office 1886, Home Undersecretary 1892-94, First Commissioner of Works 1894-95, Liberal chief whip 1899-1905, Home Secretary 1905-10, Governor-General of South Africa 1910-14.

¹⁶John Ramsay MacDonald (1866-1937) Secretary Labour Representation Committee 1900-06, Secretary Labour Party 1906-12, Leader of Labour party 1911-14, 1922-31, Labour M.P. for Leicester 1906-18.

¹⁷Cross, op. cit., pp. 20-22.

strove for opportunities to advance the cause of Home Rule. Their leader, John Redmond,¹⁸ had tried prior to the election to gain Campbell-Bannerman's aid in forwarding their cause but the latter made no promises.¹⁹ It was predictable, however, that the Irish party, over 80 strong, would be determined to make Home Rule a part of the Liberal program at every opportunity.²⁰ They were a force to be reckoned with, even though the Liberals had a majority without their support.

The Liberal government embarked on radical measures of political and social reform to deal with a rapidly changing society. Their established philosophy of liberal democracy which emphasized equal rights for all, constitutional government determined by the consent of a majority of the country and a reduction of privilege took on a new dimension which brought to the fore a new and more flexible type of politician. The middle class politician came more to the fore to deal with the needs of the middle and lower classes by the development of social reform and welfare schemes.

¹⁸John Redmond (1851-1918) Irish Nationalist M.P. for New Ross 1881-85, for North Wexford 1885-91, for Waterford 1891-1918, Chairman of the Irish Parliamentary Party 1891-1918.

¹⁹Cross, op. cit., p. 174.

²⁰For a good account of the Irish Nationalist Party's position in the 1906 Parliament see: R.H. Grätton, A Modern History of the English People 1880-1922 (London, Martin Secker, 1950), p. 698.

The program which the Liberals produced in 1906 was a good indicator of the new government's intention to meet the challenges which presented themselves. King Edward VII was apprehensive about the broad scope of the program but Campbell-Bannerman assured him it could be easily handled.²¹ It fell basically into three parts, the first of which was an attempt to satisfy pledges incurred in the course of the election itself. Industrial relations were conspicuously near the top of the list as was the plan to grant local self-government to the former Boer Republics of South Africa. Both these questions were settled immediately. The Chinese labour problem in South Africa was also successfully dealt with by the prohibition of further importation of Chinese labourers into South Africa and the repatriation of those already there as soon as their term of employment ended.²²

The second area involved forwarding the long standing Liberal principle of equal opportunity and democratization of the franchise. To this end several

²¹J.A. Spender, The Life of the Right Honourable Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1923, 2 vols.) Vol. II, p. 210.

²²R.C.K. Ensor, England 1870-1914 (London, Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 390.

bills were presented, the most noteworthy being an education bill, an old age pensions bill and a plural voting bill. The first of these was designed to grant more equal opportunity both for education and religious training to the non-conformists.²³ The old age pensions bill resulted from the same rationale for by it the Liberals were intending to improve the position of the elderly citizens of the country. The plural voting bill for its part, displayed another aspect of Liberal political philosophy - the long standing principle of franchise reform along democratic lines. The eventual end in mind here was that there be one man, one vote. The third area also reflected the new government's concern for the common people, for Royal Commissions were set up to deal with more minor issues such as meals for school children, miners' hours and industrial diseases.

As the individual pieces of legislation were considered, complications arose and were worsened by the results of a debate on March 12, 1906 over a resolution in favour of Free Trade. Balfour, the leader of the opposition, who had just been returned in a by-election for the City of London, attempted to state evasively his party's position on the issue when Campbell-Bannerman jumped up and shouted that the House had had enough of his

²³Rowland, op. cit., pp. 76-77.

foolery. He demanded that Balfour present a resolution or sit down.²⁴ This was the end of any co-operation which might have been contemplated between the government and the opposition and the predominantly conservative House of Lords began to obstruct legislation. The education bill, which passed the Commons after a very heated controversy, with a majority of 192, was so riddled with amendments in the Lords that it was literally destroyed.²⁵ The plural voting bill was rejected outright by the Lords.²⁶

In rejecting the plural voting bill, the Lords struck at a very important item in the Liberal franchise policy. During the nineteenth century Liberal efforts had been concentrated in three basic areas of electoral reform and each reflected the party's own interests.²⁷ Qualification was the first of these areas and here the Liberals were interested primarily in eliminating plural voting and in extending the franchise to the middle and lower classes. In the past the qualification regulation had

²⁴ Ensor, op. cit., p. 391.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 393.

²⁶ Homer Morris, Parliamentary Franchise Reform in England from 1885-1918 (New York, Longmans and Green Co., 1921), p. 22.

²⁷ For a good, brief discussion of the Liberal franchise reform policy see Morris, op. cit., pp. 10-12.

always favoured the rich and the landed since the franchise for the most part was based on a property qualification.

Registration, or in more precise terms, the waiting period before a new arrival in a constituency could become qualified to vote, was also a cause for Liberal concern. As it stood the regulation bore heavily against the more migratory voter, usually found in the lower classes, and the majority of these voters were thought to vote usually for Liberal candidates. Consequently any disabilities connected with the waiting period should be reduced.

Redistribution of parliamentary seats according to population was the last part of the Liberal program for electoral reform. As no steps in this area had been taken since 1884-85, the need for redistribution was now pressing. This could be done with a view to party advantage and would also carry on the liberal tradition of democratization of the franchise.

The plural voting bill of 1906 provided that a person registered as a parliamentary voter in more than one constituency could vote only in the one which he selected as his voting place.²⁸ When even this measure

²⁸ Morris, op. cit., p. 17.

was so swiftly cut off by the Lords, the Liberals became indignant. Campbell-Bannerman sensed immediately that this boded ill for future franchise legislation and advocated a dissolution on the issue of The Lords vs. The People.²⁹ The expense of another election, however, coupled with the reluctance of the new ministry to again appeal to the country, forbade any such action and the problem was left to be dealt with at a later date.

Closely related to Liberal franchise policy of course, was the question of Woman's Suffrage. While the Lords were busy rejecting the plural voting bill, the proponents of Woman's Suffrage were reviving their demands and presenting them to the Liberal government. The revival of these demands, however, was ill-timed. The fact that novel departures were being taken by the Liberals in almost every political sphere did not necessarily mean that they would embrace Woman's Suffrage. No parliamentary party was willing to adopt Woman's Suffrage as policy and the fact that the Liberals were committed to the reform of the existing electorate did not include female enfranchisement. As soon as Campbell-Bannerman was confronted with the issue he made it an open question to be decided on its own merits by each individual member.³⁰ In doing this Campbell-Bannerman

²⁹Cross, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

³⁰Norris, op. cit., pp. 39-40.

adopted a policy which worked to the detriment of the women's wishes. W.E. Gladstone, the noted Victorian Liberal Prime Minister had been a determined opponent of Woman's Suffrage on the grounds that it would trespass upon the "delicacy of her own nature," and during his terms of office he did all in his power to de-emphasize the issue.³¹ Rosebery, Gladstone's successor, had been no more helpful for during his premiership Woman's Suffrage did not even obtain a parliamentary hearing.³² When the Liberal party was again returned to power in 1906 the women of Britain were still without the parliamentary vote.

The initial agitation for women's political emancipation had originated with John Stuart Mill in 1867.³³ During discussion on the Reform bill of that year Mill had attempted to have a Woman's Suffrage amendment appended but it was rejected by a majority of 123 votes. Similar attempts over the intervening years met with the same fate. The reasons why women were denied political recognition were numerous, not the least of which was woman's very precarious and often contradictory social position. It was

³¹Rover, op. cit., pp. 118-20.

³²Ibid.

³³Morris, op. cit., p. 28.

in the social position held by women that the fundamental argument against Woman's Suffrage lay.³⁴

In Victorian England women had restricted legal status. What recognition they had attained up to the turn of the century was only a result of prolonged agitation. Such notable figures as A.V. Dicey³⁵ with his publication of Letters to a Friend on Votes for Women, which opposed the suffragists' view, or indeed women themselves such as Beatrice (Potter) Webb emphasized the subordinate position of the female sex. Property and earnings all belonged to her husband or some other male and even the children she might, and generally did bear, were the father's exclusive property. A woman could sign no contract, make no will, cast no vote nor do very little save obey her father's or

³⁴For information on woman's social, economic, intellectual and political position at the turn of the century consult Duncan Crow, The Victorian Woman (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1971); Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968); Robert Cecil, Life in Edwardian England (London, B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1969); J.A. and Olive Banks, Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England (London, Liverpool University Press, 1964); Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957); Sir Charles Petrie, The Victorians, (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961); Simon Nowell-Smith (ed.), Edwardian England 1901-1914 (London, Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 45-101.

³⁵A.V. Dicey (1835-1922) English Jurist, Author of The Law of the Constitution 1885; a standard work, also Law and Public Opinion in England, 1905.

husband's bidding.³⁶ As Duncan Crow states in his study, The Victorian Woman, she was unimportant as compared to the male, bound by every social convention of the time and consequently at a very severe disadvantage.³⁷

Woman's position of inferiority was readily accepted by many males and apparently was not objected to by a great number of women themselves. The significant attempts made by Florence Nightingale,³⁸ Annie Besant,³⁹ and Josephine Butler⁴⁰

³⁶Crow, op. cit., Chapter 15, The Revolt of Women.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 51-52.

³⁸Florence Nightingale was one of the few women who through sheer force of will managed to break conventional bonds and went into nursing. Her subsequent activities in that area and particularly the role she played in the Crimean War, nursing the wounded, gained her world wide recognition.

³⁹Annie Besant was a free thinker associated with materialists like Charles Bradlaugh, an agitator in radical political circles; a feminist, an early convert to Fabian Socialism through the agency of G.B. Shaw; an author-editor-publisher and the first prominent woman to fight openly for Birth Control. It was in the latter area that she became world renowned.

⁴⁰Josephine Butler is remembered mainly because of her attempts to have the Contagious Diseases Acts repealed. The acts stated that any woman, in garrison towns, suspected of prostitution could be forced by the proper authorities to undergo a medical examination to determine whether she was infected with a contagious disease in the venereal sense. If so she was liable to be hospitalized until the problem was cleared up. To Josephine Butler this was "an outrage on the sacred rights of womanhood" and after prolonged agitation the acts were repealed in 1886.

to defy traditional norms were fraught with obstacles and despite their valiant efforts in areas such as medicine and social welfare, very little had been done by the turn of the century in the way of political emancipation. By that time, women, as a result of prolonged agitation, could take part in certain aspects of municipal government, obtain an advanced education at Girton College and hold clerical positions in the commercial world. By 1893 women could even own property in their own right and hold or dispose of it without the intervention of a trustee.⁴¹ Still though, the door to parliamentary representation was shut against them and the House of Commons remained an exclusively male club.

Those who opposed Woman's Suffrage in 1900 still included not a few M.P.s who clung stubbornly to traditional standards.⁴² Assent was grudgingly given to progress which had already been achieved but a resolute stand was taken against women voting in parliamentary elections. In a word, to the Edwardian as well as to the Victorian, it was only natural for women to be ignored when questions

⁴¹Crow, op. cit., p. 251.

⁴²A.J. Priestley in his book, The Edwardians, wrote: "I find myself believing that the Edwardians were far more inclined to combine other beliefs, prejudices, fads with their politics than people were later. This was part of the stir and ferment of the era." Obviously this contention could be extended to incorporate women as well as politics. A.J. Priestley, The Edwardians (London, Heinemann, 1970), p. 121.

relating to the franchise were considered.⁴³ It was no doubt the intention of the Liberal Government to continue ignoring female suffrage as long as possible.

This, however, the suffragists would not tolerate and after the turn of the century renewed attempts were made to have the question brought to public attention more forcefully. The suffrage societies, which had been in existence for some time, were reactivated. The first of these, the London National Society for Woman's Suffrage, had been founded in 1867 when John Stuart Mill had attempted to secure parliamentary approval of its demands.⁴⁴ After Mill's abortive attempt the L.N.S.W.S. had been almost dormant up to 1900 when it came into public prominence once again. The society demanded equal electoral rights for women with men and as it adopted reasonable non-violent methods, the adherents of that society were called "constitutionalists." A number of branch societies also sprang up independently in Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol and Edinburgh but by 1897 all had federated with the L.N.S.W.S. to form the National Union of Woman's Suffrage

⁴³J.A. Spender, Great Britain: Empire and Commonwealth 1886-1935 (London, Cassell and Co., 1935), p. 436.

⁴⁴Rover, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

Societies.⁴⁵ The leader of this new society was Millicent Garrett Fawcett,⁴⁶ the widow of a former Liberal cabinet minister, Henry Fawcett. The society continued under her leadership up to 1914.

The N.U.W.S.S., however, was not the only woman's suffrage society nor was it the most influential. In 1903 Emmeline Pankhurst,⁴⁷ the widow of a Manchester lawyer, established an organization that was to play the dominant role in the politics of Woman's Suffrage up until 1914. The Woman's Social and Political Union, as it was called, had as its motto a simple slogan, "deeds not words" and to the implementation of that slogan Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, devoted their lives.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶There is a good account of Mrs. Fawcett's life and activities in: Ray Strachey, The Cause: A Short History of the Woman's Movement in Great Britain, (New York, Kennikat Press, 1928 reprint 1969).

⁴⁷For an account of Emmeline Pankhurst's life and activities see: Sylvia Pankhurst, The Life of Emmeline Pankhurst, (London, Wiener Laurie, 1935); Emmeline Pankhurst, My Own Story (London, Eveleigh Nash, 1914); Dudley Barker, Prominent Edwardians (New York, Atheneum, 1969).

⁴⁸For an account of how this devotion was displayed see: Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals (London, Longman's Green & Co., 1931).

The policy of the W.S.P.U. was one of militancy carried out by contacting all members of parliament who could be reached to demand to know what their attitude was towards Woman's Suffrage. If the response was favourable they would support the member; if not they would do all in their power to bring about his defeat. As new departures were being taken in politics in general around 1900, so too did a new departure occur in the way women pressed their demands.

The W.S.P.U. policy was put to the test for the first time in Manchester during the election campaign of 1906. Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenny, a Manchester millhand, caused a considerable disturbance at a pre-election meeting which featured Sir Edward Grey⁴⁹ and Winston Churchill⁵⁰ as the principal speakers. The women

⁴⁹Sir Edward Grey (1862-1933), Liberal M.P. for Berwick on Tweed 1885-1916, Foreign Undersecretary 1892-95, Foreign Secretary 1905-16.

⁵⁰Winston Spencer Churchill (1874-1965), Conservative M.P. for Oldham 1900-05, joined Liberal party 1904, Liberal M.P. for North West Manchester 1906-08, Dundee 1908-22, Conservative M.P. for Epping 1924-25, Undersecretary for Colonies 1905-08, President Board of Trade 1908-10, Home Secretary 1910-11, First Lord of Admiralty 1911-15, Chancellor Duchy of Lancaster, 1915, Minister of Munitions 1917, Secretary for War and Air 1919-21, Secretary for Colonies 1921-22, Chancellor of the Exchequer 1924-29, First Lord of Admiralty 1939-40, Prime Minister 1940-45, 1951-55.

several times tried to interrupt the speakers to query them as to their attitude towards Woman's Suffrage and as to whether the Liberal party would enfranchise women should that party come to power. Almost immediately they were ejected from the hall. Undaunted, however, the women attempted to set up a protest meeting in the courtyard outside, with the result that they were arrested. When the two women refused to be bound over or to pay their fines, they were imprisoned and profited considerably from the publicity.⁵¹ This incident set the pattern and in the Manchester area it was soon commonplace for aspiring M.P.s to be approached by persistent women suffragists who asked the same questions.

From Manchester the agitation spread to London and the tactics of the women intensified. Demonstrations, mass meetings, deputations to the House of Commons and heckling of M.P.s became the order of the day and it became increasingly obvious that this time the women were more determined than ever to make themselves heard. M.P.s devised their own particular methods of dealing as best they could with the expected confrontations and a whole series of arguments were advanced to substantiate the anti-suffragist point of view.

The most famous of these arguments and by far the most popular after the turn of the century was the

⁵¹Barker, op. cit., pp. 192-93.

"physical force" argument - the idea that women by their very nature were excluded from military service and therefore not suited to political life.⁵² Government, it was claimed, was based primarily on the ability to exercise force and women, being less strong both physically and mentally than men, could play no part in defending their country or in managing its affairs. To many this argument was conclusive. One of its chief proponents was Lewis Harcourt,⁵³ Campbell-Bannerman's First Commissioner of Works.

Another group depended on the "physiology" argument which held that men and women's natural roles were determined by their sex. It was man's predetermined responsibility to govern the country while it was the woman's task to look after his physical needs. The proponents of this argument, one of whom was H.H. Asquith,⁵⁴

⁵²Morris, op. cit., p. 33.

⁵³Lewis Vernon Harcourt (1862-1922), Liberal M.P. for Rosendale 1904-16, First Commissioner of Works 1905-10; 1915-17, Colonial Secretary 1910-15.

⁵⁴Asquith said in the House of Commons: "I believe, having regard to the social and political expediency of such a country and an empire such as ours, it is better to maintain the distinction of sex which has always hitherto been treated as lying at the root of our parliamentary system and which has been and is recognized with exceptions trivial in number and not in any way relevant in their circumstances by all great civilized nations of the world... There is no country in the world where women are so zealously safeguarded as in this country. H.C. Deb. Vol. 19, 58, 1910, C244-254.

Campbell-Bannerman's successor, felt that the separate spheres of activity of the two sexes should be maintained at all costs. In their view the House of Commons was and should remain an exclusive male preserve.

All anti-suffragists felt that the pro-suffragists were making uncalled for demands. They went to great pains to relate the tremendous progress that had been made advancing the status of women in the fields of education, medicine and commerce and they put forth arguments to show how admirable the present position of women was. Female participation in municipal government was praised and it was claimed that issues which were particularly relevant to women such as divorce hearings, child welfare and domestic affairs in general were decided in accordance with women's requests.⁵⁵ Thus women did not need the vote to better their position.

What was obvious from all these arguments was the reluctance of men to consider seriously what the women were demanding. Very often individual M.P.s would put forth views which contained elements of all three arguments. It was often not that they did not want women to have political rights but rather that they felt they were better off without them. Even among those who agreed that

⁵⁵For a speech embodying some of these ideas see: Sir Randal Cremer, Liberal M.P. for Shoreditch, Hoggerston, H.C. Deb. Vol. 185, 58, 1908, 0270-276.

females should be enfranchised there was considerable disagreement on the extent to which this should take place. Quite a few of those who favoured the cause did so only because, as the Times said in 1913, it was the sporting thing for the twentieth century politician to do.⁵⁶ This attitude towards the issue retarded rather than forwarded the movement.

Campbell-Bannerman proved to be a classic example of this type of "sporting" supporter for when he was confronted with the issue shortly after he came to power he adopted a tolerant sympathetic attitude towards the women.⁵⁷ He referred to himself as a supporter of Woman's Suffrage but took no positive action either personally or officially. The consequences were predictable. The W.S.P.U. suffragists, now called "militants"⁵⁸ because of their tactics, became more militant and the government became more obdurate. Campbell-Bannerman made the question an open one as referred to earlier and each member was left free to vote and speak on the issue as he saw fit.

⁵⁶Times, January 24, 1913, p. 8.

⁵⁷Rowland, op. cit., p. 113.

⁵⁸This name was used during the period alternately with the title "Suffragettes" which the Daily News gave the women in February 1906. This was to distinguish them from the "Constitutionalists", Mrs. Fawcett's group.

This policy was adopted because opinion on the subject ran across party lines and was divided even in the Cabinet. In Asquith's subsequent administration a similar policy was adopted for the same reasons but Asquith's own personal opposition to Woman's Suffrage made the possibility of success for the movement even more remote.⁵⁹ Compromise became daily less possible and consequently tensions mounted.

In 1906 Woman's Suffrage seemed to have already reached an impasse, as the Liberals were divided both on the party and Cabinet level over the issue. The women, however, persisted in exerting as much pressure as they could with their available resources. The other parliamentary parties offered little basis for optimism and in fact were generally more opposed than the Liberal party. The Conservatives, when they had been in power before 1905, had always been inclined to oppose Woman's Suffrage. The rank and file of the party were known to be strongly

⁵⁹L.C.B. Seaman concedes the fact that the policy adopted by the Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith Cabinets led to the failure of Woman's Suffrage. He argues that after 1906 "the formidable Mrs. Pankhurst was put in a position to exploit the situation created by the government's evasions" and that there was little excuse for the way in which the Government sustained its refusal to concede to the Suffragist's demands. See: L.C.B. Seaman, Post-Victorian Britain 1902-1951 (London Methuen and Co., 1966), p. 39.

opposed and the leaders like Salisbury and Balfour, who were disposed to favour the principle of Woman's Suffrage, declined to actively support the cause since it was viewed by them as a minor issue.⁶⁰ In fact franchise reform of any kind had seldom been advocated by the Conservative party since the status quo generally worked in its favour.

The Labourites and the Irish Nationalists did not support the suffragists for different reasons. The Labour party had just been formed and was concentrating on the demand for adult manhood suffrage.⁶¹ The preoccupation of the Irish Nationalists with Home Rule, as always, overshadowed all other issues and in fact no evidence exists that that party was even approached by the suffragists in 1906.⁶² The suffragists, then, had no alternative but to seek help from the Liberals and it was to that party that the most frequent demands were addressed. Even here, however, the best that could be achieved was the promise that the M.P.s who favoured Woman's Suffrage would bring legislation forward in the form of a private members' bill.

⁶⁰Rover, op. cit., p. 103.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 146-47.

⁶²Ibid., p. 143-44.

No well defined and active pro-suffrage group existed in the parliament of 1906. A Liberal committee advocating Woman's Suffrage emerged after the Liberal victory at the polls but was of such slight consequence that it could exert little effective pressure.⁶³ This was in part due to the apathy of its members and also to the precarious parliamentary position of the Woman's Suffrage issue itself. The election had returned many members to parliament allegedly supporting Woman's Suffrage but in their subsequent actions these members proved themselves to be only half-heartedly committed to the cause. In the case of the Liberal Committee this was especially true for the only significant step taken by that group between 1906 and 1909 was support for Geoffrey Howard's adult suffrage bill in 1909.⁶⁴ At the end of 1909 the Liberal Committee was dissolved and the all party "Conciliation" Committee, in which the Liberals were in a majority, took its place.⁶⁵

Legislation introduced into the Commons to deal with Woman's Suffrage after 1906, then, was in the form of

⁶³Rover, op. cit., p. 138.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Morris, op. cit., p. 60.

private members bills but as previously had been the case, the results gave little cause for optimism. A bill introduced in 1907 by W.H. Dickinson,⁶⁶ a pro-suffrage Liberal, to have women enfranchised on the same terms as men was deliberately talked out. Homer Morris claims that this happened because of the Speaker's refusal to have the question put to a vote.⁶⁷ Even at this early date the more far-sighted advocates of Woman's Suffrage sensed that a long struggle was in store.⁶⁸ The women, however, continued to bring pressure to bear in every quarter. By-elections became their immediate area of concentration and everywhere aspiring candidates were constantly confronted by the women. Liberal candidates especially bore the brunt of this extension of W.S.P.U. policy. Again though, little was accomplished and the women could obtain a satisfactory response in only very scattered instances. A negative response also met their requests for meetings with ministers

⁶⁶W.H. Dickinson, Liberal M.P. for St. Pancras North.

⁶⁷Morris, op. cit., p. 44.

⁶⁸This realization came from knowledge of the usual fate of private members' bills in parliament. For a good account of the hazards which private members' bills had to overcome see: P.A. Bromhead, Private Members Bills in the British Parliament (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), pp. 28-42.

in order to learn what the government position was on the question. Asquith, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, consistently refused to receive the women's representatives as did Lloyd George, the President of the Board of Trade.⁶⁹

In 1908 a considerable breakthrough occurred. Another Woman's Suffrage bill, identical with that of 1907 and introduced by another pro-suffragist Liberal, H. Stanger,⁷⁰ came before the Commons. This bill passed second reading with a majority of 179 votes (ayes 273 - noes 94) and the suffragists rejoiced that finally Woman's Suffrage had met with at least partial success. The Labour members voted unanimously in favour of the bill and for the first time Woman's Suffrage had reached the realm of serious academic debate.⁷¹ The bill was eventually dropped, however, under pressure of other parliamentary business, early in the Asquith administration.

Legislative success was not the only outcome of the debate on this bill, for a very significant speech was delivered by a prominent member of the Cabinet. Herbert Gladstone, the Home Secretary, in pledging his support for the bill, encouraged the suffragists to use "force majeure"

⁶⁹Morris, op. cit., p. 40.

⁷⁰H. Stanger (1849-1929) Liberal M.P. for North Kensington 1906-10.

⁷¹Morris, op. cit., p. 47.

which he said was essential for all great movements to secure public support.⁷² This was interpreted by the W.S.P.U. as an appeal for greater militancy and they were now slow in complying with the advice.⁷³ This was the situation when Asquith replaced Campbell-Bannerman as Prime Minister in April of 1908.

⁷²H.C. Deb., Vol. 185, 58, 1908, C241-245.

⁷³Barker, op. cit., p. 214-15.

CHAPTER II

THE ASQUITH MINISTRY AND THE WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE QUESTION: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

When Asquith became Prime Minister the Woman's Suffrage question became a lesser political issue for some time. This change in the situation was due to several factors, most important of which was the state of the governmental program. Campbell-Bannerman had been absent from the House since November of 1907 and the Cabinet had attempted to deal with issues on an ad hoc basis. The result was that Asquith inherited a completely disorganized governmental program which had to be put back into manageable form. Several important legislative measures such as the licensing bill, the education bill and old age pensions were in various stages of passage and other bills on the agenda remained untouched.

Thus Asquith made the changeover in government as rapid as possible, deciding that changes in the Cabinet should be kept to a minimum. In this Asquith was successful and less than a month after he assumed office he presented, with the full approval of the new Chancellor

of the Exchequer, the 1908 budget.¹ What Asquith had done was to hold as many Cabinet ministers as he could in their previous offices and to re-shuffle the remainder as he saw fit. Some changes resulted as can be seen by comparing the Asquith and Campbell-Bannerman cabinets.²

Eleven cabinet ministers continued in the old offices which they had received from Campbell-Bannerman. The remaining offices were re-shuffled and three new ministers, Winston Churchill, Walter Runciman,³ and Reginald McKenna were brought in. Only one minister, Lord Elgin,⁴ was dropped being succeeded by the Earl of Crewe⁵

¹Asquith "kissed hands" at Biarritz on April 8, 1908 and on May 6, he presented the budget which he had prepared as the former Chancellor of the Exchequer.

²This table has been constructed from those found in Ensor, op. cit., pp. 612-14. See Appendix I.

³Walter Runciman (1870-1949) Liberal M.P. for Oldham 1899-1900, for Dewsbury 1902-18, for West Swansea 1924-29, for St. Ives (Liberal National) 1929-37, Viscount 1937, Parliamentary Secretary Local Government Board 1905-07, Financial Secretary to Treasury 1907-08, President of Board of Education 1908-11, President Board of Agriculture 1911-14, President Board of Trade 1914-16, and 1931-37, Lord President of the Council 1938-39.

⁴Victor Alexander Bruce, 9th Earl of Elgin (1849-1917) Treasurer of the Household 1886, Viceroy of India 1894-99, Colonial Secretary 1905-08.

⁵Robert Offley Ashburton Crewe-Milnes (1858-1945) succeeded as Baron Houghton 1885, created Earl of Crewe 1895, Marquess 1911, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland 1892-95, Lord President of the Council 1905-08, 1915-16, Lord Privy Seal 1908, 1912-15, Secretary for Colonies 1908-10, Secretary for India 1910-15, President Board of Education 1916, British Ambassador in Paris 1922-28, Secretary for War 1931.

at the Colonial office. The new Cabinet post of The First Commissioner of Works, which had been set up in 1907, was still under its original head, Lewis Harcourt.

For this new Cabinet of 1908 the task of reorganizing the governmental program proved to be a difficult one. As the government continued to press legislation forward fresh complications arose due to the opposition's increasing activity. The suffrage issue, which had received no attention since the debate on Stanger's bill of February, was shunted to the sidelines. In June 1908 the large number of amendments to the old age pensions bill used up so much parliamentary time that Stanger's bill and several other minor bills had to be dropped.⁶ The loss of Stanger's bill, however, was only one of two setbacks for the suffragists at this time. In May, prior to discussion on the pensions bill, Asquith adopted a discouraging official and personal position on the question of woman's enfranchisement.⁷ Replying to a deputation from the Liberal suffragists in the House Asquith said that the Woman's Suffrage issue still remained an open question to be decided on its own merits by each individual member of the House. Asquith thereby confirmed

⁶Rowland, op. cit., p. 157.

⁷Times, May 21, 1908, p. 10.

his adoption of Campbell-Bannerman's policy on Woman's Suffrage. In addition to this he also confirmed his own personal opposition to Woman's Suffrage and further complicated the situation by declaring that he intended to bring forward a full scale Reform bill. To this bill, provided the House so decided by a free vote, a Woman's Suffrage amendment could be appended during committee stage so that the suffragists' demands could be accommodated.

The suffrage societies denounced this proposal immediately. The W.S.P.U., under the leadership of Christabel Pankhurst, referred to Asquith's statement as a trick and demanded an immediate government measure independent of any franchise bill the government contemplated.⁸ Behind this rejection of Asquith's proposals lay several crucial considerations the most important of which was the precarious parliamentary position of Woman's Suffrage. In 1908, as in 1906, parliamentary opinion was split on the question and in the Liberal party especially this division was potentially worsened by Asquith's advent to power since he was a known opponent. Even the Cabinet were disagreed on what policy should be adopted and consequently the question was left open and outside the protection of party. It was the lack of this party protection which prodded the suffrage societies to repudiate

⁸Times, May 21, 1908, p. 10.

Asquith's statement of May 1908 since the chance of a Woman's Suffrage amendment to the Reform bill being carried on the basis of a free vote was remote. The prospects of a compromise being reached grew daily less possible and it soon became evident that the demand for the vote would bring about a confrontation between the Liberal Cabinet and the women suffragists.

The Liberal Cabinet in 1908 was divided into two camps on the question of Woman's Suffrage. The "pros", or those who felt that the women were making a just claim forwarded the cause as best they could, in spite of opposition from the ministers who disagreed. In that these conflicting opinions in the Cabinet complicated the suffrage issue and delayed its resolution an analysis of these attitudes and the men who held them is in order. Let us look first at the ministers opposed to Woman's Suffrage or as they were commonly called, the anti-suffragists. The first of these was the Prime Minister, H.H. Asquith.

Asquith⁹ was born in 1852 at Morley, Yorkshire, into the family of a Presbyterian wool manufacturer. When

⁹The account of Asquith's life is compiled from: The Earl of Asquith and Oxford, Fifty Years of Parliament, 2 vols. (London, Cassell and Co., 1926); The Earl of Asquith and Oxford, Memories and Reflections 1852-1927 2 vols. (London, Cassell and Co., 1928); Margot Asquith, Autobiography of Margot Asquith (London, Thornton and Butterworth, 1920); J.A. Spender and Cyril Asquith, Life of Herbert Henry Asquith Lord Oxford and Asquith 2 vols. (London, Hutchinson &

his father died, Asquith and his invalid mother became financially dependent on his mother's family and John Willans, his uncle, took care of his early education. In 1863 Asquith was sent to a Moravian boarding school at Fulneck, Leeds where he encountered a political philosophy which may have influenced his attitude on woman's suffrage years later. The Moravians with their literal biblical interpretation did not believe in the involvement of women in politics and even for the males, political involvement was only accepted because of the need for leadership. If the seeds of opposition to female involvement in politics were sown here then Asquith's further education in all male schools may well have strengthened this frame of mind.

In 1865 Asquith went to the City of London school. Here he kept in close touch with his mother and wrote long accounts of his visits to the House of Commons or the theatre. It was in one such letter that the first indication of his attitude towards women was recorded. Writing about an actress, Miss Robertson, he said that "she was the first woman I at all idolized. She was not

Co., 1932); Roy Jenkins, Asquith (London, Collins, 1964); The Dictionary of National Biography 1922-30; William Verity, "Haldane & Asquith," History Today, Vol. XVIII, July 1968, pp. 447-55; The Earl of Birkenhead, Contemporary Personalities (New York, Booksfor Libraries Press, 1924 reprint 1969), pp. 23-32.

really beautiful but had a most alluring voice.... But of course she was as remote as a star from one's daily life."¹⁰ Women for Asquith at this time tended to be rather remote idolized objects rather than a part of real life.

After the City of London School Asquith attended Balliol College, Oxford, there developing the debating skills for which he later became renowned. When studying law at Lincoln's Inn in 1875, he met R.B. Haldane who was even then an ardent pro-suffragist. Due to Haldane's prompting Asquith stood for East Fife in 1886 and won the seat. In 1892, he was given the Home Office in Gladstone's last government and in 1895 when parliament dissolved Asquith was already considered as a future Prime Minister.

As Home Secretary Asquith had the first of a series of encounters with the women suffragists. He joined with nineteen other members in opposing a private members' bill which attempted to enfranchise women already eligible to vote in local elections. In a speech on this bill Asquith summed up his reasons for opposing women voters. He believed that women wielded influence by personal methods and not by "associated or representative" action. Politics was not the natural sphere for women since they were better suited to the circle of social and domestic

¹⁰Jenkins, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

life.¹¹ His belief that women should find their expression in this way may well have been based on his mother's role. The "turmoil and dust of politics" which he referred to on this occasion was too grim a reality to inflict upon idealized womanhood.

Asquith's views on the position of women were probably also influenced by his first marriage. Asquith married Helen Melland in 1877, a woman of retiring disposition reluctant to take part in social activities. Helen desired to spend her time in taking care of "dear H's" health and in fact this is all she did.¹² Asquith was, at the time, very active socially and if Helen had not died prematurely in 1891, the marriage would most likely have become unbearable.¹³ Probably Asquith saw in Helen, as in his mother, the domesticity and limited interests which he assumed to be typical of women in general. Whatever the reasons behind Asquith's opposition to woman's suffrage there is no doubt that his belief that women were better suited to the domestic sphere played a major role in their formation.

¹¹Rover, op. cit., pp. 122-23.

¹²Spender and Asquith, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 43.

¹³Jenkins, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

In 1928 Asquith wrote in his Memories and Reflections that to enfranchise women meant the logical acceptance of them in the higher offices of government.¹⁴ To prevent this occurring he had supported stubbornly the idea of separate spheres of activity for men and women.

The fact that in 1894 Asquith married Margot Tennant, an energetic socialite of the time, did not alter his opinions in the least for in spite of her enthusiasm for involvement in social and intellectual activities she held the position that the actress Miss Robertson had held years before. Asquith adored Margot as the highest form of womanhood and as she herself was an ardent anti-suffragist and shared his views entirely on women's political status no conflict arose.

Asquith was hardly an oddity in his opposition to Woman's Suffrage for his attitude was shared by many of his colleagues. Lewis Harcourt,¹⁵ the First Commissioner of Works, was another anti-suffragist and by far the most zealous after 1911. Harcourt based his opposition on the belief that women were unfitted not only by training but by

¹⁴Oxford and Asquith, Memories and Reflections, Vol. I, pp. 213-14.

¹⁵The account of Harcourt's life is taken from: A.G. Gardiner, The Life of Sir William Harcourt, 2 vols. (London, Constable and Co., 1923); The Dictionary of National Biography 1922-30.

temperament for the exercise of "that political discretion which was so essential in the conduct of public affairs."¹⁶ Lewis was strongly influenced by his father Sir William Harcourt, to whom he was closely attached and under whom he had worked as private secretary when Sir William held the post of Chancellor of the Exchequer. In April of 1892 Sir William's opinion on women voters was reflected in a letter to Gladstone: "I am suffering under deluges of female correspondence which satisfy me more than ever of the total incapacity of the sex for public affairs."¹⁷ In the same year, when Sir Albert Rollit's bill was up for discussion, he placed his name on the whip which was circulated by Asquith to vote against the bill,¹⁸ writing to John Morley, "I am coming up to London on Tuesday only to vote against the women."¹⁹ A.G. Gardiner, Sir William's biographer, indicates the closeness in viewpoint between Sir William and his son when he refers to Lewis as the most effective mouthpiece that any politician could hope to have.²⁰

¹⁶Times, February 29, 1912, p. 6.

¹⁷Gardiner, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 172.

¹⁸Oxford and Asquith, Memories and Reflections, Vol. I, pp. 194-95.

¹⁹Gardiner, op. cit., Vol II, p. 174.

²⁰Ibid., p. 505.

When Lewis Harcourt later entered the House of Commons he adopted a negative attitude towards Woman's Suffrage that surpassed even that of his father. In a debate on a franchise bill in 1912, Lewis bitterly attacked Sir Edward Grey and Lloyd George for their support of the women's cause in a speech unsurpassed in its sarcasm.²¹ Lewis Harcourt, with an ancestry that stretched back to the days of the Norman Conquest²² and an anti-suffragist father, could not agree that women should have political power. Like his father, his dislike of anything radical undoubtedly reinforced his belief that women were unsuited for politics.

Reginald McKenna²³ was another Cabinet minister who opposed votes for women. His contribution to the anti-suffragist cause was impressive, especially after he became Home Secretary in 1911. McKenna was the son of a civil servant who, though a Roman Catholic, changed his religion and had his children raised as protestants. In spite of his humble beginnings McKenna received a good education and attended St. Malo, Ebersdorf and later Kings College,

²¹ H.C. Deb., Vol. 47, 58, 1913, C889-897.

²² L.G. Pine (ed.), Burke's Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage (101 ed.) (London, Burke's Peerage Ltd., 1956), pp. 1023-24.

²³ Reginald McKenna's life is compiled from: Stephen McKenna, Reginald McKenna 1863-1943 (London, Spottiswoode, 1948); The Dictionary of National Biography, 1941-50. The Earl of Birkenhead, Contemporary Personalities, pp. 215-22.

Cambridge. Politically, McKenna was a radical and under the influence of Sir Charles Dilke he fought for every new cause except Woman's Suffrage. It was in this area that he found himself closely in agreement with Asquith.

McKenna voiced his opposition many times, especially in November of 1911 shortly after he came to the Home office. In reply to a deputation he said that he was an avowed anti-suffragist on the same grounds as Asquith but he was willingly awaiting some sound argument that could turn him from his present position.²⁴ This sound argument never came and McKenna afterwards often appeared at meetings held under the auspices of the National League for opposing Woman's Suffrage.

These three men - Asquith, Harcourt and McKenna - were the main anti-suffragists in the 1908 Cabinet. At the time, their opposition to Woman's Suffrage was effective because of the general political situation and also because of the inactivity of those who favoured women voters. The government program of 1908 was dangerously overloaded and the ministers were generally agreed that the handling of government bills on the present agenda took precedence over all else. Thus, Stanger's bill was dropped without any reaction from the pro-suffragists in the Cabinet. The new ministry was obviously functioning on the premise that

²⁴Times, November 25, 1911, p. 9.

Cabinet solidarity was the primary consideration.

There were, however, several Cabinet ministers who favoured female suffrage. The most prominent of these was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George,²⁵ who had climbed from an obscure Welsh background to occupy the second most coveted position in the country. He was the type of man who one would expect to be found in the forefront of unpopular causes, for from his early boyhood in Wales he was radically inclined. He had been raised by a devoted uncle, a Baptist preacher and cobbler, who instilled into his stubborn head the rudiments of Latin and French so as to ready him for the law. Through sheer determination Lloyd George attained his goal and was elected to parliament at age 27 for Caernarvon Boroughs. He was completely dedicated to the improvement of the lower classes from which he came and also supported the enfranchisement of women.

In November of 1908 Lloyd George fully explained why he was a supporter of Woman's Suffrage. He believed that the political enfranchisement of women was not only

²⁵Lloyd George's life has been compiled from: Frank Owen, Tempestuous Journey - Lloyd George His Life and Times (London, Hutchinson & Co., 1954); Richard Lloyd George, Lloyd George (London, Frederick Muller Ltd., 1960); T.E. Raymond, Mr. Lloyd George (New York, George H. Doran Co., 1922); Thomas Jones, Lloyd George (London, Oxford University Press, 1951); The Dictionary of National Biography 1941-50; Lucy Masterman, "Recollections of Lloyd George" Part I and II, History Today, March 1959, Vol. IX, pp. 160-67 and April 1959, pp. 274-81; The Earl of Birkenhead, Contemporary Personalities, pp. 33-42.

fair, but just, equitable and essential to the interests of the State. While formerly the lower sections of society had been unable to speak effectively for themselves, women would contribute the compassion and interest that was needed to understand some of the problems that weighed so heavily on this class.²⁶

Sylvia Pankhurst saw many contradictions in Lloyd George's position. Summing up his role during the more hectic days of the controversy she wrote that "Lloyd George was making an unsuccessful attempt to gather the sweets of two worlds; to win laurels as the heroic champion of woman's suffrage without jeopardizing his place in a Cabinet headed by an anti-suffragist Prime Minister."²⁷ There is some injustice in her appraisal for many times Lloyd George incurred the anger of important people by his support of Woman's Suffrage. One of these was King Edward VII. In December of 1908 Francis Knollys, the King's private secretary, wrote a stinging letter to Asquith concerning Lloyd George. The King, having seen in the Times that Lloyd George intended chairing a pro-suffrage meeting in the Albert Hall, declared that he would have

²⁶'One of the Rank and File,' "Mr. Asquith and the Women's Liberal Federation", Westminster Review, Vol. 174, November 1910, pp. 508-13.

²⁷Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement, p. 350.

"no more to do with him than was absolutely necessary."²⁸ Considering that Lloyd George was Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time, such action might have been inconvenient. Asquith accordingly asked Lloyd George not to preside over the meeting, though he did attend and spoke in favour of Woman's Suffrage. This incident, however, and several others like it developed into a pattern as Lloyd George, for the remainder of the controversy, tried to steer a course between the conflicting sides. On the one hand he tried to maintain good relations with his Cabinet colleagues and on the other he attempted to help the women also. In some cases he was successful, in others he failed.

In Sir Edward Grey,²⁹ the suffragists had another staunch ally whose support was often equal to that of Lloyd George. Of a prominent aristocratic family of the north of England, Grey was a direct descendant of the Lord Grey of the 1832 Reform Bill and was related also to Lord Durham, the advocate of responsible government in the colonies.

²⁸Rowland, op. cit., p. 157.

²⁹Sir Edward Grey's life is compiled from: Keith Robbins, Sir Edward Grey - a Biography of Lord Grey of Fallodon (London, Cassell, 1971); Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Twenty-five Years 1892-1916, 2 vols. (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1925); George McCauley Trevelyan, Grey of Fallodon, The Life and Letters of Sir Edward Grey Afterwards Viscount Grey of Fallodon (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937); The Dictionary of National Biography, 1931-40; The Earl of Birkenhead, Contemporary Personalities, pp. 163-73.

In early life he did not show enthusiasm or interest in anything except bird watching and fly fishing, and his educational career at Temple Grove, Winchester and later at Balliol College was undistinguished. In 1885, however, a very significant event occurred, for in October he married Dorothy Widdrington of Newton Hall. It was due to her influence that he became an ardent pro-suffragist. In 1906, when the suffrage issue was coming to the fore in British politics, Lady Grey was among those who sympathized with the women's demands. When her husband was heckled at a pre-election rally in Manchester by Annie Kenny and Christabel Pankhurst, her response had been, "What else could they do."³⁰ Later in the year Lady Grey was thrown from her carriage and mortally injured. Keith Robbins, Grey's latest biographer, indicates that this was the point of total conversion to suffragism for Grey and "as a debt to a memory" he began to advocate publicly Woman's Suffrage from then onwards.³¹

Grey's initial attempts, however, were "behind the scenes" as in 1907 and 1908 he tried to prod Asquith

³⁰Pankhurst, The Suffragette Movement, p. 190.

³¹Robbins, op. cit., p. 248.

into action so as to forestall further violence.³² In 1911 C.P. Scott of the Manchester Guardian saw Grey as "by far the bigger man in relation to the suffrage issue."³³ Grey was, however, more restrained than Lloyd George in his approach to the suffrage question and in fact disliked the style of the Welshman's oratorical appeals.³⁴ He preferred to gain his objectives in his own restrained, conversational method of public speech and thereby became a notable ally to the suffragists.

Herbert Gladstone³⁵ was yet another advocate of Woman's Suffrage who deserves careful consideration. Herbert was the youngest son of the famous W.E. Gladstone. Educated at Eton and later at University College, Oxford, he entered parliament for Leeds in 1880. During the ensuing years he held office in several government departments and in 1905 became Home Secretary in the Campbell-Bannerman administration, in which post he

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., p. 247.

³⁴The Dictionary of National Biography 1931-40, p. 372.

³⁵Gladstone's life is compiled from: Rowland, The Last Liberal Governments; Roger Fulford, Votes for Women; The Dictionary of National Biography 1922-30.

remained until appointed as the first Governor General of South Africa in 1910.

While at the Home Office Gladstone came into almost constant contact with the suffragists as it was his responsibility to curb their militancy. His task was a delicate one, but from the first he insisted on law and order while favouring the principle of Woman's Suffrage. As early as 1906, he spoke in favour of a resolution by Keir Hardie that sex should cease to be a bar to the exercise of the parliamentary franchise.³⁶ In 1908, as we have seen earlier, when Stanger's bill was being debated he took a significant stand in favour.³⁷ As it happened though, his obvious sympathies with Woman's Suffrage increasingly alienated powerful figures in the Cabinet and in 1910 as a consequence of his failure to control the increasingly militant women, he was appointed as Governor General of South Africa.³⁸ Gladstone's role in the controversy over Woman's Suffrage came to a premature end but his work had helped to keep the cause in the public eye.

³⁶ Annual Register, 1906, p. 103.

³⁷ H.C. Deb., Vol. 185, 5S, 1908, C241-245.

³⁸ Rowland, op. cit., pp. 106 and 265.

R.B. Haldane³⁹ was another conspicuous pro-suffragist minister. Due to his advanced training at Gottingen University in Germany he usually approached the issue in a philosophical vein. He developed a strong personal relationship with Asquith in the course of their legal studies and on all issues except Woman's Suffrage both were agreed. Millicent Fawcett, the leader of the Constitutionalists, considered him as pledged to the fulfillment of the women's demands.⁴⁰ In May of 1909, speaking to a pro-suffrage deputation, Haldane publicly declared that Woman's Suffrage was in keeping with the trends of the age and it was only a matter of time until women would be fully accepted as voters.⁴¹

Lloyd George, Grey, Gladstone and Haldane were the true "pros" in the 1908 Cabinet and even though their opinions were not overly publicized outside the government they made inevitable deep dissension over the issue of Woman's

³⁹Haldane's life is compiled from: R.B. Haldane, Autobiography (New York, Doubleday Doran and Co., 1929); Roy Jenkins, Asquith (London, Collins, 1964); The Dictionary of National Biography 1922-30; William Verity, op. cit., The Earl of Birkenhead, Contemporary Personalities, pp. 75-82.

⁴⁰M.G. Fawcett, The Suffrage Movement (London, T.C. and E.C. Jack, 1911), p. 9.

⁴¹Times, May 24, 1909, p. 10.

Suffrage in the Cabinet. After Gladstone left the scene Lloyd George, Grey and Haldane pressed their views more forcefully on the rest of the Cabinet as the vanguard of the pro-suffragists.

The Cabinet, however, was not merely composed of pro and anti-suffragists, for quite early in the period under consideration Winston Churchill and Augustine Birrell became conspicuous for their middle of the road positions on the issue. Churchill⁴² was by far the most prominent of the two and as he held the post of Home Secretary in 1910 and 1911, his views were especially important. After a series of military adventures which took him to Africa and Asia and which he brought to public attention in several books, Churchill succeeded in 1900 in being elected as a Conservative member for Oldham. In 1904 during the controversy over Chamberlain's proposals for tariff reform and Imperial preference Winston crossed the House to sit on the Liberal benches. He was appointed in 1906 Under-Secretary for

⁴²Churchill's life is compiled from: Winston Churchill, My Roving Commission (London, Thornton and Butterworth, 1930); R.S. Churchill, Winston Churchill, Vol. II Young Statesman 1901-1914 and Companion Part III (London, Heinemann, 1967); A.J.F. Taylor, (ed.), Churchill Revised (New York, Dial Press, 1969); Robert Rhodes James, Churchill: A Study in Failure 1900-1939 (London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1970); Lucy Masterman, "Churchill: The Liberal Phase," Part I and II History Today, Vol. XIV, March 1964, pp. 741-47 and December 1964, pp. 820-27; The Earl of Birkenhead, Contemporary Personalities, pp. 113-23.

Colonies in the Campbell-Bannerman government and in 1908 was raised to Cabinet rank by Asquith who gave him the presidency of the Board of Trade.

On the ~~suffrage~~ issue Churchill appeared to be a supporter because it was the sporting thing to do. The exigencies of the moment were more influential in converting him to the cause than was his educational or professional background. In 1908 Churchill spoke on the suffrage issue for the first time. In view of the fact that he was standing for re-election in Manchester upon being taken into the Asquith Cabinet his speech was naturally attuned to the political needs of the moment. To the women in his audience he said, "Trust me ladies, I am your friend and will be your friend in the cabinet. I will do my best as and when occasion offers because I think sincerely that women have always had a logical cause."⁴³ Churchill's support of Woman's Suffrage was apparently unquestionable at the time but by 1911 his position had changed radically. When the delayed Reform bill of 1908 was again being considered he was writing to Grey that he would oppose him in his attempts to put Woman's Suffrage in an amendment to that bill.⁴⁴ Churchill's own personality played a

⁴³Rover, op. cit., p. 132.

⁴⁴R.S. Churchill, op. cit., Companion Part III, Vol. II, WSC to Sir E. Grey, 20 December 1911, p. 1474.

significant part in bringing about this change.

From the beginning of his membership in the Asquith Cabinet Churchill was subject to the same public interruptions as were the rest of his colleagues. For him public harrassment was going much too far. Lloyd George realized this as much as did the Militants and in a discussion with C.P. Scott in December of 1911, admitted that Churchill was "very put out by such disturbances."⁴⁵ Churchill's sympathies cooled still further when he went to the Home Office after Gladstone's resignation. Here he had to cope with the newly adopted policy of rock-throwing and vandalism of the W.S.P.U. and his attitude hardened against the women all the more.⁴⁶ Consequently when Woman's Suffrage came up for consideration in 1910 and 1911 Churchill was always found in the ranks of those opposed. As A.J.P. Taylor says, Churchill could only bargain with

⁴⁵Trevor Wilson, (ed.), The Political Diaries of G.P. Scott 1911-28 (London, Collins & Co., 1970), p. 58.

⁴⁶The further "hardening" of Churchill's attitude stemmed, at this time also, from the fact that militancy against him personally was intensified. In 1909 and subsequently his meetings in the Lancashire area were noted for the elaborate precautions taken against possible disturbances and very often women were only allowed to attend his meetings by giving pledges to keep quiet. See: P.F. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism (Cambridge, University Press, 1971), pp. 119-20.

any dissident from his view when he himself was in a strong position⁴⁷ but the women continually kept one step ahead of him by intensifying their tactics. Thus Churchill's opposition to Woman's Suffrage stemmed more from personal rather than political factors.

Augustine Birrell⁴⁸ was another minister who began as an advocate of Woman's Suffrage but ended up being an opponent. The son of a Baptist minister, Birrell was educated at Amersham Hall school and Trinity College, Cambridge. Quite early in life he displayed an aptitude for writing and later became an accomplished author. In 1889 he was elected for West Fife, a district adjacent to that held by Asquith in East Fife. Of the many government posts he held, he is most remembered for his Secretaryship of Ireland from 1907 to 1915 which ultimately was the cause of his political undoing.

As far as Woman's Suffrage was concerned Birrell favoured what he called a moderate solution - the enfranchisement of widows and single women only. Married women were to be excluded since they were already well represented by their husbands who had the parliamentary

⁴⁷Taylor, op. cit., p. 19.

⁴⁸Birrell's life is compiled from: Leon O'Broin, The Chief Secretary: Augustine Birrell in Ireland (Hamden, Archon Books, 1970); The Dictionary of National Biography, 1931-40.

vote. As early as 1905 Birrell was answering questions positively in respect to women's enfranchisement and at a meeting of the National Liberal Federation in May of 1905, he said that he personally had no doubt that before long it would be possible to submit a resolution on the subject to the Federation's council. He added, "the sooner that time comes, the better."⁴⁹ In reply to a deputation in October of 1908 he said he was still and always had been in favour of the admission of widows and single women to the franchise.⁵⁰ In 1911, however, Birrell declared that he could no longer support Woman's Suffrage. The immediate reason for this change of mind was an attack made upon his person by the militants during which his knee was badly injured. C.P. Scott, the editor of the Manchester Guardian, was left with the conviction that no active support could be looked for from him.⁵¹ Birrell's change of heart is perhaps justifiable for it would require a considerably devoted supporter to have accepted the militants' illogical attack on even those ministers who supported their cause.

The ministers referred to thus far were major figures in the Woman's Suffrage controversy from 1908 to 1914.

⁴⁹Rover, op. cit., pp. 138-39.

⁵⁰Times, October 24, 1908, p. 14.

⁵¹Wilson, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

However, most of the remaining ministers of the Cabinet were active from time to time. When legislation came to a vote they were almost invariably found in the division lobbies. Thus when the ~~suffrage~~ issue hovered on the brink of success as it did in 1910 and 1913 their position was quite important.

John Morley⁵² and Sydney Buxton⁵³ were only superficially concerned with the ~~suffrage~~ issue for while both approved Woman's Suffrage in principle, neither took a resolute stand. Morley particularly kept aloof from the heated discussions which the question generated⁵⁴ and Buxton only sporadically voiced his opinion in favour of the principle of Woman's Suffrage. When the ~~suffrage~~ issue

⁵²John Morley (1838-1923) Liberal M.P. for Newcastle on Tyne 1883-95, for Montrose Boroughs 1896-1908, Viscount Morley 1908, Chief Secretary for Ireland 1886 and 1892-95, Secretary for India 1905-10, Lord President of the Council 1910-14.

⁵³Sydney Buxton (1853-1934) Liberal M.P. for Peterborough 1883-85, for Poplar Division of the Tower Hamlets from 1886 to 1914. Undersecretary for Colonies 1892-95, Postmaster General with seat in Cabinet 1905-10, Privy Council 1905, President of Board of Trade 1910.

⁵⁴In his book on Morley, John H. Morgan claims that Morley's interest in the Woman's Suffrage issue was "a purely intellectual sympathy"; he did not cultivate the society of women, and there can have been few who could really claim his friendship. See: John H. Morgan, John, Viscount Morley (London, John Murray, 1924), p. 21.

developed into a serious political crisis during 1910 and after Buxton in fact began to speak against woman's enfranchisement, giving militancy as his reason for his change of mind.

Walter Runciman and John Burns occasionally added their support to the opponents' ranks. In Runciman's case this opposition stemmed from his belief that the issue was an unimportant one. When legislation was being considered he voted on it according to the exigencies of the moment. Only occasionally did he display any marked interest. In 1910, however, when a conciliation bill, designed to obtain all-party support, was being discussed, Runciman opposed it because it was not democratic enough.⁵⁵

Burns professed himself to be in favour of the principle of Woman's Suffrage but his attitude changed when militancy became the main policy of the W.S.P.U. after 1906. In 1908 he denounced militancy, saying that neither he nor his colleagues would swerve from what they intended to do or not to do. Burns viewed the women's tactics as an unacceptable method of trying to bully the government into granting them the vote.

⁵⁵H.C. Deb. Vol. 19, 58, 1910, C298-305.

⁵⁶Times, May 27, 1908, p. 14.

C.E. Hobhouse,⁵⁷ J.E.B. Seely⁵⁸ and J.A. Pease⁵⁹ were opponents of Woman's Suffrage from the start. Although they did not speak at any great length on the subject their weight was felt in the division lists when suffrage bills were before the House. Occasionally they would appear at anti-suffrage demonstrations but usually their presence was the only contribution they made. In the Cabinet, however, their opposition helped to keep Woman's Suffrage from becoming government policy.

Analysis of ministerial opinion on the suffrage issue yields a number of revealing conclusions. Asquith was opposed to Woman's Suffrage and had brought his debating skills to bear against proposals for it right from the start of his early political career. As Prime Minister in 1908 he continued the long standing Liberal concern for electoral reform in the areas of manhood suffrage and

⁵⁷ Charles E. Hobhouse (1862-1941) Educated at Eton, Christ Church, Oxford, and R.M.C. Sandhurst, Liberal M.P. for West Wilts 1885-95, J.P. for Wilts. Elected for East Bristol 1900 and also 1906. Private Secretary to Colonial Office 1892-95, Financial Secretary to Treasury 1908-11, Chancellor Duchy of Lancaster 1911-14.

⁵⁸ J.E.B. Seely (1868-1947) Liberal M.P. for Abercromby, Liverpool 1906-10, for Ilkestone, Derbyshire 1910-22, for Isle of Wight 1923-24, Undersecretary Colonial Office 1908-11, War Office 1911-12, Secretary of State for War 1912-14, Undersecretary for Air 1919.

⁵⁹ J.A. Pease (1860-1943) Liberal M.P. for Tyneside 1892-1900, for Saffron Walden 1901-10, for Rotherham 1910-17, Chief Whip (Liberal) 1908, Chancellor, Duchy of Lancaster 1910-11, President Board of Education 1911-15, Postmaster General 1916.

re-distribution of seats. His attempts to fulfill these pledges helped to sidetrack the woman's suffrage issue and this was facilitated by the fact that the suffrage issue tended to erupt only at intervals and was often viewed as a "passing mania".⁶⁰ The slight concession which Asquith was willing to make - having women incorporated into the 1908 Reform bill by an amendment - met with an unfavourable response from the suffragists. His main policy, adopted from Campbell-Bannerman, was to treat Woman's Suffrage as an open question. This disappointed the suffragists, for unless Woman's Suffrage was supported by the government of the day it had little chance of being enacted into law.

The differences of opinion in the cabinet, however, were a most formidable obstacle in the way of Woman's Suffrage becoming government policy. If they could have been successfully removed, the vote for women would have been assured. However, the general political climate was unfavourable to Woman's Suffrage being taken seriously, giving the anti-suffragists in the cabinet the advantage. Moreover, the overloaded government agenda required cabinet

⁶⁰The belief that the demand for the vote for women was a "passing mania" was taken quite seriously at the time and most proponents of this belief, one of whom was F.E. Smith, a Conservative M.P., argued that women did not really want the vote at all. It was viewed as only a "fad" and would disappear as soon as something came along to take its place.

unity and the avoidance of divisive issues. There was thus little likelihood that Woman's Suffrage would become part of the government program.

In the period from 1908 to 1910 individual ministerial opinion solidified. A distinct line emerged between the supporters and opponents of Woman's Suffrage and, as shown above, ministers like Lloyd George and Asquith took definite stands, which they continued to hold for the remainder of the controversy. Each minister, with few exceptions, surrendered his neutrality and became drawn into the controversy over the problem. How the Asquith Cabinet responded to and influenced the development of both the Woman's Suffrage cause and suffrage legislation in the Commons will be taken up in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE MINISTRY AND THE CONCILIATION BILL OF 1910

The Asquith Cabinet's response was minimal on the first suffrage bill it had to face. In March of 1909 Mr. Geoffrey Howard, Liberal M.P. for Eskdale, Northumberland, presented an adult suffrage measure for second reading. The bill had been drafted by the Woman's Suffrage Committee of Liberal members in the House along the lines laid down by Asquith in the May meeting of 1908. At that time besides announcing the intention of the government to introduce a Reform bill Asquith had also said that any private member's bill which came before the House proposing Woman's Suffrage would only be considered if it was democratic and open to amendment. Howard's bill proposed that all men and women twenty-one years of age and over who had a three month residence qualification in any constituency should be entitled to the parliamentary vote. He said that the bill would enfranchise about three million men and ten or eleven million women. The objective of the bill was to find out the government's attitude towards a full-fledged democratic measure.¹

¹Morris, op. cit., p. 53.

During the debate Asquith came out strongly against the measure. His opposition stemmed from three basic considerations, all of which in turn arose out of the government's already announced franchise policy. Firstly, a general reform of the existing electoral system, as proposed by Asquith in May of 1908, was still the official franchise policy and all other franchise measures were secondary to this. Secondly, Woman's Suffrage in itself was not a viable issue since the Cabinet was divided on the question and the support of the major parliamentary parties was lacking. Thirdly, Howard's bill advocated changes of a magnitude inappropriate for a private member's bill. Such an important step should and could only be taken by a government which was prepared to support it through all its legislative stages. Under the present circumstances such support was impossible. For these reasons Asquith abstained from voting on the bill.² The bill, nonetheless, received a majority of 35 (ayes 157 - noes 122)³ thereby being accepted in principle by the House. This, however, was as far as the measure got for it was referred to a committee of the whole House and never came up again.

²H.C. Deb., Vol. 2, 5S, 1909, C1428-30.

³Ibid., C1430 et seq.

At the time Asquith's summation of the issue satisfied almost all Cabinet members. In concluding his speech he said that the ministry, because of the peculiar parliamentary position of Woman's Suffrage, would not support the second reading of the bill.⁴ Subsequently the only ministers who voted on the bill were Lloyd George and Lewis Harcourt, their actions being permitted by Asquith because of commitments they had made prior to the Cabinet's decision being taken.⁵ It was clear, at any rate, that even though the House itself might be prepared to accept the principle of Woman's Suffrage, the Asquith Cabinet were not and in fact, were unanimously agreed that it should not be adopted under the present conditions.

Outside the House Howard's bill aroused opposition also and curiously enough the pro-suffrage societies viewed the bill with disapproval.⁶ The bill to them was a travesty of the primary objective of their demands as well as being too broad in scope. They demanded an independent measure designed specifically to remove the sex disqualification

⁴H.C. Deb., Vol. 2, 58, 1909, C1428-30.

⁵Times, September 29, 1910, p. 10.

⁶This was reflected in Parliament by Philip Snowden, a Labour M.P. for Blackburn, during second reading. See: H.C. Deb., Vol. 2, 1909, 58, C1383, and also Manchester Guardian, March 9, 1909, p. 6, and March 15, 1909, p. 4.

and clearly a full-scale adult suffrage bill, such as Howard's, would not fulfill such a demand. Christabel Pankhurst wrote on March 22 that Asquith was deliberately trying to forestall the handling of the woman suffragists' specific demands by having Howard's bill, which advocated adult suffrage, brought in for a parliamentary hearing.⁷ Under the circumstances, then, with both the Cabinet and the suffragists being opposed, it is little wonder that the bill never reappeared and the suffragists were once more without a legislative measure before the House.

Subsequent attempts by the suffragists to press their demands became subordinate to larger political issues for the rest of 1909.⁸ Lloyd George's budget of April aroused such controversy that by November, when it was rejected by the Lords, a general election was imminent. This did not mean, however, that the suffragists had been

⁷Times, March 22, 1909, p. 12.

⁸Though the greatest deterrent to Woman's Suffrage being again considered in 1909 was the larger political issues, e.g. the 1909 budget, there was also the antagonistic attitude of King Edward VII towards the issue. On June 15 Knollys, the King's private secretary, wrote to Asquith that, "The King deplors the attitude taken up by Mr. Asquith on the Woman's Suffrage Bill." The King would apparently have preferred that Woman's Suffrage legislation be denied any hearing at all. See: Philip Magnus, King Edward the Seventh (London, John Murray, 1964), p. 409.

idle. Demonstrations and deputations to the House of Commons continued and militant tactics escalated to take in rock-throwing as well. A new peak of militancy was reached during the summer when Miss Wallace Dunlap adopted the hunger strike tactic while in prison and had to be released on July 9 after only ninety-two hours of imprisonment.⁹ This new tactic proved perplexing for the government and forcible feeding was attempted. On September 24, 1909 the first instance was reported in the press, Mrs. Mary Leigh being the first woman to be forcibly fed.¹⁰ This brought about such a storm of criticism that it became imperative to develop an alternative policy. The general election of January 1910 delayed any action, however, and after the election the political situation had changed radically both for the government and the suffragists.

During the election campaign the suffragists failed to make Women's Suffrage an election issue - the best they could do was to harrass some candidates into favourable replies.¹¹ The returns, nonetheless, were encouraging.¹²

⁹Morris, op. cit., p. 55.

¹⁰Sylvia Pankhurst, The Suffragette: A History of the Women's Militant Suffrage Movement 1905-1910 (New York, Source Book Press, 1970), Reprint of 1911 ed., p. 431.

¹¹Morris, op. cit., p. 56.

¹²The actual returns were Liberals 275, Conservatives 273, Nationalists 82 and Labour 40.

The Liberals were returned with a majority of two over the Conservatives and became dependent on the Irish and Labour parties to provide them with a workable majority.¹³ To the suffragists this was unparalleled victory. Instead of being able to press demands on the Liberals only, the suffragists could now press the smaller allied parties as well. This logically appeared more promising for the Labourites were committed to adult male suffrage and in the suffragists' opinion this party might be persuaded to support Woman's Suffrage as well. The Irish Nationalists held limited promise for the suffragists but they could most likely be brought to support female suffrage if for no other reason than to clear the path for Home Rule. At any rate, 1910 promised to be a good year and on February 14, 1910 the Militants voluntarily suspended militancy against the government.¹⁴

In April a new policy was inaugurated by the supporters of Woman's Suffrage in the House of Commons. A Conciliation Committee was set up to draft a measure which would satisfy all those in the House who were interested in extending the franchise to women. Lord Lytton, an ardent Liberal feminist, was Chairman and Henry Brailsford, a

¹³Rowland, op. cit., p. 272.

¹⁴Times, February 15, 1910, p. 8.

noted radical journalist was Honorary Secretary.¹⁵ The Committee itself consisted of 54 members, 24 of whom were Liberals, 17 Conservatives, 6 Irish and 6 Labour.¹⁶ The Conciliation Bill that was eventually drawn up would, in Brailsford's opinion, satisfy the four main political parties.¹⁷ The bill, based on the municipal franchise, proposed to enfranchise every woman who owned a house or was the inhabitant of a dwelling valued at £10 or more annual rental. Also no woman was to be disqualified by marriage provided that a husband and wife were not both qualified in respect of the same property.¹⁸ The latter regulation would bear heavily on women from the lower classes and the bill was expected to add only about one million women to the electorate. This conservative approach to Woman's Suffrage was to be severely criticized during the debate.

While this bill was being drafted and support for it was being sought in all quarters of the House, Cabinet

¹⁵Fulford, op. cit., p. 221.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷For Brailsford's opinion in greater detail see: R.S. Churchill, op. cit., Companion Part III, pp. 1431-34.

¹⁸Rover, op. cit., p. 215.

Ministers began to take public positions on it. Augustine Birrell and Sir Edward Grey told Brailsford that their names could be appended to the bill to indicate that they welcomed the formation of the Conciliation Committee and favoured a solution on non-party lines.¹⁹ On April 19, Winston Churchill allowed his name to be added to these two.²⁰ Lloyd George proved to be elusive. Although Brailsford wrote to Churchill on April 13 that Lloyd George would be asked to permit his name to be used nothing was heard from him.²¹ The Times, however, on July 8, reported that Lloyd George, while declaring himself in favour of Woman's Suffrage would most likely condemn the bill's restricted scope during the debate on second reading.²² Brailsford by this time had abandoned any hope of Lloyd George's support, for on the same day, July 8, he wrote to Churchill, declaring that he had hoped "Lloyd George would have consented to remain neutral but he is quite determined

¹⁹Times, May 27, 1910, p. 10.

²⁰R.S. Churchill, op. cit., Companion Part III W.S.C. to H.N. Brailsford, 19 April 1910, p. 1434.

²¹Ibid., p. 1427.

²²Times, July 8, 1910, p. 12; Manchester Guardian, July 9, 1909, p. 9.

to smash us ... because it is not adult suffrage."²³ Lloyd George in March had once again declared his unwavering support for the implementation of Woman's Suffrage and did have his reasons for opposition to the bill which he explained fully during the debate.²⁴

Asquith's position proved to be the most revealing of all and was clearly stated in reply to two deputations shortly before the bill was debated. In reply to the representatives of the pro-suffrage deputation, who were seeking time for proceeding with the bill should it secure second reading, Asquith tried to be as reasonable as possible.²⁵

Due to the division of opinion on the issue in the Cabinet he felt that further time for the bill could not be promised. Speaking of a private member's bill, such as the Conciliation bill, he said, "the prospects of such a measure passing through all its stages ... are extremely remote," but he added, "whatever my opinion the House of Commons ought to have the opportunity of expressing an opinion on it."²⁶ What this statement amounted to was that

²³R.S. Churchill, op. cit., Companion Part III, p. 1436.

²⁴Times, March 24, 1910, p. 4.

²⁵Ibid., June 22, 1910, p. 10.

²⁶Ibid.

Asquith intended to leave the individuals in the Cabinet and the House free to vote as they desired and to make no commitment as to the forwarding of the bill should it secure a second reading. Asquith's personal opposition could well be expected.

In speaking to a deputation from the anti-suffrage societies the same day, June 22, Asquith was more explicit as to his own position. He told them that "in so far as the general consideration against the obliteration of the distinction of sex ... is concerned," they were preaching to the converted. He went on to say that, "Cumulatively, the arguments which had been used seemed to him to constitute an overwhelming case against getting rid of the distinction of sex."²⁷ His own suffrage views being decided and well known he felt it was only fair that the government be trusted to deal with the matter in a spirit of equity with due respect to the political exigencies which now confronted them. Again he confirmed his intention of leaving the bill to the judgement of the House but removed any doubt as to where his own sympathies lay.

The Conciliation bill was presented for second reading on July 11, by David Shackleton, a Labour M.P. The debate turned out to be the most spirited one to date and was participated in by several ministers. The bill

²⁷Ibid.

eventually passed second reading with a majority of 110 (ayes 299 - noes 189)²⁸ and was sent to a committee of the whole House with a majority of 145 (ayes 320 - noes 175)²⁹ despite the fact that Shackleton had asked for the bill to be sent to a Grand Committee.³⁰ This latter proposal was of vital importance to the success of the bill for the sending of the bill to a Grand Committee, composed only of both pro and anti-suffragists, would have limited the number of members able to speak on the bill in a smaller arena than a committee of the whole House would be.³¹

The debate itself was characterized by the Times as "one of these rare occasions when votes had been influenced by the speeches delivered."³² The promoters of the bill recognized that the debate went very much against

²⁸H.C. Deb., Vol. 19, 58, 1910, C320 et seq.

²⁹Ibid., C322 et seq.

³⁰Ibid., C42-48.

³¹That this procedure would have been helpful to the easy passage of the Conciliation bill was shown by the actions of the Parliamentary Anti-Suffrage Committee. They circulated a whip urging members of parliament to resist the motion to refer the proposal to a Grand Committee. See: Manchester Guardian, July 8, 1910, p. 8.

³²Times, July 13, 1910, p. 14. The Manchester Guardian referred to the speeches of the debate as "high-leveled and practical." July 12, p. 8. The Economist of July 16, 1910, characterized the debate as "good and helpful." Being opposed generally to the implementation of Woman's Suffrage it is clear what this publication meant by the term "helpful."

them. So damaging was the effect of some speeches that supporters who later voted for the measure described it as "an abominable bill."³³ During the latter part of the debate the supporters saw that they could not hope for more than a majority of 40. What had brought on this somewhat surprising outcome is obvious from looking at the ministerial speeches. These numbered five in all and four of them were detrimental to the bill's success.

Haldane was the only minister to speak in favour. He depicted the bill as being the logical conclusion of the great emancipation movement and declared his intention of voting for the principle it embodied.³⁴ "I believe," he said, "there is only one line which it is possible to take for anyone who at once is genuinely in favour of the real progress of the state and at the same time does not condemn the concessions which have been made to women in the past."³⁵ Haldane was as good as his word but he later voted for the bill to be sent to a committee of the whole House.

Asquith, Runciman, Lloyd George, and Churchill spoke against the bill, each varying only slightly in

³³Times, July 13, 1910, p. 14.

³⁴The Manchester Guardian, July 12, p. 8, commented favourably on Haldane's speech as being logical and contemporary.

³⁵H.C. Deb., Vol. 19, 1910, 58 C76-83.

their opinions as to the bill's shortcomings. The arguments presented concentrated on three basic areas, namely, the principle of Woman's Suffrage itself, the tactics employed by advocates of Woman's Suffrage and the restricted nature of the measure under consideration. Asquith's speech in particular included all three. Speaking on the principle of Woman's Suffrage he said that it was better "in an empire such as ours to maintain the distinction of sex."³⁶ His opposition to women voters, he declared, was not based on any abstract theory or any supposed code of natural rights but based on "the knowledge of the inevitable tendencies of human nature which involve consequences, both to the sex and to the state, consequences injurious to the real interests of the one and not without peril to the stability of the other ... once this step is taken it does not afford a logical halting place."³⁷ This argument brought Asquith's personal opinions out into the open whereas in 1909 he had opposed Howard's democratic bill more on the basis of parliamentary procedure. In the present debate his position was influenced more by his personal opposition to Woman's Suffrage on the grounds that women would suffer through political involvement. Also political involvement for women meant their subsequent presence in the House of Commons and

³⁶Ibid., C244-54.

³⁷Ibid.

this Asquith could not conceive let alone advocate.

As to the tactics of the suffragists Asquith was no less explicit and declared that "a cause which cannot win its way to public acceptance by persuasion, argument, organization and by peaceful methods of agitation, is a cause which has already in advance, pronounced upon itself its own sentence of death."³⁸

Asquith condemned the restricted scope of the bill, depicting it as "a travesty of democratic institutions which does not satisfy the most rudimentary requirements of democratic ideas."³⁹ The delivery of this last argument in particular, and the whole speech in general was Asquith at his oratorical best and it was at times like this that the praise of his debating ability by men like A.G. Gardiner was justified.⁴⁰

Walter Runciman's attitude reflected the position he had taken on the suffrage question all along. While he proposed to support second reading on principle he could not pledge his support beyond that stage unless the bill was withdrawn and a more democratic measure introduced.⁴¹

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰A.G. Gardiner, Prophets, Priests and Kings (London, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1917), pp. 53-62.

⁴¹H.C. Deb., Vol. 19, 5S, 1910, C298-305.

Runciman subsequently voted for second reading but also voted for the committal of the bill to a committee of the whole House. In the latter step he was joined by all his Cabinet colleagues.⁴²

Lloyd George's position on the bill was dichotomous for while he was at all times viewed as a supporter of Woman's Suffrage he came out strongly against this measure. His opposition stemmed primarily from the fact that the property qualification stipulated in the bill would bear heavily on the lower classes and deny them the vote. He spoke at great length on his reasons for supporting Woman's Suffrage on the grounds that all women should have a hand "in fashioning the laws which affect their lives and happiness" and he professed his reluctance to go into the lobby against a Woman's Suffrage bill for the first time in his life.⁴³ In view of his subsequent support for Woman's Suffrage it could well be the case that he was acting on principle and not according to political exigencies as the suffragists later charged.⁴⁴ His position at the time, however, did not pass unnoticed and Philip Snowden in

⁴²Ibid., C320 et seq.

⁴³Ibid., C305-09.

⁴⁴Times, July 15, 1910, p. 9; Manchester Guardian, July 18, p. 9.

particular accused Lloyd George of pretending to be more democratic than those who favoured Woman's Suffrage.⁴⁵

Winston Churchill's position on this bill was by far the most amusing for right up to the debate itself his support had been expected. When he spoke, however, he described the bill as "undemocratic." He saw it as "a capricious and one-sided addition to the franchise" and "an unbalanced mitigation of the grievances which existed."⁴⁶ Speaking further on the bill's undemocratic nature he said the bill would increase plural voting by husbands giving their wives and daughters the necessary £10 qualification, viz., a house or room valued at £10 annual rental or more. Even worse, prostitutes would be enfranchised while many respectable married women would be voteless.⁴⁷ Churchill felt that any member who could bring himself to vote for such a measure must be either "very innocent or must have been intimidated."⁴⁸

⁴⁵H.C. Deb., Vol. 19, 58, 1910, C316.

⁴⁶Ibid., C220-228.

⁴⁷The Economist of July 16, 1910, pp. 104-05 fully agreed with Churchill on this particular "prostitute vs married woman" argument. In the editor's opinion the idea that marriage should be a bar to the suffrage would not stand the test of time.

⁴⁸H.C. Deb., Vol. 19, 58, 1910, C220-228.

Churchill baffled everyone for his name had appeared on the back of the bill as one who favoured a solution to the Woman's Suffrage question on non-party lines. Lucy Masterman, in her biography of her husband, provides us with perhaps one reason for Churchill's change of mind. Churchill, she wrote, just prior to the debate, was strongly influenced by Masterman and Lloyd George. Both of these men "put the points to him against Shackleton's bill - its undemocratic nature and especially particular points such as that 'fallen women' would have the vote but not the mothers of a family. Winston, she continued, began to see the opportunity for a speech on those lines and as he paced up and down the room he began to roll off long phrases. By the end of the morning he was convinced that he had always been hostile to the bill and that he had already thought of all these points himself.⁴⁹ In any event the speech was so forcefully delivered that Arthur Pensonby, a Liberal supporter of the measure, referred to it as "very damaging criticism."⁵⁰

⁴⁹Lucy Masterman, C.F.G. Masterman A Biography (London, Nicholson & Watson, 1939), p. 166. Churchill, however, was probably motivated more by his own belief that the Woman's Suffrage measure proposed in the Conciliation bill was unsound. See Churchill memorandum of 19 July 1910 in R.S. Churchill op. cit. Companion Part III, p. 1453.

⁵⁰H.C. Deb., Vol. 19, 5S, 1910, C230.

The remaining ministers made no contribution to the debate but their attitude can be deduced from the way they voted. Reginald McKenna and Lewis Harcourt voted against second reading and Sir Edward Grey, Augustine Birrell and John Burns voted in favour.⁵¹ This was in accordance with the positions they had adopted in 1908 and 1909.

In the aftermath of the Conciliation bill Cabinet ministers manoeuvred for position on the Woman's Suffrage question with the impending election increasingly in mind. On July 16, the Liberal Committee in favour of Woman's Suffrage met to seek a wider bill.⁵² The meeting was adjourned prematurely with a view to a more important meeting the following week when it was hoped Lloyd George would attend and speak. Before the meeting was adjourned, however, two important points were raised. The first was in respect to Lloyd George's request for a democratic bill open to amendment. This aroused much interest and those in favour of full adult suffrage declared their readiness to advocate such a measure. It was pointed out also that this would recommend itself to the Labour party since adult suffrage was the main item in their franchise policy.⁵³

⁵¹Ibid., C320 et seq.

⁵²Manchester Guardian, July 16, 1910, p. 9.

⁵³Times, July 16, 1910, p. 12; Manchester Guardian, July 16, 1910, p. 9.

The second issue raised was in connection with the voting on the Conciliation bill, which had been expected to receive a majority of only 40 or 50 votes. The subsequent majority of 110 was due, it was found, to the accession of a large body of members who had been taking an extended weekend. These members were pledged to the Woman's Suffrage organizations to support the bill and had returned to the Commons while the division was being taken, thereby voting without having been subjected to the influential ministerial speeches.⁵⁴ This was the reason why the Conciliation bill had received such a favourable response in the division.

The second meeting of the Liberal Committee was duly held on July 21 and was addressed by Lloyd George. He once more declared his support of Woman's Suffrage but made it clear that he could only support a democratic solution. He urged members not to press for a solution along the lines prescribed by the Conciliation bill and he also asked the meeting not to embarrass the government by pressing for Woman's Suffrage until the House of Lords question had been dealt with.⁵⁵ Asquith seemed to have been thinking along the same lines as Lloyd George for on July 28, in reply to

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Times, July 21, 1910, p. 12; Manchester Guardian, July 21, 1910, p. 7.

a letter from Lord Lytton, he refused to grant further facilities for proceeding with the Conciliation bill. He did indicate, however, that a bill capable of amendment along the lines suggested by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, would be more likely to be accommodated by the government.⁵⁶ Brailsford, who was well informed on all aspects of the issue, said that Asquith's "no" was the most decisive answer he had ever given on the question. He accused Asquith of hiding behind Lloyd George in the hope that the latter would succeed in splitting the suffragist vote.⁵⁷

Brailsford's accusation could well be the truth, for a bill advocating adult suffrage would definitely be rejected by the Unionists as being too radical. Lloyd George and the Liberal members in favour of Woman's Suffrage were well aware of this fact. The tactic, then, of allowing a more democratic measure to be discussed in the Commons could be viewed as a well conceived political manoeuvre which would rid the Cabinet of the Woman's Suffrage issue since the adverse Unionist vote would ensure the defeat of any measure for complete adult suffrage. When this contention is seen in conjunction with Lloyd George's request that Woman's Suffrage not be pressed until the Lords question was

⁵⁶Times, July 28, 1910, p. 10.

⁵⁷Ibid.

settled it gains credence for that issue was the most predominant question in the Cabinet at the time.

Lloyd George maintained his position for all of the summer of 1910 and in September once again reiterated his July proposals with the additional comment that Woman's Suffrage was not the only cause which brought him to public life nor was it the cause nearest his heart.⁵⁸ At this time Woman's Suffrage certainly was not the issue dearest to him, in view of his attempts to impose heavier taxes on the upper classes and reduce the powers of the House of Lords. He was trying to shelve Woman's Suffrage for the time being in order to concentrate on his major concerns.

Churchill was also busy on the suffrage question. He spent most of July in acrimonious correspondence with Lord Lytton, the chairman of the Conciliation Committee, trying to defend his actions during the debate on second reading.⁵⁹ The correspondence became so heated that the long established friendship between the two was broken. Lord Lytton, speaking at a Woman's Suffrage meeting at Welwyn

⁵⁸Times, September 29, 1910, p. 10.

⁵⁹This correspondence appeared in the Times and also in the Manchester Guardian throughout most of July. The letters from the Times are included in R.S. Churchill's Companion Volume Part III, Chapter 19.

on July 14, referred to Churchill as a statesman who trifled with women's liberties⁶⁰ and on July 15, in a letter to Churchill, he described his speech as "a treacherous attack on those whom you have allowed to regard you as a friend."⁶¹ Churchill tried to vindicate himself on the grounds that his position had been misrepresented by Brailsford, the Secretary of the Conciliation Committee.⁶² After a rather lengthy and much publicized exchange of letters, the correspondence degenerated into name calling. The suffragists loudly proclaimed Churchill as a traitor to their cause.

In November of 1910 Churchill once again became the center of attention in regard to the suffrage issue. This time the criticism was more damaging to his image and came from a wider group than the suffragists themselves. The occasion was a suffrage demonstration at the House of Commons on November 18. The police attempted to break up the demonstration and in doing so jostled the women,

⁶⁰Times, July 14, 1910, p. 8.

⁶¹R.S. Churchill, op. cit., Companion Part III, p. 1440.

⁶²Ibid., WSC to Lord Lytton, 14 July, 1910, p. 1441.

injuring many.⁶³ Churchill, who as Home Secretary was held responsible for their actions, was bitterly criticized by the press and the outraged public.⁶⁴ He tried to extricate himself by ~~pro~~claiming that the police had misinterpreted his instructions. He sent a sharp letter to Sir Edward Henry, the Chief of Police, instructing him in the future to adhere strictly to the policies laid down by the Home Secretary.⁶⁵

In the election campaign of December 1910, Churchill came forward with a full statement of his position on the Woman's Suffrage question. Speaking at Dundee, his constituency, he declared that disqualification on the basis of sex was not right or logical. He was therefore in favour of the principle of women being enfranchised but refused to pledge his support for any special bill. Churchill rejected any adult suffrage bill which in his view would alter the balance between parties or was not supported by a majority of the electors. He cautioned his audience not to build undue hopes on anything he might say for he had no desire

⁶³Fulford, op. cit., p. 230-31.

⁶⁴Christabel Pankhurst, Unshackled (London, Hutchinson, 1959), p. 167.

⁶⁵R.S. Churchill, op. cit., Companion Part III, WSC to Sir Edward Henry, November 22, 1910, p. 1457.

to later defend himself from their reproaches.⁶⁶ Churchill was becoming more cautious in his dealings with the suffragists and in view of the harrowing year he had experienced one must admit he was justified.

Sir Edward Grey had not spoken on the Conciliation bill but placed his views on record in November of 1910. Speaking to a deputation from Berwick, his constituency, on the matter of granting facilities for pursuing the Conciliation bill, he regretted that he could not support their request for this session. The government program, he said, was already overburdened. Grey did, however, give his personal support to Woman's Suffrage and said he could understand the growing exasperation of the suffragists when the House passed bills on second reading by large majorities but made no further progress with them. His personal opinion was that facilities ought to be given next year and that whatever occurred the bill must be so drawn as to be open to amendment. In that way would the bill meet the major criticisms made against it during the debate of the previous July.⁶⁷ Grey was still a suffragist and was willing to do what he could to get legislation onto the government timetable.

⁶⁶R.S. Churchill, Churchill: The Young Statesman, p. 401.

⁶⁷Times, November 14, 1910, p. 8.

Augustine Birrell was the most straight-forward of all the ministers. Addressing the members of the Irish Woman's Suffrage League at Dublin Castle in October, 1910, he declared that he had supported the Conciliation Bill both in the Cabinet and in the Commons. Birrell believed that the next session would be a good one for suffrage legislation and urged those interested to introduce a bill which was capable of amendment. He pointed out, in vague terms, that such a measure would divide the parties very considerably but he assured his audience he would do all he could to ease the difficulties which would arise.⁶⁸

On November 22, 1910 a significant breakthrough occurred. In reply to a question by Keir Hardie in the House, Asquith announced that "The government will, if they are still in power, give facilities in the next parliament for effectively proceeding with a Woman's Suffrage bill if so framed as to permit of free amendment."⁶⁹ This pledge was the result of two incidents. On November 16, the Conciliation Committee, in the face of the impending dissolution of Parliament, asked for facilities for 1911.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Times, October 29, 1910, p. 12.

⁶⁹H.C. Deb., Vol. 20, 58, 1910, C273.

⁷⁰Times, November 16, 1910, p. 9.

Consequently Hardie had merely provided the opportunity for a reply from Asquith.

The second incident occurred on November 18, when Asquith announced his intention of requesting a dissolution for November 28, because the conference between the two Chambers over the issue of the House of Lords had failed to reach an agreement. Asquith outlined the government program for the rest of the session but made no reference to facilities for the Conciliation bill. Viscount Castlereagh, a supporter of the Conciliation bill, moved an amendment on the Prime Minister's motion of adjournment protesting the way the government had dealt with Woman's Suffrage.⁷¹ The amendment was defeated by a vote of 52-199. Homer Morris concludes that the power of the Cabinet and the government's whips made themselves felt and the supporters of the Conciliation bill proved more loyal to the government than to the suffrage cause.⁷² Still though, the government had been challenged by a motion that attempted to censure the government. Most likely it caused Asquith and the Cabinet to review the question as to whether Woman's Suffrage should be given a place on the timetable. Hence Asquith's pledge of November 22.

⁷¹Morris, op. cit., p. 68.

⁷²Ibid.

"The pledge," the Times asserted, "was so worded as to convey the impression that if the Liberals were successful in being returned to power then the new parliament would be entitled not necessarily by the intention but by the permission of the government to make a stupendous change which would fundamentally alter the basis of the electorate. In other words Woman's Suffrage and Woman's Suffrage on a democratic basis is an issue at this election and if the election confirms the government in power, the new parliament will be considered to have received a mandate on the subject of Woman's Suffrage."⁷³ The Militants, however, were not enthused at all by Asquith's announcement and on November 23 reverted to militancy because Asquith had failed to assure them that women would be definitely enfranchised in 1911. Big demonstrations occurred almost immediately and as Christabel Pankhurst wrote to the Times, the W.S.P.U. reverted to a "state of war."⁷⁴

This was the situation when 1910 came to a close. A Woman's Suffrage measure had received **second** reading and the ministers had taken definite positions on the issue. The whole question of woman's political rights

⁷³Times, November 24, 1910, p. 10.

⁷⁴Ibid., November 23, 1910, p. 8.

had been the subject of serious deliberation and had held the center of the political stage with other pressing political problems like the House of Lords issue. Even Asquith, a well known opponent to the cause, had come to realize that Woman's Suffrage deserved a full scale debate in the Commons, and in fact had, more freely than usual, granted facilities for the Conciliation bill in July. How Asquith came to this realization is not perfectly clear but it is likely that it was due to the formation of the Conciliation Committee and the subsequent pressure it brought to bear both on Asquith and the Cabinet. There was also the knowledge that support for the suffrage issue was increasing, for it had found a place in most candidates' campaign speeches during the election of January 1910, despite the fact that most ministers had avoided it and it was not an election issue.

The first election of 1910 itself had been encouraging for the suffragist forces as the Liberals were reduced in power and the Labour and Nationalist parties assumed greater importance. As mentioned earlier this broadened the front on which suffragist demands could be pressed. In sum the general political situation had taken a decided turn for the better and the question of women's political emancipation had assumed an unprecedented importance.

There were, nonetheless, adverse factors. The most important one was the difficulty encountered in securing progress on a concrete measure for female enfranchisement. The government necessarily placed great emphasis on the settlement of the Lords issue, and the Conciliation bill had divided opinion sharply in the Commons, with both pro and anti-suffrage ministers unsympathetic to it. Ministers had demanded, from a variety of motives, a more democratic bill which was capable of amendment and in the end facilities were granted only to such a measure. It became the task of the Conciliation Committee to draft such a bill. Only the future would determine how this democratic bill would fare and in the meantime the Cabinet was caught up in the general election of December 1910.

CHAPTER IV

THE ASQUITH MINISTRY AND THE FATE OF THE CONCILIATION BILLS

During the second general election campaign of 1910 the militant suffragists went to great lengths to show what they meant by a "state of war." Anti-government campaigns were carried out in fifty constituencies with the emphasis on those which Cabinet ministers were contesting.¹ In the final analysis, however, no great changes occurred in the standings of the political parties. The Liberals lost two seats but the Irish Nationalist and Labour parties gained four seats which made a net gain of two seats to the Liberal government and its allies.² Mr. Brailsford, who was still working diligently in support of Woman's Suffrage, was more optimistic than ever before, declaring that in all there were elected 246 supporters of Woman's Suffrage. This left 120 members who supported the principle of Woman's Suffrage but seldom got beyond that, 42 adult suffrage supporters who were committed to vote only for such a measure and 65 who were either neutral or

¹C. Pankhurst, op. cit., p. 168.

²Rowland, op. cit., p. 339.

undecided. The remaining 193 were avowed opponents.³ This statistical analysis of the House indicated that only about one-third of the House was really dependable. What was required to bring about Woman's Suffrage was the backing of the government. The Conciliation Committee appealed to the Liberal leaders reminding them of Asquith's pre-election pledge but the response was not encouraging and an entirely new situation developed.

The first indication of this change in the situation came in early March, 1911 when Brailsford sent to Churchill a memorandum demanding a public inquiry into the conduct of the metropolitan police during the November, 1910 encounter with the militant suffragists. This memorandum went too far for some members of the Conciliation Committee and as a result several Liberal members resigned.⁴ This, naturally, reduced the support which that group could give to the suffragist forces. By mid-March the question of Woman's Suffrage was threatening Cabinet unity and the possibility of ministerial resignations remained until the suffrage issue was suspended by the war of 1914. This was indicated, for example, when C.P. Scott met with Haldane to induce him to speak in Manchester on behalf of the Conciliation bill of

³Morris, op. cit., p. 70.

⁴Manchester Guardian, April 8, 1911, p. 11.

1911.⁵ Haldane refused for what Scott considered to be inadequate reasons⁶ but referred to the internal stress which the Cabinet was experiencing with respect to the Woman's Suffrage question. He said that of late the feeling in the Cabinet had become distinctly less favourable and that the suffragists would do well to stick to Asquith's pledge and not do anything which might constitute a breach of its terms.⁷ The terms of the pledge had been quite simple for all Asquith demanded was a Woman's Suffrage bill capable of being amended. Full facilities had been promised for the present parliament though a particular session had not been mentioned.

Further evidence of growing tension in the Cabinet came from other sources. Lord Loreburn, Scott's closest friend in the Cabinet, blamed Asquith for having conceded too much to the women suffragists and hinted that he might himself resign if Asquith was ever called upon to redeem his 1910 pledge.⁸ Woman's Suffrage had become a pressing

⁵J.L. Hammond, C.P. Scott of the Manchester Guardian (London, G. Bell & Sons, 1934), p. 104.

⁶Robbins, op. cit., pp. 247-48.

⁷J.L. Hammond, op. cit., p. 104.

⁸Ibid., p. 105.

issue and the feelings which had hitherto been repressed in the Cabinet were now brought out in the open.

The suffragists, nonetheless, pressed for a fulfillment of Asquith's pledge for facilities and ultimately a favourable response was received. The Militants were induced to declare a truce once more and a Woman's Suffrage bill was introduced by Sir George Kemp, Liberal M.P. for Northwest Manchester. This bill once more attempted to add one million women to the electorate. It proposed that every woman who was a householder be granted the franchise and not be disqualified by marriage. The £10 qualification of the 1910 Conciliation bill was excluded and the title of the bill was extended so as to make the bill amendable. There was, however, a stipulation that forbade a woman to vote in the same constituency as her husband and therefore in the long run the bill could only apply to widows or spinsters, or to well to do married women who possessed a household in another division.⁹ This stipulation was severely criticized during the debate since it left the greater part of the working class women as badly off as ever.

The position of the Cabinet on this bill reflected the problems which have already been referred to. No

⁹Manchester Guardian, April 24, 1911, p. 7.

ministers spoke during the debate on the excuse that private members should have more time to take part. The debate on the bill itself was not of the high order of that of 1910, being characterized by the Manchester Guardian as "not very spirited."¹⁰

Yet, when the division was taken the bill received a majority of 167 votes (ayes 255 - noes 88), the largest majority to date.¹¹ This majority did not, however, represent a clear gain in strength for the movement, for the total vote in 1911 was only 343 as opposed to 489 in 1910. The attitude of the Unionists was not accurately represented for a large number of those who were opponents did not vote at all. The Labour and Irish votes were the only really satisfying ones to the suffragists for the Labourites voted unanimously for the bill and the Irish vote was 31 for and only 9 against.¹²

The ministerial vote on this bill followed the same pattern as in 1910 but was marked by the absence of Churchill, McKenna and Haldane. Among the ministers who voted for the bill's rejection were Asquith, Harcourt and Seely. Those who favoured it were Lloyd George, Grey,

¹⁰Manchester Guardian, May 6, 1911, p. 6.

¹¹H.C. Deb., Vol. 25, 58, 1911, C806 et seq.

¹²Morris, op. cit., pp. 71-72.

Runciman and Burns.¹³ In this voting pattern lay the crucial obstacle to the fulfillment of Woman's Suffrage. If the anti-suffrage ministers had been converted to the cause by the significant modifications made to the 1910 Conciliation bill as proposed by Sir George Kemp, then the militant suffrage campaigns of the future would have been avoided. The Spectator summed up the situation nicely on February 18, shortly before Kemp's bill was debated. "Every member of the House of Commons," the editorial said, "from the P.M. downwards, ought to make up his mind to declare his opinion in the plainest possible terms either against Woman's Suffrage or in favour of it, recognizing that this is not one of those questions which can be treated as a kind of annual parliamentary joke. It excites far too much social disquiet for that."¹⁴ The most interesting aspect of the 1911 Conciliation bill, however, came after second reading and arose from the efforts of the bill's supporters to secure further facilities. It was at this point that how Asquith's 1910 pledge was to be interpreted became an important question.

¹³Manchester Guardian, May 6, 1911, p. 10.

¹⁴Spectator, Vol. 106, February 18, 1911, p. 239.

On May 19, 1911, the Times speculatively reported that in view of the upcoming Parliament bill and National Insurance bill, it would be impossible for the government to grant more time for proceeding with the Woman's Suffrage bill in the next session.¹⁵ On May 23 Cameron Corbett, Liberal M.P. for Glasgow, and Mr. Whitehouse, Liberal M.P. for Lanark, approached the Prime Minister with the request for facilities for the women's bill.¹⁶ They were requested by Asquith to postpone their demand until the Cabinet considered the feasibility of continuing with the measure. This was immediately interpreted by the suffragists in the House to mean that the government was again trying to delay their bill. Consequently, Viscount Wolmer, a determined Conservative suffragist, demanded to know what the government intended doing about Asquith's pledge.¹⁷ The reply, given by Lloyd George, was by no means encouraging. Lloyd George admitted that the only possible opportunity he could foresee, in the face of the government's overloaded program, was for the bill to be

¹⁵Times, May 19, 1911, p. 10.

¹⁶Ibid., May 23, 1911, p. 10.

¹⁷H.C. Deb., Vol. 26, 58, 1911, C703-5.

re-introduced next session for second reading and then if it passed successfully, the government would be prepared to give a week for its further stages.¹⁸ The Conciliation Committee considered this proposal inadequate in that Asquith's 1910 pledge had promised facilities with no mention of any time limit. They demanded further facilities in the current session and also requested that the government use closure in order to secure passage of the bill.¹⁹ No reply was given to these demands.

This turn of events provoked a reaction from Sir Edward Grey. While speaking at the National Liberal Club on June 2, he gave an explanation of his personal position concerning Woman's Suffrage. "It is a very serious matter," he said, "that the House of Commons should year after year be getting itself into an invidious and discreditable position in regard to the subject, by passing second reading again and again and not showing whether it was determined to proceed with it."²⁰ He referred to Lloyd George's statement of a few days earlier as a splendid offer

¹⁸Ibid., C105.

¹⁹Ibid., C106.

²⁰Times, June 2, 1911, p. 6.

to settle the matter next session and appealed to all suffragists to combine their efforts to that end. This appeal, though, was not enthusiastically received by the Conciliation Committee and Lord Lytton, the Chairman, continued to press his demands for immediate legislative action and the use of closure.

In mid-June Asquith once again referred to Woman's Suffrage. In reply to a letter from Lord Lytton, who was seeking a clear statement on the position of Woman's Suffrage, Asquith said that the week offered by Lloyd George could be interpreted with reasonable elasticity and the government would grant the request for the use of closure.²¹ He further promised that should more time become necessary for the final stages of the bill, it would be freely granted. Asquith referred to the divided opinion of the Cabinet over the suffrage issue but asserted that his pledge would be upheld both "in the letter and in the spirit."²² These statements were so encouraging that the W.S.P.U. immediately suspended hostilities and patiently awaited the fulfillment of Asquith's pledge.

The atmosphere of calm thus created was not to exist for long, however, and in August confusing statements were once again made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

²¹Times, June 17, 1911, p. 12.

²²Ibid.

In the Commons, Mr. Lief Jones, a Liberal suffragist, asked Lloyd George specific questions in regard to facilities for the bill supported by the Conciliation Committee. In reply Lloyd George said that the government clearly could not undertake to give facilities for more than one bill on the same subject, but any bill which satisfied the test of being democratic and being open to amendment and had secured a second reading would be treated as falling within their engagement.²³ Immediately apprehensions and suspicion were aroused by this reply. The suffragists feared that some other franchise measure was being contemplated by the government. It was not until November, however, that the whole situation exploded.

On November 7, 1911, Asquith received a deputation of M.P.s headed by Arthur Henderson, a Labourite, who presented him with a memorial on behalf of the Parliamentary Council which was connected with the Peoples Suffrage League.²⁴ Asquith declared that the government intended to bring forward a bill next session which would grant adult suffrage to every man who was a citizen and twenty-one years of age or over. He suggested, as in 1908, that a Woman's Suffrage amendment be appended to confer the franchise

²³Morris, op. cit., pp. 74-75.

²⁴Times, November 8, 1911, p. 8.

upon women. Asquith, however, stated that his personal opinion on Woman's Suffrage had not undergone any change during the last few years. The pledge that he had made to the Conciliation Committee regarding parliamentary time for their bill in the next session would be strictly adhered to and would be in addition to the proposed Reform bill. Speaking further on the Conciliation bill he expressed his hostility to its name and stated that it would only be debated if so drafted as to be freely amendable. He concluded by saying that he parted company with his pro-suffrage ministers when they said that the term "man" must also incorporate "woman". There he left the whole issue.

The response to this announcement of a Reform bill was immediate. The W.S.P.U. publicized their intentions of reverting to militancy and did so at once.²⁵ A leader in the Times declared that in view of the Prime Minister's intentions it would be absurd to waste time in tinkering with the question as proposed by the Conciliation Committee and that although most ministers had been embarrassed by pledges hastily given to obviate opposition, they were all provided now with an excellent excuse for doing nothing.²⁶ The Manchester Guardian viewed the situation differently:

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 9.

the announcement of the Reform bill altered the situation in respect to the Conciliation bill, but the suffragists now had not one but two opportunities of having their demands considered. "Women," the editorial declared, "have waited long for their enfranchisement, it is at hand."²⁷

The suffrage societies were determined to get to the root of the matter and on November 18, the representatives of nine societies, the W.S.P.U. being one, met with Asquith and Lloyd George to learn more clearly the intentions of the government. Asquith, for his part, said the introduction of a Reform bill did not change the situation: the Cabinet and the rank and file M.P.s were free to do as they chose on the Woman's Suffrage issue and promises already given were to be fulfilled.²⁸ Lloyd George agreed, adding that "the women who considered themselves the victims of trickery would be greatly surprised next year, when several millions of women had been added in a bill to the franchise."²⁹ The woman suffragists, however, accused the government of double dealing, to which Asquith took excited exception saying, "I tell you, I am the head

²⁷Manchester Guardian, November 9, 1911, p. 8.

²⁸Times, November 18, 1911, p. 10.

²⁹Ibid.

of the government and I am not going to make myself responsible for the introduction of a measure which I do not conscientiously believe to be demanded in the interests of the country."³⁰ For once Asquith demonstrated a little emotion towards the issue, convinced apparently that the proposed Reform bill would not jeopardize the chances of success for Woman's Suffrage if freely desired by the Commons, either through amending the Reform bill, or by passing a separate bill. As it turned out a majority of Cabinet ministers agreed with the Prime Minister.

Lloyd George, however, was not so convinced. Speaking at Bath late in November, he referred to the Conciliation bill as having been "torpedoed" by Asquith's pledge of a Reform bill.³¹ This speech called forth a severe rebuke from Asquith, who scolded him for trying to commit the government and the party to Woman's Suffrage.³² The Times reflected Lloyd George's attitude and reported that if Woman's Suffrage was left to be dealt with in the form of the Conciliation bill it would not have the smallest chance of serious consideration since, despite Asquith's opinion, the Reform bill did alter the situation. The Times went on

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Morris, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

³²Austin Chamberlain, Politics from Inside: An Epistolary Chronicle 1906-14 (London, Cassell and Co., 1936), p. 170.

to conclude that Asquith's proposal to keep the Conciliation bill and to proceed with the Reform bill "are in fact incompatible, the realization of both is impossible."³³

Most of the Cabinet ministers, nonetheless, continued to support Asquith's views and Sir Edward Grey in particular, was still optimistic. In a letter to Lord Lytton he declared that he could see no conflict between the Conciliation Bill and the Reform bill and agreed completely with Asquith's proposals.³⁴ Speaking at Bristol on November 22, Birrell said that he would support whichever proposal came up provided it would enfranchise women.³⁵ Apparently, to the suffragists' good fortune, he had forgotten his alienation from the cause in February of 1911 at which time he had had his knee injured. Haldane, Harcourt, McKenna, and Hobhouse felt the same way as Asquith about the Reform Bill and could see no contradiction or trickery in his actions.³⁶ Asquith apparently was trying to consolidate Cabinet unity and the Reform bill was the best way to do it at the time.

³³Times, November 18, 1911, p. 11.

³⁴Ibid., November 21, 1911, p. 7.

³⁵Ibid., November 22, 1911, p. 8.

³⁶Ibid., December 1, 1911, p. 10.

Subsequently, however, the feasibility of a Conciliation bill receded and Asquith's proposed Woman's Suffrage amendment to the Reform bill came to the center of the stage. It was over the formulation of this amendment that discord in the Cabinet began to be publicly revealed once again. Sir Edward Grey and Lloyd George were at the Horticultural Hall in mid-December "to inaugurate the Woman's Suffrage campaign." Grey stated that "however the members of the government differed about Woman's Suffrage they were all united in loyalty to the Prime Minister." He once again appealed for unity in accepting the Reform bill as the greatest opportunity that Woman's Suffrage had yet had.³⁷ Obviously Grey was trying to avoid any possible split in the Cabinet. Grey also read a letter from Haldane supporting Woman's Suffrage and saying that the development of political life had reached a stage where it was no longer either logical, expedient or just to withhold the franchise from women.³⁸ Lloyd George too spoke strongly in favour of Woman's Suffrage, declaring that in spite of what some people said there was a mandate in the country for it. He opposed the holding of a referendum saying that success next year

³⁷Ibid., December 18, 1911, p. 9.

³⁸Ibid.

was assured.³⁹

The referendum opposed by Lloyd George was Churchill's latest idea. In an agitated letter to the Master of Elibank, the Liberal chief whip, Churchill first brought forward the suggestion. He stated that the government was "getting into serious difficulties over Female Suffrage and that if the proposed Reform bill contained a clause adding eight million women to the electorate it would not get through without bringing about a dissolution." Churchill viewed this prospect with no little alarm and felt that for the government to sanction such a measure would be "a disastrous mistake."⁴⁰ Churchill felt that Woman's Suffrage was unpopular in the country and the government could ultimately fall over the issue since some irreplaceable Cabinet ministers felt strongly on the matter. Churchill saw the situation developing very like the split in the Tory party in 1903, over tariff policy, and deprecated the tendency of ministers to underrate the danger which was so apparent to him. He further thought it "damnable" that such a strong government and party should go down on "petticoat politics."⁴¹

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰R.S. Churchill, op. cit., Companion Volume Part III, Churchill to Master of Elibank, Dec. 18, 1911, p. 1473.

⁴¹Ibid.

In reference to discontent in the Cabinet over Woman's Suffrage Churchill forecast that there would be a definite clash of opinions. He wrote, "If Lloyd George and Grey go on working themselves up, they will have to go if female suffrage is knocked out, and the Prime Minister's position will become impossible if it is put in."⁴² Churchill's conciliatory compromise was a referendum - first of the women to find out if they wanted the vote, and then of the electors to find out if they would give it. He himself was willing to abide by the result but in the meantime he detested the idea of making such a "prodigious change in the teeth of public opinion and out of pure weakness."⁴³

Churchill became even more disturbed about the Woman's Suffrage issue and in a letter to Grey was not a little cynical in stating the case as he saw it. He told Grey that if he and Lloyd George were going to campaign strongly in favour of adding six million voters to the franchise it would become increasingly difficult for those who thought differently, including himself, not to participate actively in some counter movement. He told Grey that if he persisted in his present course "you will

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

find it very difficult to regard me as anything but an opponent."⁴⁴ He closed his letter by appealing to Grey to see if they could not come together on a referendum.

The results of this letter were immediate. Next day Churchill could write to Asquith that "a feeling of unity is not impossible."⁴⁵ Churchill said he had dined with Grey and Lloyd George the previous night and during the course of the discussion over the Reform bill a tentative solution had been reached. All three agreed that if a Woman's Suffrage amendment were carried, the adult suffrage register should be forthwith constructed and as soon as this was complete the whole mass of women to be enfranchised should decide by referendum whether they would take up their responsibilities or not. Churchill's part of the bargain was agreement to a democratic Woman's Suffrage amendment to the Reform bill. He agreed to this merely because "it would probably get smashed and this would again be a solution."⁴⁶ Churchill ended by expressing his hope that nothing would develop which would have the effect of

⁴⁴Ibid., Churchill to Grey, Dec. 20, 1911, p. 1474.

⁴⁵Ibid., Churchill to Asquith, Dec. 21, 1911, p. 1475.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 1476.

"closing up this loophole of escape which is the only one I can see."⁴⁷

Asquith's reply was quite revealing. He said there was much force in what Churchill had written about the growing importance of the women's question, so much in fact, that Asquith was trying to decide whether he would attend the mass "anti" demonstration scheduled to take place at the Albert Hall in February 1912. Asquith felt that the government had taken the only possible course open and the only alternative was for the minority in the Cabinet to resign. He was concerned too over the way the general political situation was developing and was not optimistic about the 1912 sessions. Referring to recent Scottish by-election defeats, he felt that "we open 1912 with a lack of cohesion in the forces behind us." He thought the whole Woman's Suffrage situation called for "the most serious consideration during the next few weeks,"⁴⁸ but made no specific reference to Churchill's proposals concerning the referendum.

The Conservatives also saw the dangers of the Woman's Suffrage issue for the Liberals. F.E. Smith⁴⁹

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 1477.

⁴⁹F.E. Smith (1872-1930) 1st Earl of Birkenhead, English lawyer and statesman, Conservative M.P. 1906-18, Attorney General 1915, Lord Chancellor 1919-22, Secretary of State for India 1924-28.

counselled the newly appointed leader of the opposition, Bonar Law,⁵⁰ to give his serious attention to the question of female suffrage. "Asquith," he said, "is drifting into an absolutely impossible position and one that may upset the apple cart."⁵¹ Smith went on to outline how the Conservatives might profit from the crisis:

Privately, I know there is the greatest bitterness among the Cabinet and they are not unconscious that the situation may undergo developments very sinister to them....Asquith, Harcourt, McKenna and Hobhouse are sincere opponents in principle. Churchill (this is most private) greatly resents Lloyd George's statement that "under any risk and in any event it (W.S.) will be carried forward." The position then in a word of all these opponents ... is that if the Tory party fights straight they will all take their lives in their hands and resist the policy coute que coute - and the price may well be their very existence for Lloyd George will bitterly resent it. But if the Tory party carries with Liberal help the Conciliation amendment to the Franchise [i.e. Reform] Bill all these men will vote for the extreme amendment [i.e. the Adult Female Suffrage amendment] on the pretext that if the vote is given against their wishes to women at all it should at least not be given under circumstances which will load the dice against the Liberal party. It is therefore vital that we should no longer fool around with the Conciliation Bill.

⁵⁰ Andrew Bonar Law (1858-1923) British statesman born in New Brunswick, Canada, Conservative M.P. from 1900, Leader of opposition in House of Commons 1911-15, Secretary of State for Colonies 1915-16, Chancellor of Exchequer 1916-18, Lord Privy Seal 1919-21, Prime Minister 1922-23.

⁵¹ R.S. Churchill, *op cit.*, Companion Volume Part III, Smith to Bonar Law, December 27, 1911, p. 1478.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 1478-79.

Thus Smith urged that the Conservatives vote against any Woman's Suffrage proposals, thus preventing the enfranchisement of the women and at the same time deepening the breach already evident in the Liberal Cabinet between the pro and anti suffragists. Obviously the Woman's Suffrage situation had deteriorated to such a degree, as far as the Cabinet was concerned, that the issue was now a very real life or death issue.

The first new initiative came from outside the Cabinet, from the Master of Elibank. In a letter to Churchill in early January 1912, he admitted that the Cabinet's position was serious, and the most difficult problem he had yet encountered. Elibank emphasized the fact that from the point of view of the "Cabinet from within" the question of Woman's Suffrage was extremely delicate and now was essentially a question of whether "our party will gain by the inclusion or exclusion of women."⁵³ He stated that in the past when "vital occasions" had arisen his last card had been his personal friendships in the Cabinet and it looked like a similar situation was again arising. Elibank went on to suggest that "the principal actors in the drama should meet" including Lloyd

⁵³Ibid., Master of Elibank to Churchill, Jan. 3, 1912, pp. 1479-80.

George, Grey, the Prime Minister, Haldane and Harcourt.⁵⁴ Whether this group ever did meet is uncertain but subsequent events would indicate that if they did no agreement was reached.

Churchill tried to enlist the aid of Lord Curzon, the Conservative leader of the National League for opposing Woman's Suffrage. To Curzon Churchill appealed for support in bringing in a Woman's Suffrage referendum on a non-party basis. In Churchill's view this would reduce the pressures which the Woman's Suffrage issue was exerting on the parliamentary parties and he felt the Prime Minister would be willing to agree to this procedure.⁵⁵ Curzon declined to accept this solution and for the time being Churchill was stymied.

Lloyd George had been relatively silent while Churchill was reassessing the position of the Cabinet and it was not until late February that he spoke again on the question. Speaking at the Albert Hall in support of Woman's Suffrage he alluded to the differences of opinion both in the Cabinet and in the party. He said there was no hope of converting the anti-suffragist ministers so that the Cabinet could treat the issue as a government one. Lloyd George also opposed Churchill's proposed referendum

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Churchill to Lord Curzon, Jan. 7, 1912, p. 1481.

on the grounds that in practice it would include only the wives or daughters of present electors and would therefore be unjust to the working classes, who in large part would be excluded. In his opinion a compromise formula was needed to get the support of all sections of the suffrage movement and failing this he would be inclined to support the Conciliation bill.⁵⁶ In fact the 1911 Conciliation bill was rescheduled for second reading in March 1912.

Other ministers now stepped forward to express their opinions on the bill anew. Churchill announced his intention of voting against the bill's second reading unconditionally.⁵⁷ To a deputation of anti-suffragists Birrell declared he must vote for the bill since to wait for amendments to the Reform bill might prove in the long run to be disastrous.⁵⁸ Most of the remaining ministers indicated their positions on February 29, at an anti-suffrage demonstration in the Albert Hall. Harcourt, McKenna, Asquith and Colonel Seely were among those who opposed Woman's Suffrage completely. It was at the Albert Hall that Harcourt emerged as a central figure in the

⁵⁶Times, February 24, 1912, p. 8.

⁵⁷Ibid., February 26, 1912, p. 7.

⁵⁸Ibid.

controversy, referring sarcastically to a sentence in a letter from Haldane, in which the latter's pro-suffrage views were expressed, as being "worthy of Schopenhauer."⁵⁹ Harcourt spoke candidly about the views of his pro-suffrage colleagues and stated that as far as the anti-suffrage ministers were concerned compromise was impossible.⁶⁰

As the time approached for the debate on the Conciliation bill, several incidents occurred which shed considerable light on the bill's prospects. On March 1, because the speech from the throne made no reference to Woman's Suffrage the W.S.P.U. served notice that militancy would be intensified. Subsequently Militants attacked shop windows in the West End of London, causing about £5000 damage before the police could effectively stop them.⁶¹ These tactics proved inimical to the cause and the press denounced them. The Economist, in particular, spoke out against this rash move on the part of the Militants, stating that "whatever government was in power and whatever franchise was in force, sabotage and incendiarism must be

⁵⁹Ibid., February 29, 1912, p. 6.

⁶⁰Spectator, Vol. 108, March 2, 1912, p. 337.

⁶¹Morris, op. cit., p. 80.

put down in the interests of society."⁶² By early March the general opinion in the lobby of the Commons was that the Militants had already killed the Conciliation bill.⁶³

This feeling also stemmed from the knowledge that Unionists and Liberals who opposed Woman's Suffrage had developed strategies to oppose the Conciliation bill. The Unionists had decided to support any amendments to the Conciliation bill in its committee stage; then they were to vote against third reading.⁶⁴ This strategy was no doubt intended to discredit the Liberals as much as possible and proved tangible evidence that F.E. Smith's advice, given in December, 1911, was being acted upon. The Liberal opponents for their part merely resolved to issue a statement of the case against Woman's Suffrage from the Liberal point of view,⁶⁵ and request a negative vote on the Conciliation bill.

Both of these arrangements, however, were not necessary for when the Conciliation bill was debated on

⁶²The Economist, Vol. 74, March 9, 1912, p. 525.

⁶³Times, March 5, 1912, p. 15.

⁶⁴Ibid., March 1, 1912, p. 7.

⁶⁵Ibid.

March 28, it was rejected on second reading by a majority of 14 votes (ayes 208 - noes 222).⁶⁶ The bill, which was identical to that of 1911, was introduced by Mr. Agg-Gardiner, a Conservative M.P. for Cheltenham, and from the start did not fare well. The women's use of militancy was emphasized in the speeches and many would be supporters voted against the bill because of the women's tactics.⁶⁷ The debate itself was not spirited and the speeches given were a mere repetition of arguments of previous years.

The only ministers who spoke were Asquith and Grey. The Prime Minister opposed the bill on the familiar grounds that the removal of sex disqualification would be inimical to the women and to the state. Asquith felt that if women were added to the electorate it would only reduce their status and influence. The statute books were already full of special legislation to protect women and children; they did not really need the vote.⁶⁸ Grey was not as explicit

⁶⁶H.C. Deb., Vol. 36, 5S, 1912, C724 et seq.

⁶⁷Of the twenty-one members who spoke on this bill no less than sixteen spoke about the adverse effect that militancy would have on the passage of the bill. Mr. Charles Roberts and Mr. Dickinson, in particular, referred directly to this and being pro-suffragists asked members not to give it undue emphasis in their voting. H.C. Deb., Vol. 36, 5S, 1912, C686-692 and C719-721.

⁶⁸H.C. Deb., Vol. 36, 5S, 1912, C653-656.

as the Prime Minister, merely stating his intention of voting for the bill in spite of militancy. He spoke of the fairness of Asquith in allowing his colleagues freedom of action on the issue and for giving it a free run in parliament.⁶⁹

The other ministers remained silent but did go into the division lobbies. Ministers who voted for the bill were Birrell, Burns, Lloyd George, Runciman and Grey. Asquith, Churchill, Harcourt, McKenna, Hobhouse, Buxton and Colonel Seely voted for the bill's rejection. Haldane cast no vote at all on this bill and was most likely absent since if he were present he would surely have voted for the measure.

Several factors had a bearing on the voting, the most important being the position of the Irish Nationalists. Thirty-five Nationalists voted against the bill and only three Independent Nationalists voted in favour. Home rule took precedence over Woman's Suffrage and by helping to defeat the bill the Nationalists secured further time for their own cause while easing the possibility of embarrassment to the Cabinet.⁷⁰ They viewed Cabinet unity

⁶⁹Ibid., 6671-677.

⁷⁰Manchester Guardian, March 29, 1912, p. 6.

as essential to the consummation of Home Rule.⁷¹ Ten of the Nationalists abstained from voting altogether, including some members of the Conciliation Committee whose action aroused no little criticism from the Liberals who favoured the bill.⁷²

The Labour vote was weakened by the absence of thirteen members who were in their constituencies because of a coal strike which was raging at the time.⁷³ The twenty-five Labour votes cast in the bill's favour were not enough for success.

The anti-suffrage press was jubilant at the defeat of the bill and the Times reported, "we are happily rid of a measure which to its many other demerits adds that of being a sham and a snare."⁷⁴ It went on to criticize Asquith for trying to have the Conciliation bill dealt with under the shadow of the upcoming Reform bill. Ministers who agreed with Asquith were accused of supporting his arguments to save him from the effects of his promises.

⁷¹Almost all sources used confirm the fact that the Irish Nationalists were interested only in forwarding their own interests. See, for example, Morris, op. cit., pp. 82-83; Manchester Guardian, March 29, 1912, p. 6; Times, March 29, 1912, p. 9.

⁷²Manchester Guardian, March 29, 1912, p. 6.

⁷³Times, March 29, 1912, p. 10.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 9.

The Manchester Guardian, a Liberal and pro-suffrage paper, concurred with this latter statement and added that the Conciliation bill was lost because of the personal influence which Asquith wielded over his ministers, preventing them from dividing against him.⁷⁵ The Economist, however, viewed the outcome of the bill as the end result of the March window smashing campaign of the Militants. That incident, the Economist argued, had provided the Commons with an excellent excuse for not voting for female enfranchisement and the government had been rescued by a strange freak from what looked like a very awkward dilemma.⁷⁶

After the defeat of the 1912 Conciliation bill, no further private members' bills were introduced to forward the cause of Woman's Suffrage. The Militants announced that they were not surprised at the turn of events as they had known for weeks that the Irish were going to vote against the bill. They again demanded that the government assume responsibility for a Woman's Suffrage bill as the only possible means of securing its enactment into law. It would seem that besides militancy and the absence of Labour

⁷⁵Manchester Guardian, March 29, 1911, p. 6.

⁷⁶The Economist, Vol. 74, April 13, 1912, p. 786.

members, the proposal of a Reform bill had indeed "torpedoed" any chance the Conciliation bill might have had. The suffragists now turned to the Reform bill as their last resort.

CHAPTER V

THE FRANCHISE AND REGISTRATION BILL OF 1912-13 AND THE END OF THE WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGN IN PARLIAMENT

After the Conciliation Bill of 1912 had been rejected the suffragists in the House of Commons turned to the proposed Reform bill to consider ways in which that bill might most profitably be amended. The ensuing discussions indicated anew the diverse opinions which existed on the issue of Woman's Suffrage. Those Unionist M.P.s who favoured Woman's Suffrage met on June 25 and unanimously agreed that women should be enfranchised only on a limited basis.¹ This ruled out adult female suffrage and consequently directly contradicted what the Labour party suffragists were contemplating. The Labour party had resolved that as soon as the Reform bill went into Committee they would move an adult suffrage amendment.² The Conciliation Committee decided that the best procedure was to approach the other groups and to arrange for them to follow each other in order with their amendments.³ This

¹Times, June 25, 1912, p. 7.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., July 3, 1912, p. 7.

procedure was finally adopted and four amendments were appended to the Reform bill.

The provisions of the 1912 Reform bill fell basically into four categories and were directed at enlarging the existing electorate but keeping it exclusively male. The main proposal was that residence, without regard to value, be the basic qualification. Secondly, the principle of one man one vote was proposed so that the long standing Liberal principle of abolishing plural voting be made a reality. Thirdly, the residence time limit which had previously been from 12 to 15 months was reduced to 6 months. Lastly, a system of continuous registration was to be established so that a new voter, on coming of legal age, would be eligible to exercise the franchise almost right away. To this bill the Woman's Suffrage amendments were to be appended for consideration at Committee stage.

The above procedure was in accordance with the conditions laid down by Asquith in November, 1911. Each amendment was to be debated separately in Committee and when accepted by the House by an open vote, would become part of the Reform bill and share its legislative privileges. Failing acceptance in the Committee stage, however, the amendments would be dropped and the Reform bill would proceed without them. The amendments varied from one another mostly in scope.

The first amendment, in Grey's name, proposed to delete the word "male" and to insert into the Reform bill the clause "every person shall be entitled". The objective of this amendment was merely to open discussions on the principle of Woman's Suffrage. After acceptance by the House, the actual enfranchisement of women would be according to one of the remaining amendments. The amendment proposed by Arthur Henderson advocated complete adult suffrage and was backed by the Labour party. It proposed an addition of 10-13 million women to the franchise. The other amendments were less extensive and proposed an addition of 6 million and 1 1/4 million respectively. The Dickinson amendment proposed extending the vote to the wives of present electors and the Conciliation amendment proposed enfranchising the independent occupiers.⁴

The Reform bill, or the Franchise and Registration bill, passed first and second readings on June 17 and July 8 respectively. From the start it was apparent that the issue of Woman's Suffrage would play a major role. The bill was introduced by J.A. Pease, the anti-suffragist President of

⁴For an account of these amendments see: Morris, op. cit., p. 92; Agnes E. Metcalfe, Woman's Effort: A Chronicle of British Women's Fifty Years Struggle for Citizenship (Oxford, Blackwell, 1917), p. 235.

the Board of Education and passed first reading by a majority of 224 (ayes 274 - noes 50).⁵ Almost every member who spoke referred to the important question which would have to be settled at the Committee stage. Lewis Harcourt, another Liberal anti-suffragist, moved second reading on July 8 and a spirited debate ensued. Harcourt bitterly opposed Woman's Suffrage saying "I cannot believe that this House as at present constituted is prepared to add 10 million women to our voting roll."⁶ John Burns and Asquith also spoke but neither dealt extensively with Woman's Suffrage. Only Asquith referred to it: in his opinion the rejection of the 1912 Conciliation bill had virtually settled the problem.⁷ The general debate centered around the Cabinet's position on the bill and on the Woman's Suffrage amendments in particular. In Lord Robert Cecil's⁸ opinion the fact that two anti-suffragists had been chosen by Asquith to move both the first and second reading was

⁵H.C. Deb., Vol. 39, 58, 1912, C1432 et seq.

⁶Ibid., Vol. 40, 58, 1912, C1633-1644.

⁷Ibid., C2267-2277.

⁸Lord Robert Cecil (1864-1958) Educated at Eton and University College, Oxford, 1906 Conservative M.P. for East Marylebone, 1910 Blackburn and North Cambridgeshire, 1911 Hitchin division of Hertfordshire.

detrimental to the women's cause. He hoped that other Liberal pro-suffrage front benchers would attempt to redress this lack of balance.⁹ Stanley Wilson,¹⁰ another Conservative, attacked Asquith for his contradictory position on Woman's Suffrage amendments, saying that he failed to see how Asquith on the one hand could declare that the passing of Woman's Suffrage would be a national disaster and yet support it if a majority of the House desired it.¹¹ It became obvious from this debate that discussions during the Committee stage would be equally as spirited. The bill passed second reading with a majority of 72 (ayes 290 - noes 218) and was scheduled for a Committee of the whole House for July 15.¹² This timetable was not kept, however, and the Committee stage was not taken until January 1913. In the meantime new developments arose and the Woman's Suffrage situation changed considerably.

After the second reading of the Reform bill Asquith's policies were attacked by various political observers. C.P. Scott of the Manchester Guardian especially attacked the Prime Minister's position on the

⁹H.C. Deb., Vol. 40, 58, 1912, C1678-1689.

¹⁰Stanley Wilson. Born 1868, educated at Eton and Cambridge, elected for Holderness division 1900, Conservative M.P. for Yorkshire East Riding 1906.

¹¹H.C. Deb., Vol. 40, 58, 1912, C1691-1695.

¹²Ibid., C1695.

bill. "It is necessary," Scott wrote, "to speak plainly on this subject (W.S.) because we regret that the attitude of the Prime Minister is hardening. He does not in this matter share the view of the majority of the Cabinet and the majority of the Liberal party in the House of Commons." This was an observation which, as far as Asquith's influence over the Cabinet was concerned, was definitely not true. Scott went on to criticize Asquith for choosing two anti-suffragists to move the first and second reading of the Reform bill and also because he had referred to the voting on the 1912 Conciliation bill as being decisive. "That is a departure," said Scott, "greatly to be regretted from the fair and even generous attitude he has hitherto taken up on this contested question."¹³ At the very least, Asquith was now, in Scott's opinion, a definite obstacle to the success of Woman's Suffrage.

Another political commentator, C.E. Mallet, an anti-suffragist journalist, was one of the first to note the growing possibility of a Cabinet breakup over the issue. He said that when Cabinet members were irreconcilably divided, their first duty was to agree and the second was to resign if agreement was not possible.

¹³Manchester Guardian, July 13, 1912, p. 8.

Under the present circumstances where the Cabinet was divided over Woman's Suffrage, Mallet said, the best course was to reject the Woman's Suffrage amendments and to retain the services of politicians like Asquith, Lloyd George and Harcourt. "In no way," Mallet went on, "should the present government be subjected to the ordeal of breaking up over Woman's Suffrage."¹⁴ On the other hand, Ramsay MacDonald, the leader of the Labour party, speaking as an individual, reaffirmed a pledge made at the Albert Hall in the spring of 1912, that if Woman's Suffrage was not contained in the Reform bill, the Labour party would try to turn the government out.¹⁵ Thus if the Liberal Cabinet approved Woman's Suffrage it rushed the loss of some of its leading ministers and if it rejected Woman's Suffrage it faced the possibility of being forced from office by Labour votes.

C. P. Scott thought the question of resignations in the Cabinet had been stirred up by opponents to the

¹⁴C. E. Mallet, "Woman's Suffrage and the Liberal Party," Nineteenth Century and After, Vol. 71, 1912, #1, pp. 599-608.

¹⁵Times, July 10, 1912, p. 8.

Woman's Suffrage amendments and attempted to get, from Grey, an open denial of the rumors.¹⁶ Grey responded that the question of resignations was unfounded but urged Scott to contact Asquith on the issue.¹⁷ From Asquith, however, Scott received a similar reaction. The Prime Minister said that he did not feel called upon to take notice of any of the rumors and they were circulated without his authority. Asquith did, however, indicate his concern for the outcome of the Reform Bill and said that while ministers like Grey were making themselves responsible for the main amendment (i.e. the amendment which contained the principle of Woman's Suffrage) to the bill, he could not remain neutral.¹⁸ Scott was still dissatisfied, however. He felt the rumors were seriously affecting party morale in the House of Commons and continued to press for a denial of them. Once again he wrote to Sir Edward Grey. The response this time came in a letter to Miss Haldane, niece of R.B. Haldane and an ardent pro-suffragist. To her Grey wrote, "there is no truth in the report that if a Woman's Suffrage

¹⁶Hammond, op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁷Ibid., Grey to Scott, November 29, 1912, p. 113-14.

¹⁸Ibid., Asquith to Scott, December 9, 1912, p. 115.

amendment to the Reform bill were carried it would be followed by resignations which would break up the government."¹⁹ But even this was not enough to settle the matter and rumors continued to spread. On December 16, the Times once again referred to the subject, saying rumor was rife that Asquith would resign if the Woman's Suffrage amendment to the Reform bill were carried.²⁰ The following day the issue was raised in the Commons but Asquith gave no definite answer.²¹

The uncertainty surrounding the Cabinet's position, coupled with the diverse opinions held by its members, stimulated considerable controversy as to the chances for success of the Woman's Suffrage amendments. On January 21, just two days before the Committee stage, the best opinion on the fortunes of the amendments was that Grey's amendment stood a chance of being passed with a narrow majority. The remaining three, however, were expected to be lost.²²

¹⁹Times, December 12, 1912, p. 8.

²⁰Ibid., December 16, 1912, p. 8.

²¹Ibid.

²²Manchester Guardian, January 21, 1913, p. 8.

Behind this expectation lay several crucial considerations, the first being the position of the Irish Nationalists. It was expected that they would do nothing which would embarrass the government or cause a worsening of the conflict already obvious in the Cabinet. Consequently they were expected to oppose the amendments as they had the 1912 Conciliation bill.²³

Members of the Liberal Party became concerned about the Cabinet divisions, resulting in an attack upon the leading suffragist ministers. Grey was accused of being responsible for inducing the Prime Minister to give his pledge to the women's deputation back in 1911 and both Grey and Lloyd George were depicted as the two leading champions of Woman's Suffrage in the Cabinet. Grey in fact was referred to by the Times as the "compelling force" behind the Suffrage movement and the "present imbroglio" was directly his responsibility.²⁴ His position was deemed virtually indefensible since he was responsible for the main Woman's Suffrage amendment to the Reform Bill.

Individual ministers now stepped forward to express opinions on the issues raised by the Reform bill. McKenna, Seely and Hobhouse were among the first. At an anti-suffrage

²³Times, January 21, 1913, p. 6.

²⁴Ibid., January 22, 1913, p. 6.

meeting at the Albert Hall both McKenna and Seely, though absent, were announced as being in sympathy with the meeting.²⁵ Hobhouse was the chief speaker of the evening and was more explicit than usual. He moved a resolution - "that in view of the threatened introduction into the franchise of amendments giving the parliamentary vote to women, this meeting records its hostility to any such proposal and pledges itself to use every means in its power in order to secure their rejection." Hobhouse admitted fearing the electoral influence of women over men saying that "the predominance of women over men would not only be immutable, but impregnable."²⁶ What with the anti-suffrage opposition thus upheld on the one side by Hobhouse and with the pro-suffrage position clearly stated on the other by Grey, it was clear that no matter what way the Reform Bill turned out, Cabinet unity was imperilled. This was recognized by the parliamentary groups interested in the suffrage question.

The anti-suffrage Liberals were the first to attempt to improve the government's position. They attempted to

²⁵Ibid., January 21, 1913, p. 6.

²⁶Ibid.

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cajole Liberal suffragists and the Irish Nationalists into thinking that adult suffrage as embodied in the Henderson amendment was the only sound form of Woman's Suffrage.²⁷ This was done because they knew that this amendment was almost certain to be defeated with the aid of solid Unionist opposition. When members proved difficult to persuade, the serious position of the Cabinet was referred to and this was believed to be the "clincher." Press releases subsequently verified the success of this activity and supporters of Woman's Suffrage were described as being alarmed by the rumors circulated by the anti-suffragist Liberals. Unionist suffragists also became more active and stated that if adult suffrage was the outcome of the voting on the amendments they would oppose the whole Reform bill on report stage.²⁸ Amid this political manoeuvring came the forecast of ministerial positions on the amendments. Haldane, Grey, Birrell, Runciman and Lloyd George were expected to support the Grey amendment and Asquith, Churchill, Harcourt, Seely, McKenna and Hobhouse would be opposed.²⁹ The Cabinet was thus split right down the

²⁷Times, January 22, 1913, p. 6.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

middle when the Committee stage began.

On January 23, 1913, as soon as the Committee stage began, a completely new twist was given to the entire issue. In response to a question from Bonar Law, the leader of the opposition, the Speaker indicated that should Woman's Suffrage amendments be successfully incorporated into the Reform Bill, then that bill would be so altered as to necessitate its withdrawal.³⁰ Pending the Speaker's official ruling, however, the debate on the allocation of time and the Grey amendment proceeded.³¹

Asquith, in his opening speech, outlined the political history of the Woman's Suffrage issue to date and several times alluded to the difficult parliamentary position which it had occupied. The Cabinet's differences of opinion, he said, had ruled out the possibility of Woman's Suffrage securing government protection and as he himself was unconditionally opposed, he could not in justice force the issue on his colleagues. Asquith claimed that the

³⁰H.C. Deb., Vol. 47, 58, 1913, 6644.

³¹It would be false to assume that Bonar Law asked this question so as to have the Woman's Suffrage amendments thrown out. Rather it would be more accurate to assume that he was attempting to open an avenue whereby the Liberal Cabinet might be discredited because he was, unlike most of his own party, a supporter of women's enfranchisement. See Robert Blake, The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law 1858-1923 (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1955), p. 140.

success which private members' bills had achieved in the past was indicative of the growing popularity of the question and the present amendments to the Reform bill were his way of providing opportunity for a final decision.³² In respect to the Committee stage Asquith proposed that each amendment be discussed under a specific time limit so as to insure that each amendment would be treated equally. The novel circumstances which surrounded the Woman's Suffrage issue, he said, justified the adoption of this guillotine resolution.³³

Asquith's critics did not agree and Bonar Law in particular was quite abusive. He rejected Asquith's views on Woman's Suffrage in toto, saying that it was illogical for him to oppose Woman's Suffrage and yet allow the House to consider the issue in conjunction with a major government bill.³⁴ Stanley Wilson and Lord Robert Cecil concurred with their leader and took the criticism a step further. Wilson condemned the Cabinet for their lack of honor and decency in their treatment of Woman's Suffrage over the years,³⁵ and Cecil spoke out bitterly

³²H.C. Deb., Vol. 47, 58, 1913, 0648-662.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 0662-668.

³⁵Ibid., 0678-680.

against the guillotine resolution proposed by Asquith. In Cecil's opinion such a procedure merely negated Asquith's pledge of free discussion and many members would defect because of the restrictions imposed.³⁶ This set the tone of the entire debate and by the time the vote was taken, in which the guillotine resolution and the timetable for the Woman's Suffrage amendments were agreed upon as proposed by Asquith, no minister had stepped forward to answer the critics. The government in general, despite the fact that its resolutions had been passed, had been soundly scolded and the sitting had exceeded sixteen hours.

On the extra-parliamentary scene, in the meantime, speculation was rife about the probable outcome of the Reform bill and the Woman's Suffrage amendments. The Times thought that the Speaker's expected ruling would mean the loss of the Reform bill and the Manchester Guardian agreed.³⁷ Lloyd George and Sir Edward Grey met with a deputation of suffragists but did not refer to the Speaker's intervention on the issue. Both men said they would vote for the Dickinson amendment and failing its passage, would support

³⁶Ibid., 0735-742.

³⁷Times, January 24, 1913, p. 7; Manchester Guardian, January 24, 1913, p. 8.

the Conciliation amendment.³⁸ Neither apparently liked the scope of the Henderson proposal. The Unionist suffragists, in the light of the new developments, were trying to persuade their fellow anti-suffragists to vote for the Grey Amendment, on the grounds that if it were passed the government would be greatly embarrassed.³⁹ The anti-suffragist Unionists, however, declined.

The majority of the Irish Nationalists, on the other hand, were intending to vote against the Grey Amendment in order to save the government from any possible embarrassment should that amendment pass and all the rest be rejected.⁴⁰ This, in the Nationalists' opinion, would save the government from again having to face a confirmation of Woman's Suffrage in principle but with no practical result. The Liberal suffragists were reported as also "hardening" against the Grey amendment⁴¹ and no doubt this was in consideration of the Cabinet's position as well. In actual fact, no one knew precisely what the Speaker intended doing and pending his ruling hasty alterations had

³⁸Manchester Guardian, January 24, 1913, p. 11.

³⁹Times, January 24, 1913, p. 8.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

to be made to previously decided tactics.

On January 24 the debate on the Grey amendment took place. Alfred Lyttleton, a Conservative pro-suffragist, moved the amendment and after his speech the debate again went badly for the Cabinet. Lewis Harcourt moved the motion for rejection of the amendment and condemned both Grey and Lloyd George for their pro-suffrage sympathies. Harcourt brought out all the inconsistencies of Lloyd George on the issue from 1907 to date concluding by attacking him for intending to vote for the Dickinson amendment. Harcourt claimed that Lloyd George reminded him of an old epigram slightly altered in that, "If there was one thing worse than the cant of equality, it was the cant of inequality."⁴² Harcourt was no less sarcastic in his condemnation of Grey saying that if Grey was such a staunch supporter of women's participation in politics then why did he not "employ them as ambassadors, consuls and even clerks at the Foreign Office."⁴³ In Harcourt's speech the differences of opinion in the Cabinet finally emerged completely.

Charles McCurdy, a Liberal, outlined the deplorable position in which the Liberal party found itself. He said the press was referring to the present situation as "Chaos

⁴²H.C. Deb., Vol. 47, 58, 1913, C889-897.

⁴³Ibid.

in the Commons", "Private members in a state of Bewilderment" and "Country on the eve of a Dissolution." He said the press was justified, that private members were confused, and that the government had not given enough guidance. Private members, he said, were told that if they voted for the amendments there would be resignations from the Cabinet and Home Rule would be endangered. "These," McCurdy concluded, "are the dubious counsels which are being showered on Liberal members of this House by their leaders to guide them to exercise a free vote on this occasion."⁴⁴

Lord Hugh Cecil,⁴⁵ a Unionist, expressed great satisfaction at having heard Harcourt's speech, as in his view, it was the most damaging speech he had ever witnessed against the government. Cecil speculated, facetiously, that there must have been a lot of fun in the Cabinet lately; necessitating Asquith to see to it that both Lloyd George and Harcourt sat at opposite ends of the table.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Ibid., C898-907.

⁴⁵Lord Hugh Cecil (1869-1956) Educated at Eton and University College, Oxford. In 1910 secured congenial seat as Burgess for the University of Oxford.

⁴⁶H.C. Deb., Vol. 47, 58, 1913, C909-917.

Stephen Gwynn,⁴⁷ an Irish Nationalist, denounced the government's past policy on Woman's Suffrage and brought out the relationship between the women's cause and Home Rule. He said that denial of justice and hopes deferred with expressions of sympathy were well known to the Irish people. Both the Irish and the suffragists had been driven to use violence when argument failed to bring about a positive response. Gwynn closed his speech in rather striking phrases saying, "We know what it is to be accused of hysteria, self-advertisement and many other mean vices. We know what it is even now to dread that the refusal of redress may lead to some further violence, which will do irretrievable harm to our cause."⁴⁸ Gwynn's analogy fittingly summed up both Home Rule and Woman's Suffrage but when the debate was adjourned no government representative had, as yet, come forward to refute any of the charges which were being laid.

In the interval before debate resumed, events outside parliament were moving to a climax. Harcourt's speech gave rise to rumors of ministerial resignations once more. The Times reported that it was absolutely necessary for the life of the Cabinet that they reconsider

⁴⁷ Stephen Gwynn. Born 1864, Journalist, author and statesman, Nationalist M.P. for Galway, 1906-18.

⁴⁸ H.C. Deb., Vol. 47, 5S, 1913, C924-927.

their differences and that ministers hoped that a forthcoming meeting of the Cabinet would effect this.⁴⁹ The anti-suffragist ministers were known to resent Lloyd George's statement that there was no truth in the rumors of resignations and some members of the Liberal party itself were restless over the use of closure to end the debate, which in their opinion was a dangerous attack on parliamentary liberty.⁵⁰ The Unionist party on January 24 issued a whip to the effect that when the Grey and Henderson amendments went to a division every member of the party was requested to come and vote for their defeat.⁵¹ The Manchester Guardian gave a full account of the issue of the Speaker's ruling and quoted precedents as far back as 1832 to show that the bill need not be rejected. However, Scott anticipated that the Speaker's ruling would be contrary to suffragists' hopes.⁵²

On January 27 when debate resumed, Asquith asked the Speaker for his ruling on the Woman's Suffrage amendments. The Speaker ruled that if the Woman's Suffrage

⁴⁹Times, January 25, 1913, p. 8.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Manchester Guardian, January 24, 1913, p. 8.

amendments were adopted, then they would so change the character of the bill as to make it a new one. Accordingly the bill would have to be withdrawn and a new bill introduced. Asquith withdrew the Reform bill immediately, claiming that the House had not expected such a ruling.⁵³ Asquith went on to state that the only course left open in respect to the Woman's Suffrage issue was to again promise time for a private member's bill.⁵⁴ This he proceeded to do. The reaction to this situation was explosive and devastating criticism of the government came from all quarters of the House.

Bonar Law, the leader of the opposition, followed Asquith and immediately discounted the latter's argument that the Speaker's ruling had been unexpected. Over a year ago, Bonar Law said, the possibility had been pointed out and he could not see how Asquith, "with the talent which we see in front of us now," could have failed to make it perfectly clear that this difficulty would not arise.

⁵³ Even though the ruling may have been unexpected as Asquith wrote later to the King, it was no doubt a blessing in disguise for the Cabinet. This was shown in a subsequent letter from Asquith to a friend the same day when he said, "The Speaker's coup d'etat has bowled over the women for this session - a great relief." Roy Jenkins, op. cit., p. 250.

⁵⁴ H.C. Deb., Vol. 47, 58, 1913, C1019-1030.

"It is most likely," said Bonar Law, "due to the fact that this government is living from hand to mouth and has not time to think about anything except how they will continue in office for another year."⁵⁵ Arthur Henderson,⁵⁶ a Labour M.P., rejected Asquith's proposal that Woman's Suffrage be considered in a private member's bill and went on to criticize the anti-suffragist Cabinet ministers who had tried to persuade members not to embarrass His Majesty's Government by supporting Woman's Suffrage. Henderson asked whether the government would support a private member's bill after it passed second reading but Asquith declined to respond.⁵⁷ The longer the debate continued the more serious became the barrage of criticism and even though Lloyd George and Grey placed themselves in complete sympathy with the government, the Cabinet members still suffered intense ridicule. A.J. Balfour, a former Conservative Prime Minister, claimed it was due to Lloyd George's machinations to have Woman's Suffrage amendments appended to the Reform bill that the present state of affairs

⁵⁵Ibid., C1030-1031.

⁵⁶Arthur Henderson (1863-1935) Labour M.P. for Barnard Castle 1903-18, for Widnes 1919-22, for Newcastle-on-Tyne 1923, for Burnley 1924-31, for Clay Cross 1933-35, President Board of Education 1915-16, Paymaster General 1916, Home Secretary 1924, Foreign Secretary 1929-31.

⁵⁷H.C. Deb., Vol. 47, 58, 1913, C1031.

had developed. It was this, Balfour asserted, that had denied the House the opportunity of deciding the issue in a clear and specific form.⁵⁸ What that "clear and specific form" was Balfour failed to say.

The following day the press commented on the turn of events. The view was commonly held that the government had lost a great deal of prestige by their conduct over the Reform Bill and its Woman's Suffrage amendments.⁵⁹ A large percentage of the Liberal electors were disgusted by the display of bad management and many more were equally disgruntled by the revelations of Cabinet conflict made by Harcourt in his speech. No one was very enthusiastic over the newly proposed private member's bill for Woman's Suffrage for it fell short of a redemption of pledges given.⁶⁰ However, it was the only avenue now open and to it the suffragists turned.

The first steps taken to forward Woman's Suffrage by means of a private member's bill met with depressing response. On the last of January the Liberal members

⁵⁸Ibid., C1050-1055.

⁵⁹Times, January 27, 1913, p. 7; Manchester Guardian, January 28, 1913, p. 8.

⁶⁰Manchester Guardian, January 28, 1913, p. 8.

supporting Woman's Suffrage held a meeting at Westminster Hall to draw up a resolution. Although invitations were issued to 180 M.P.s, only 50 responded. Lloyd George sent a message expressing his regret at being absent and his sympathy with the meeting. A resolution was passed to set up a committee to draft a new suffrage bill with the condition that the attitudes of the various groups interested in Woman's Suffrage were to be considered.⁶¹

Within a week the various groups in the House interested in Woman's Suffrage had declared their views and as usual hardly any common ground was apparent. The Unionist suffragists stated their preference for a limited bill modelled after the municipal voting register. The Liberal and Unionist anti-suffragists declared their intentions of opposing any Woman's Suffrage bill whatever.⁶² The Irish Nationalists made no announcement but were believed to favour a Woman's Suffrage bill in principle. The Labour party was undecided, having just set up a committee to study the situation and to confer with other groups who were interested in the framing of the bill.⁶³ However, they

⁶¹Ibid., January 31, 1913, p. 8.

⁶²Times, February 6, 1913, p. 8.

⁶³Ibid., February 11, 1913, p. 10.

would probably support the widest possible measure. Ultimately the Dickinson amendment to the Reform bill, which favoured the addition of about 6 million women to the franchise, was adopted by the Liberal suffragists with the condition that it should be so framed as to admit freely of amendment.⁶⁴ The bill was to be drafted immediately. At this juncture new problems arose which adversely affected the development of new Woman's Suffrage legislation. The government was once again challenged over the issue of Woman's Suffrage but this time the Cabinet was more united than before.

The challenge came on March 18 when the Home Office vote was being debated.⁶⁵ Harold Smith criticized McKenna, the Home Secretary, for his lack of tact in handling the militant hunger-strikers in prison and other members enlarged upon the issue. The Militants had been so exasperated with the tactics of the government that they had virtually declared civil war upon society.⁶⁶ Windows were broken,

⁶⁴Morris, op. cit., p. 105.

⁶⁵McKenna, op. cit., p. 153.

⁶⁶This worsening of the situation after the withdrawal of the Reform bill in January 1913 proved the veracity of at least one M.P.'s fears. Sir Almeric Fitzroy wrote in his diary on January 27, 1913 that "The threats of the women of what they will do in the event of their hopes being disappointed have reached such a pitch that ... valuable lives are in danger...." See: S. Maccoby, English Radicalism: The End? (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1961), p. 77.

golf greens were destroyed by acids, letter boxes and their contents were destroyed, priceless treasures in museums and public galleries were mutilated and houses, churches, railways and public buildings were damaged by fire and bombs.⁶⁷ On February 17, 1913 a house which was being built for Lloyd George at Walton was partially destroyed by a bomb and Mrs. Pankhurst, speaking at Cardiff a few days later assumed full responsibility.⁶⁸ It therefore became urgent to curtail such activities and as usual the government was without a definite policy. Up to now, women were arrested and imprisoned for their illegal conduct but this proved to be futile as the women in gaol refused to take food. Consequently they had to be released when they reached a state of collapse and went free. This was the reason for Harold Smith's motion of censure.

Smith's criticism of McKenna for failing to control the women was much more important than it at first appeared. While he directly condemned McKenna it soon became apparent that the whole Cabinet was under fire. Over twenty members took part in this debate and both McKenna and the Cabinet were bitterly criticized by members from all parties. The Home Secretary defended his actions strongly, pleading the

⁶⁷Morris, op. cit., p. 104.

⁶⁸Ibid.

unprecedented exigencies of the problem. At the same time, however, he declared his intention of bringing into the House a bill to deal with the women hunger-strikers.⁶⁹

The Prisoners' (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) bill was introduced within a week after Smith's motion of censure had been debated and defeated. The bill provided for the temporary release of hunger-striking prisoners, who were medically unfit to be detained in prison. They were to be re-arrested without warrant when the time specified in their release had expired, in order to complete the remainder of the original sentence.⁷⁰ The process could be repeated indefinitely and a stipulation in the release order stated that time spent on release could not be counted as part of the original sentence. This bill was McKenna's solution to the government's problem with militancy and his reply to Smith's motion of censure.⁷¹

⁶⁹McKenna, op. cit., p. 155.

⁷⁰See Appendix II and Appendix III for this bill and a release order.

⁷¹McKenna was optimistic that the Prisoners' bill would solve the greater part of the government's problem with militancy and in a reply to a letter from Lord Stamfordham, the King's private secretary, he said that "it would be possible to restrict forcible feeding to a few exceptional cases." See: Harold Nicolson, King George the Fifth, His Life and Reign (London, Constable and Co., 1952), p. 212.

That McKenna viewed Smith's motion seriously was obvious from his subsequent introduction of the Prisoners' bill, but larger issues were at stake than a vindication of McKenna's position. If Smith's motion had been carried it would have meant McKenna's resignation and quite possibly the resignation of the government since the majority of the Cabinet, and especially the Prime Minister, were confirmed opponents of Woman's Suffrage. It was, therefore, as important to the government as it was to McKenna that Smith's motion be taken seriously and the possibility of such a resolution arising again removed.

The major suffragists in the Cabinet, both "pro" and "anti" supported the Prisoners' bill. Stephen McKenna, McKenna's biographer, in referring to the tightening of ministerial unity on this bill, claims that "at least he (McKenna) did not now have to convince a skeptical Prime Minister nor to overwhelm two of his most powerful colleagues. Asquith, Lloyd George and Churchill were as eager to see the end of militancy as the Home Secretary himself."⁷² Another factor which demonstrated a more united front in the Cabinet was that this bill was left entirely

⁷²McKenna, op. cit., p. 159.

in McKenna's hands. He was responsible for having it drafted by the Home Office permanent officials and also for carrying it through the various parliamentary stages. No Cabinet ministers, except McKenna, spoke on any stage of the bill and in the divisions which occurred all ministers consistently voted for the bill's passage. On April 23, the bill passed third reading unaltered.

As might be expected, however, the Prisoners' bill provided yet another opportunity for opposition and pro-suffrage members to criticize the government for the manner in which the whole suffrage issue had been treated. McKenna attempted as best he could to defend his actions and referred to the unprecedented circumstances with which he was confronted. His hands were tied, he argued, when it came to having the women pay for their crimes as they defied all male authority and declared unanimously that they would not be bound by man-made laws. All the alternatives which had been presented, such as deportation and leaving the women to die, had been discounted for various reasons and consequently all that was left was the proposal as contained in the Prisoners' bill. McKenna felt that the bill would be effective in curbing hunger striking and called on all members of the House to support it.⁷³

⁷³H.C. Deb., Vol. 51, 58, 1913, C404-410.

Lord Robert Cecil summed up the general opinion of opponents of the bill. "This proposal," he said, "will be a cat and mouse proposal, namely catching women and then letting them go again, then catching them again and treating them in a way which is certainly exceptional and will be represented as being very unfair. It will, therefore, create a great deal of indignation and it will do no good."⁷⁴ Charles McCurdy, a Liberal pro-suffragist, pointed out that the House had been forced to discuss a futile bill only because the women, whom the bill was going to prosecute, had been forced into illegal courses by the stoppage of constitutional avenues.⁷⁵ Another Liberal, Sir Arthur Markham,⁷⁶ was even more critical than McCurdy when he spoke late during discussions on third reading. Markham felt that, considering the people for whom the bill was designed, it would prove useless. The fact that the bill had passed committee stage without amendment led Markham to say that "party whips, inadequate time, gags on the title and restricted opportunity" had prevented free expression of views and had helped to stifle any opposition to the bill.

⁷⁴Ibid., C432.

⁷⁵Ibid., C410-414.

⁷⁶Sir Arthur Markham (1866-1916) Liberal M.P. for Mansfield Division of Nottinghamshire 1900-16.

He concluded that the bill, "framed by the permanent officials, fathered by the Home Secretary and then fathered again by the whole Cabinet," merely reflected the will of the executive of the day.⁷⁷

On the extra-parliamentary scene reaction was laudatory. The Times in particular was unusually complimentary, saying "it should have been introduced long ago."⁷⁸ The Manchester Guardian concurred generally, though at the same time it commented that emergency legislation such as the Prisoners' bill was wrong in principle since it tended merely to solve the problem temporarily.⁷⁹ The effectiveness of the bill, however, could only be determined after a passage of time and as it went into operation the attention of the suffragists was drawn back to the upcoming Dickinson Bill.

On May 2 some very revealing announcements were made about this bill. First in importance was a recent decision of the Cabinet. The Prime Minister and Sir Edward Grey were to be the only ministers who would speak on the bill and this constraint would apply to junior members of the ministry as well as to the Cabinet ministers.⁸⁰

⁷⁷H.C. Deb., Vol. 52, 5S, 1913, c399-404.

⁷⁸Times, April 1, 1913, p. 14.

⁷⁹Manchester Guardian, April 3, 1913, p. 8.

⁸⁰Ibid., May 5, 1913, p. 8.

The only positive action taken by the remaining ministers came from Lloyd George, Grey, Runciman, Isaacs and Burns, who put their names to a whip which was circulated in the House asking sympathizers to attend and support the bill on second reading.⁸¹ What was evident from this turn of events was that even the pro-suffragist Cabinet ministers were no longer willing to speak publicly for Woman's Suffrage, as for example Lloyd George had done in the past, and from now on strict attention was to be given to Cabinet unity and party loyalty. Two challenges on the same issue in less than three months was as much as any Cabinet member was willing to endure. The possibility of embarrassment over Woman's Suffrage had to be reduced. Consequently, it became increasingly obvious that the current private members' bill would not be successful. A good many members paired against the bill even before it was debated and of course the pro-suffrage ministers, with the exception of Grey, would not be able to speak because of the Cabinet's recent decision.⁸² In addition the bill was debated at a very inopportune moment for the suffragists as the W.S.P.U. headquarters was raided by the police just prior to the second reading debate. While the police did not provide

⁸¹Times, May 2, 1913, p. 8.

⁸²Manchester Guardian, May 7, 1913, p. 9.

incriminating evidence against the Militants the entire movement was, nonetheless, brought unfavourably to public notice.⁸³ The Manchester Guardian predicted, quite accurately, that "in the present highly charged state of the political atmosphere," there was little prospect of the bill's success.⁸⁴

On May 5 the bill was introduced by Mr. Dickinson for second reading. The bill enfranchised those women who possessed the household qualification or were the wives of men who did so. A residential qualification of twelve months was required in the constituency where the household was located. The bill was limited to women of 25 years of age or over and it was estimated that it would enfranchise five or six million women.⁸⁵ The debate which ensued was characterized by an endless listing of threadbare arguments. Militancy was condemned by almost every speaker and both Sir Frederick Low and Harold Crawley, two Liberal pro-suffragists, opposed second reading on those grounds.⁸⁶

⁸³Times, May 5, 1913, p. 8.

⁸⁴Manchester Guardian, May 6, 1913, p. 8.

⁸⁵Morris, op. cit., p. 106.

⁸⁶H.C. Deb., Vol. 52, 58, 1913, C1923-27 and C1952-

The highlight of the debate was a speech by F.E. Smith, Unionist member for Walton and an avid anti-suffragist. He roundly denounced militancy and said that the suffrage movement had not the slightest chance of success until a government, as a government, was prepared to stake its parliamentary existence on it. That state of things, he concluded, did not exist today and he hoped it never would.⁸⁷ Both Asquith and Grey said nothing new. Asquith mentioned the dissension in the Cabinet as a reason why Woman's Suffrage had never been and never could be a government issue. His only regret, he confessed, was that for the very first time, in his political career he was going to publicly disagree with the Foreign Secretary.⁸⁸ Grey, for his part, declared that he would support Woman's Suffrage because as always he felt that women would profit from political involvement.⁸⁹

When the bill went to a division it was defeated by a majority of 47 votes (ayes 219 - noes 266). Grey, Lloyd George, Runciman and Birrell supported the bill while Asquith, Churchill, Harcourt, McKenna and Hobhouse remained

⁸⁷Ibid., C1984-1994.

⁸⁸Ibid., C1902-1915.

⁸⁹Ibid., C1927-1938.

staunch opponents. Haldane and Burns cast no vote at all and were probably absent.

The adverse vote came as no surprise and the Times rejoiced that the issue had finally been shelved.⁹⁰ The Spectator was equally jubilant and dismissed the entire suffrage issue with the remark, "all's well that ends well."⁹¹ The Manchester Guardian summed up the reasons for the defeat of the bill and as could be well expected militancy was deemed an overriding factor.⁹² The dramatic series of changes which had occurred in connection with the issue since the last Conciliation Bill were considered to be decisive but of importance also was the influence of F.E. Smith's speech which had turned the Conservative vote against the bill. The only consolation offered was an encouraging word to the women to press onward and not lose hope.⁹³ This encouragement, however, was of little comfort to the suffragists for now, after over five years of parliamentary struggle, Woman's Suffrage legislation had

⁹⁰Times, May 7, 1913, p. 9.

⁹¹The Spectator, May 10, 1913, Vol. 110, p. 793.

⁹²Manchester Guardian, May 7, 1913, p. 9. The Economist concurred generally with this opinion saying that "that defeat is indeed universally ascribed to militancy." Economist, Vol. 76, 1913, p. 1083.

⁹³Manchester Guardian, May 7, 1913, p. 9.

been denied even a second reading. It was, in fact, doubtful whether it would ever receive any further attention. The Times interpreted the defeat of Dickinson's bill to mean that the subject was legislatively dead for the rest of the present parliament and this assumption was absolutely correct.⁹⁴

On the extra-parliamentary scene the agitation for Woman's Suffrage raged on and eventually degenerated into a holocaust of incendiarism and property damage aimed at the government, unchecked by McKenna's Prisoners' bill.⁹⁵ In the summer of 1914, just when the Movement was on the verge of assuming revolutionary proportions, war broke out between Britain and Germany and all agitations, including Woman's Suffrage, were suspended for the duration.

⁹⁴Times, May 7, 1913, p. 8.

⁹⁵For a good detailed account of the subsequent developments of the militant aspect of the Movement see: Morris, op. cit., pp. 108-12; Metcalfe, op. cit., Part V, pp. 233-363.

CONCLUSION

Woman's Suffrage had to contend with many political and social obstacles. This thesis has dealt with one of the most important - the attitude which the Asquith Cabinet took up towards it. In the first place Asquith himself was a determined opponent and when he came to office in 1908 he made the issue an open one, to be decided by a free vote in the House of Commons. Sharing Asquith's opinion were several of the major Cabinet ministers. Harcourt, Hobhouse, McKenna, and several others were anti-suffragists for varying reasons. Their opposition proved fatal to the enactment of Woman's Suffrage into law at this time. Sir Edward Grey, Lloyd George, and Haldane were convinced supporters of the cause but could do very little since to get Woman's Suffrage on the government timetable meant virtually a reversal of Asquith's adopted policy. As this was impossible the best they could do was to speak independently in favour of the principle of Woman's Suffrage and to hope for the conversion of the anti-suffragist ministers.

Closely connected and, in fact, directly resulting from the Cabinet's division on the question, was the

precarious parliamentary position of the issue. From the first, because Woman's Suffrage ran across party lines, it fell between the stools of the Conservative and Liberal parties. At the same time it could not find significant support in any other section of the Commons save the Labour party. The Conservative rank and file were, by and large, antagonistic to granting women the vote and the Conservative leaders were only tenuously in favour even at the best of times. The Liberal rank and file on the other hand, were inclined to support the idea of female enfranchisement but, as we have seen, the Liberal leaders were irreconcilably divided. The Labour party was pledged to the inauguration of complete adult suffrage but the suffragists demanded a measure independent of any other franchise bill. The Irish Nationalists were in parliament for only one reason; Home Rule for Ireland, and all other issues were subservient to this. It was under such conditions that Woman's Suffrage legislation came up for discussion.

The most frequently used method to forward Woman's Suffrage in the legislative arena was the private member's bill but this method was fraught with hazards. The opposition of only a few members could be disastrous, as in 1906 and 1907, and even if the bill passed second reading

as in the case of Howard's bill of 1909 and the Conciliation bills of 1910 and 1911, further progress depended on the goodwill of the government.

The difficulties encountered by the 1910 Conciliation bill indicated the problems involved. The Conciliation bill of that year was drafted with a view to conciliating all shades of opinion in the House of Commons. Asquith, Churchill, Lloyd George and Runciman, however, came forward in the debate to denounce it. On the one hand it was not capable of amendment, on the other it was undemocratic and in Churchill's view it was unjust in that it enfranchised prostitutes and left voteless the more deserving married women. It is not the author's intention here to question whether these arguments were justified or not but merely to show that similar arguments were presented at other times against female suffrage measures. They tended to reflect disagreements in the Cabinet rather than positive attempts to solve the issue of votes for women.

Apart from ministerial opposition in debate there was the frustrating problem of obtaining further facilities for the bill's progress. In 1910 the first Conciliation bill passed second reading in spite of strong opposition

from the above mentioned ministers and was later permitted by Asquith to be introduced in 1911 for consideration once more. Again it was successful in passing second reading and again further time for debate was delayed until late in 1911 when it was proposed that yet another modified version of the 1910 bill be brought in for another parliamentary hearing in 1912. In that year, because Asquith again announced his intention of bringing forward the delayed 1908 Reform bill, the Woman's Suffrage bill was rejected and never assumed particular importance again. Such was the tortuous course which a private member's bill could take. As can be seen the ultimate decision on the time available to discuss such measures in the Commons rested in the hands of the government of the day. Since the Liberal government's timetable was always overloaded extensive time for Woman's Suffrage bills was difficult to arrange, especially since the Cabinet had adopted a policy of downplaying divisive issues.

The best opportunity for Woman's Suffrage came in 1913 when the Woman's Suffrage amendments to the government Reform bill were proposed. Woman's Suffrage had been before the Commons on five different occasions since 1908 and in four instances had secured a second reading:

acceptance in principle. Successive attempts to induce the government to allow time for full treatment of the issue finally became reality and the proposed amendments went far to accommodate all shades of opinion on the issue. Even the suffragists had now come to realize that their initial demand for an independent government bill was not feasible any more and their hopes ran high that the Grey amendment, which embodied the principle of Woman's Suffrage would be accepted. It was further expected that one of the three remaining amendments would determine to what extent Woman's Suffrage would be enacted. Two complications, however, set in. Militancy reached new heights and the government's general political position had become weakened by mishandling of the suffrage issue. The acceptance or rejection of Woman's Suffrage became subservient to the very existence of the Liberal government. Conservative members, as for example F.E. Smith, were waiting to take advantage of any opportunity that might arise to discredit the government and the Irish Nationalists became determined to save the Liberals from any possible embarrassment. The Labourites were still insisting on adult suffrage and Ramsay MacDonald, their leader, had by this time pledged to bring the government down if Woman's Suffrage was not included as well.

However, the issue was never decided, owing to the Speaker's unexpected ruling that the government bill would have to be withdrawn if altered in Committee by the Woman's Suffrage amendments. This was the climax of the Woman's Suffrage movement in Parliament and all else was epilogue.

Since Woman's Suffrage was in the unfortunate position of being low on the government's order of priorities, it was particularly susceptible to changes in the political barometer. In 1909 when the House of Lords question was coming to a climax Woman's Suffrage was literally dropped from the legislative program and in 1910 when the government was marking time in anticipation of the December election, Woman's Suffrage was not even considered. This reluctance of the Cabinet to deal with the issue always aroused intense ill-feeling between the government and the suffrage societies and the latter retaliated with militant tactics. If only a parliamentary party could have seen fit to take up the question or if the Cabinet had had a firm policy to deal with the problem many unpleasant incidents would have been avoided. In that no positive policy, save treating the matter as an open question to be decided by a free vote, was adopted by the Liberal Cabinet, however, open confrontation with the suffragists became commonplace.

The militant suffragists developed a policy of trying to badger all government members into favourable replies on the question but the Cabinet ministers especially came under heavy harrassment. Besides being heckled, ministers were physically assaulted, their houses were fired and when they appeared in public their speeches were drowned out by the antics of the militant women. Even when imprisoned, the women kept up the fight by adopting the hunger strike and government officials retaliated with the unpopular measure of forcible feeding.

Successive Home Secretaries, like Gladstone in 1909 and Churchill in 1910 and 1911, came under heavy criticism for the use of this inhumane procedure but McKenna, in particular, bore the brunt of the attack. Both he and the Cabinet were seriously challenged over the question in 1913 and McKenna, backed by his colleagues, managed to ease the critical parliamentary situation for the government with the controversial Prisoners' bill. Militancy in general was deprecated by friend and foe alike and was viewed by all except its perpetrators as a positive deterrent to the success of woman's political emancipation, with ministers like Churchill, Burns, Buxton and even Birrell for a time becoming avid opponents. If the militants had realized the adverse effects of their tactics, their cause might have had greater chance of success.

In retrospect, however, militancy was indirectly the fault of the Cabinet for if the women's cause had been seriously considered, as it was in 1910 and 1913, militancy would have probably never begun. Militancy was not a novelty monopolized by the suffragists alone for it was a disturbing feature of the Ulster issue and the Labour problems. As such it was a mark of the times and however much ministers might deprecate its use and influence, they failed to deal with the underlying causes for it. The anti-slavery agitation, the repeal of the Corn Laws and the manhood suffrage movement had all been marked by violence but the governments at the time had taken steps to remedy the grievances. The Asquith Cabinet, however, did nothing save adopt a vacillating policy which proved to be quite ineffective. In this the Asquith ministry displayed a general weakness which was evident not only in the Woman's Suffrage controversy but in dealing with the Ulster crisis and labour unrest as well.

In 1912 when the suffrage movement was at a critical stage, steps were taken by individual Cabinet ministers to suggest positive solutions. Churchill proposed the use of a referendum to settle the matter but immediately aroused the opposition of Lloyd George who believed that such a solution would be unjust. Asquith, too, was opposed to a

referendum because such a procedure would set a dangerous precedent and in fact no one could agree on whom the referendum was supposed to consult. If the women were allowed to state their position in a referendum existing precedents would be broken, since the right to vote on national issues through elections naturally required the participants to be bona fide parliamentary voters. On the other hand, some argued that consultation on the issue should not be confined to males since it was a decision which affected the roles of women in society. In the end the question of the referendum faded away undecided.

What lay behind the Cabinet's irreconcilable division was the personality and background of each individual who came to make up its ranks. Given that each was a product of an age where women were relegated generally to domesticity and mundane affairs, it is apparent that to the anti-suffragist ministers the prospects of having women politically active was too great a break to make with traditional norms. Consequently when attempts were made by the women and their supporters to gain the franchise it was viewed as an assault on time tried customs. For the pro-suffrage ministers no such conflict arose - it was quite acceptable for woman to remain the "Angel of the Hearth" and also to exercise the franchise.

There were also sound political reasons against female enfranchisement. Asquith, among many, believed that women would inevitably infiltrate all offices of government and being ill-fitted by nature to handle political problems, would bring about their own undoing. In his firm determination to prevent this lay the basis of his opposition. Other ministers felt that the sudden arrival of vast numbers of women voters would seriously upset the existing electoral balance and benefit the Conservative party. When Dickinson's bill of May 1913 was defeated, the question of women's enfranchisement was legislatively laid to rest. Women, in spite of several years' intense parliamentary struggle, were virtually in the same position from which they had started and while perhaps more enlightened because of their experiences, they were as yet without the parliamentary vote.

That is not to say, however, that the Liberal government had extricated itself from the issue without adverse effects. The fate of Woman's Suffrage legislation over the years covered in this thesis had increasingly discredited the Cabinet. In the early stages of the

controversy the Cabinet could defer Woman's Suffrage legislation as it saw fit, but by 1911 this was no longer possible. The entire movement became increasingly more threatening, with intensification of militant methods. In 1912 and 1913 the very existence of the Liberal government itself was endangered no less than three times amid intense criticism of their handling of the problem. By emphasizing Cabinet unity and curbing the militant tactics of the women, the Asquith Cabinet managed to survive until the summer of 1914, when war with Germany led to a suspension of the divisive issue which the policies of the Liberal government had done little to solve.

APPENDIX I

The Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith Cabinets

| Office | 1905 | 1908 |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Prime Minister | Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman | H.H. Asquith |
| Id. Chancellor | Id. Loreburn | Id. Loreburn |
| Id. President | Earl of Crewe | Id. Tweedmouth |
| Id. Privy Seal | Marquess of Ripon | Marquess of Ripon |
| Chanc. of Exchequer | H.H. Asquith | David Lloyd George |
| Home Secretary | H.J. Gladstone | H.J. Gladstone |
| Foreign Secretary | Sir Edward Grey | Sir Edward Grey |
| Colonial Secretary | Earl of Elgin | Earl of Crewe |
| Secretary for War | R.B. Haldane | R.B. Haldane |
| Secretary for India | John Morley | John Morley |
| Secretary for Scotland | John Sinclair | John Sinclair |
| Chief Secretary for Ireland | James Bryce | Augustine Birrell |
| 1st Id. of Admiralty | Id. Tweedmouth | Reginald McKenna |
| Chanc. Du. of Lancaster | Sir H.H. Fowler | Sir H.H. Fowler |
| Pres. Bd. of Trade | David Lloyd George | Winston S. Churchill |
| Pres. Loc. Govt. Board | John Burns | John Burns |
| Pres. Bd. of Agriculture | Id. Carrington | Id. Carrington |
| Pres. Bd. of Education | Augustine Birrell | Walter Runciman |
| Postmaster-General | Sydney Buxton | Sydney Buxton |
| First Comm. of Works | | Lewis V. Harcourt |

APPENDIX II

PRISONERS' (TEMPORARY DISCHARGE FOR ILL-HEALTH) BILL 1913¹

- I. 1) If the Secretary of State is satisfied that by reason of the conditions of a prisoner's health it is undesirable to retain him in prison, but that such conditions of health being due in whole or in part to the prisoner's own conduct in prison, it is desirable that his release should be temporary and conditional only, the Secretary of State may, if he thinks fit, having regard to all the circumstances of the case, by order authorize the temporary discharge of the prisoner for such period and subject to such conditions as may be stated in the order.
 - 2) Any prisoner so discharged shall comply with any conditions stated in the order of temporary discharge, and shall return to prison at the expiration of the period stated in the order, or of such extended period as may be fixed by any subsequent order of the Secretary of State; and if the prisoner fails so to comply or return, he may be arrested without warrant and taken back to prison.
 - 3) Where a prisoner under sentence is discharged in pursuance of an order of temporary discharge, the currency of the sentence shall be suspended from the day on which he is discharged from prison, under the order, to the day on which he is received back into prison, so that the former day shall be reckoned and the latter shall not be reckoned as part of the sentence.
 - 4) Where an order of temporary discharge is made in the case of a prisoner not under sentence, the order shall contain conditions requiring the attendance of the prisoner at any further proceedings on his case at which his presence may be required.
- II. 1) Where the prisoner is undergoing a sentence of penal servitude the powers under this Act shall be in addition to, and not in substitution for, the power of granting licenses under the Penal Servitude Act, 1853-1891.

¹Metcalfe, A.E., Woman's Effort, p. 364-65.

- 2) Nothing in this Act shall affect the duties of the medical officers of a prison in respect of a prisoner whom the Secretary of State does not think fit to discharge under this Act.

III.

In the application of this Act to Scotland and Ireland references to the Secretary of State shall be construed as references to the Secretary for Scotland and the Lord Lieutenant respectively.

APPENDIX III

The Conditions of release, which were not incorporated in the Statute, were as follows:¹

- I. The prisoner shall return to the above mentioned prison on the _____ of _____ 19____.
- II. The period of temporary discharge granted by this order may, if the Secretary of State thinks fit, be extended on a representation by the prisoner that the state of _____ health renders _____ unfit to return to prison. If such representation be made the prisoner shall submit _____ self, if so required, for medical examination, by the medical officer of the above mentioned prison, or other registered medical practitioner appointed by the Secretary of State.
- III. The prisoner shall notify to the commissioner of police of the metropolis the place of residence to which _____ goes on _____ discharge. The prisoner shall not change _____ residence without giving one clear day's previous notice in writing to the Commissioner and shall not be temporarily absent from _____ residence for more than twelve hours without giving a like notice.
- IV. The prisoner shall abstain from any violation of the Law.

If _____ fails to comply with any of the foregoing conditions, the prisoner is liable to be arrested and taken back to prison. While _____ is at large under this order, the currency of sentence is suspended.

¹Metcalfe, op. cit., p. 364-65.

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