

# The Changing Role of Women

Learning Objective:

To find out about the women's suffrage movement.

# What was life like for women in the 19th century?

How did rich women spend their time?

How did poor women spend their time?

Think, pair, share your ideas.





## Poor women

- Many women had to work to earn money for their families.
- Women were only able to work in a few areas, such as domestic service or factories.



- As well as working, women were expected to take care of the home and family by doing all the cooking, cleaning and childcare.
- Women were often paid less for doing the same work as men.

## Middle- and upper-class women

- Most families had servants to do most of the housework for them, including childcare.
- Women were supposed to be educated but only so they could have dinner party conversations. They weren't supposed to know more than men.



- Women's lives were governed by strict rules of social etiquette.
- Women lived lives of leisure and boredom with no purpose other than to go to parties and call on their friends.



Towards the end of the 19th century, many women were becoming more vocal about the injustice of their place in society. Women were generally viewed as people who needed to be protected and who were incapable of leading independent lives or making their own decisions. Many women wanted to dispel this lie and prove that women were just as intelligent and competent as men.

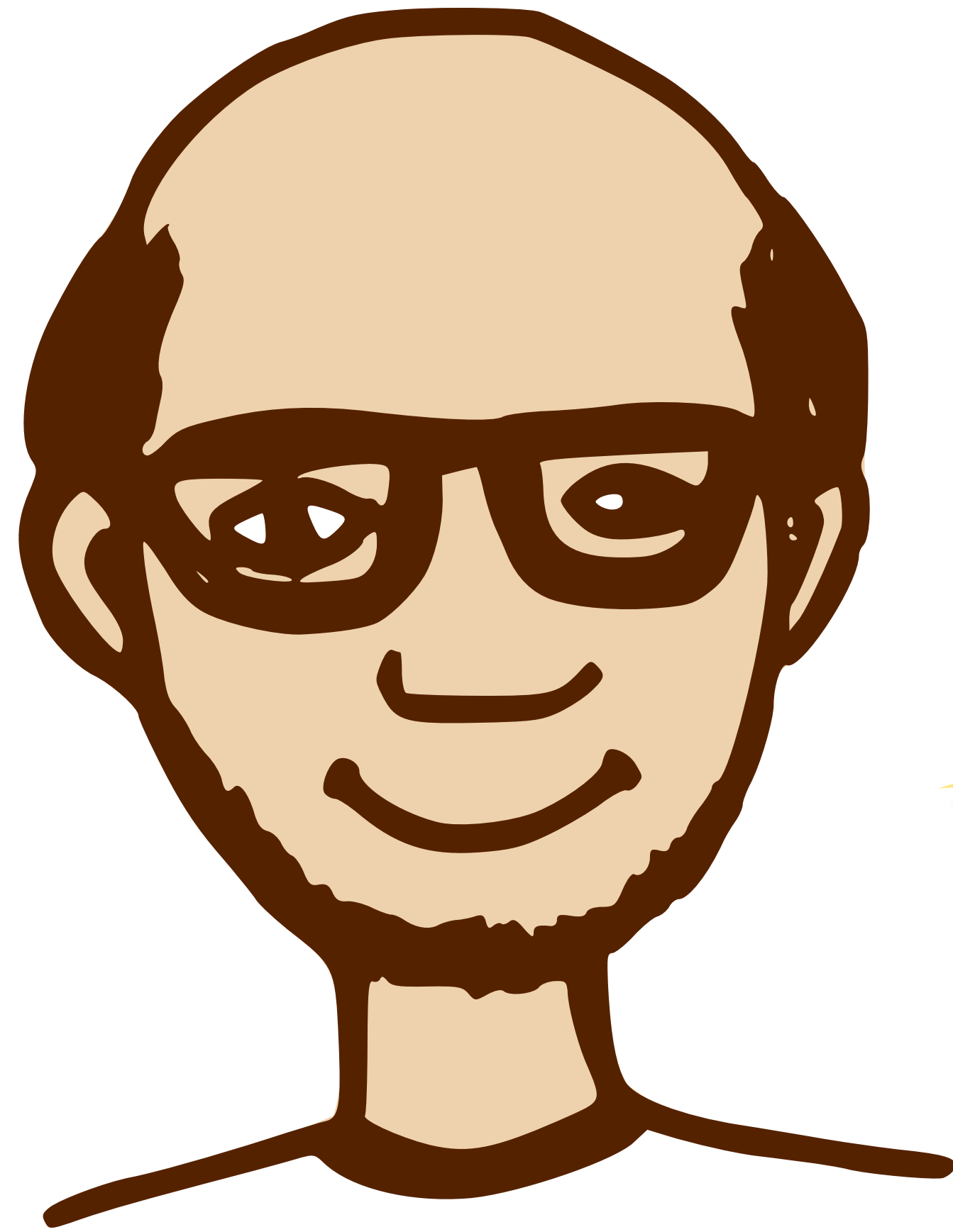
Of course, women had spoken out about their status within society before now but changes to everyday life during the Victorian era meant that women's movements became more numerous and organised.

How do you think the changes during the early 19th century had an effect on the number of women speaking out against their position?





One of the main things that women started to question was why they were unable to vote. The right to vote in political elections is known as suffrage.

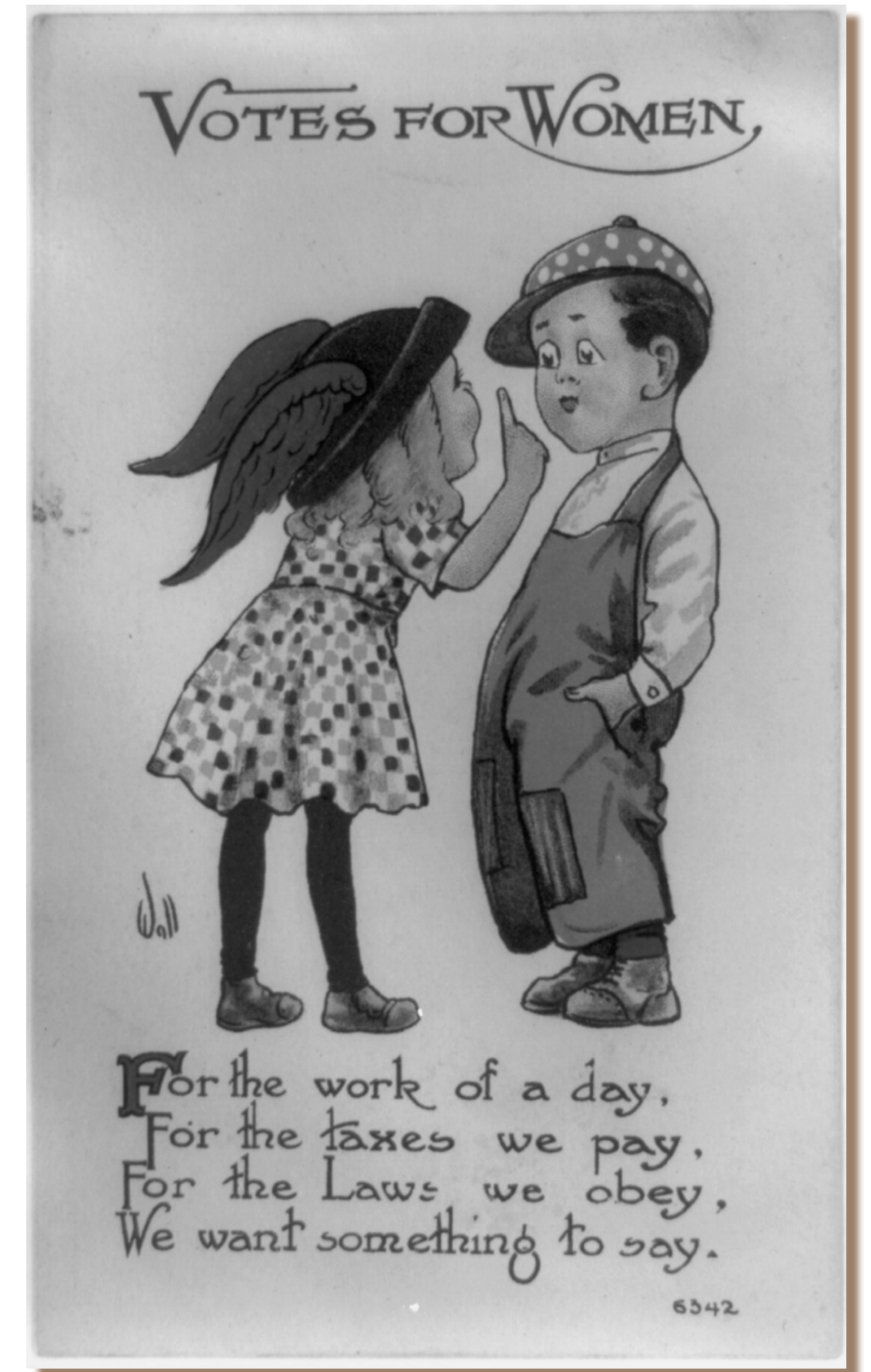


Why do you think the question of women's suffrage was important to Victorian women?



There are many reasons why women wanted to be able to vote. Firstly, they lived in society, just as men did, and wanted to have the same rights as men to decide how their country was run. Being able to vote also meant that they could influence the laws that governed their lives. Whilst it was only men who were able to vote and men who were able to make the laws, women would never be able to become equal citizens.

It was not only women who wanted equal suffrage. Many men, even some Members of Parliament, were for universal suffrage but most men still believed that women would not understand what they were doing if they voted. They thought women were not knowledgeable enough to be trusted to make important decisions.





## THE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN.

THE economical position of women is one of those subjects on which there exists a "conspiracy of silence." While most people, perhaps, imagine that nearly all women marry and are supported by their husbands, those who know better how women live, or die, have rarely anything to say on the subject. Such social problems as this are certainly painful; they may or may not be insoluble; they must not be ignored.

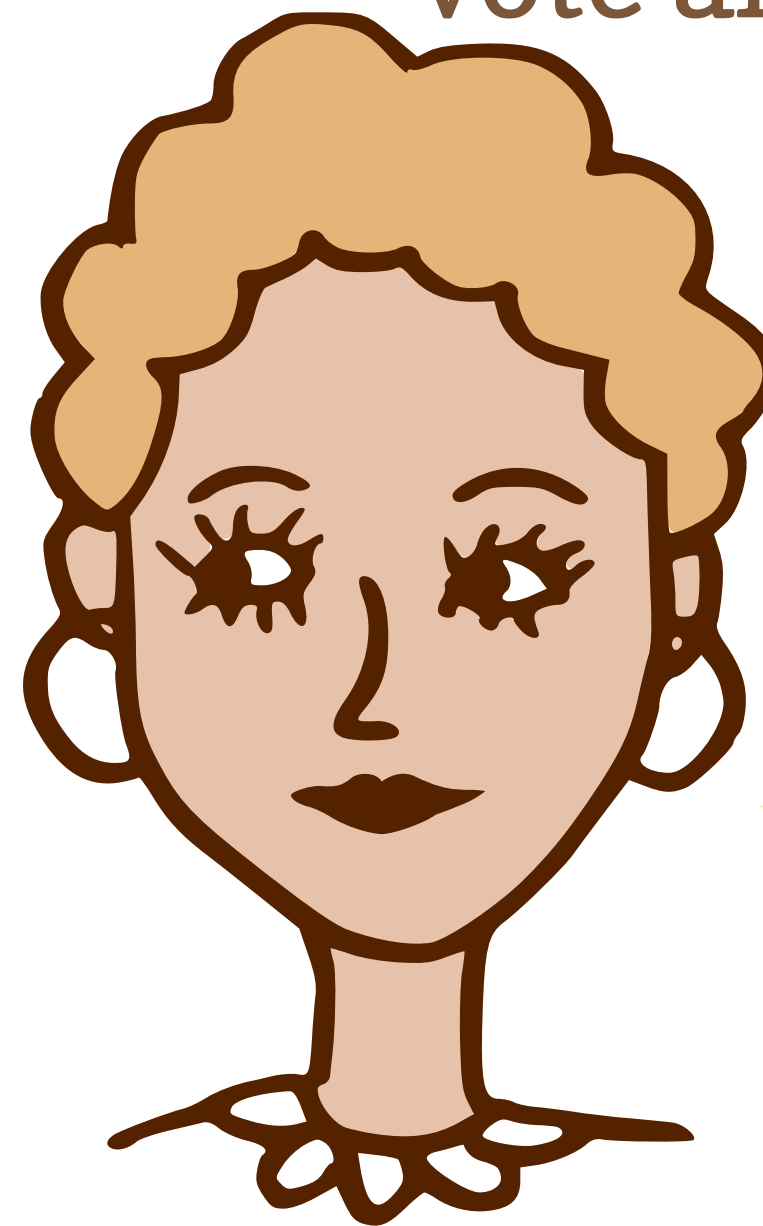
The phrase "to become a governess" is sometimes used as if it were a satisfactory outlet for any unsupported woman above the rank of housemaid. When we see advertisements in the newspapers, offering "a comfortable home," with no salary, as a sufficient reward for accomplishments of the most varied character, we sometimes wonder at the audacity of employers; but when we learn that such an advertisement, offering the situation of nursery governess, *unpaid*, was answered by *three hundred women*, our surprise has in it something of despair.

The truth is, that the facts of society have changed more rapidly than its conventions. Formerly muscles did the business of the world, and the weak were protected by the strong; now brains do the business of the world, and the weak are protected by law. The industrial disabilities of women, unavoidable under the earlier *régime*, have become cruel under the later. There is neither the old necessity of shelter, nor the old certainty of support.

The census of 1861 gave nearly six millions of adult English women, distributed as follows:—

Wives .....	3,488,952
Widows .....	756,717
Spinsters over 20 .....	1,537,814
	<hr/>
	5,782,983

In the 1850s and 1860s there were already many radical political groups who spoke out against the established order. There were already movements to encourage the higher education of women and to allow women to qualify as doctors, lawyers and other professions. In 1867, the London Society for Women's Suffrage was formed. They wrote many papers on women's right to vote and presented them to parliament.

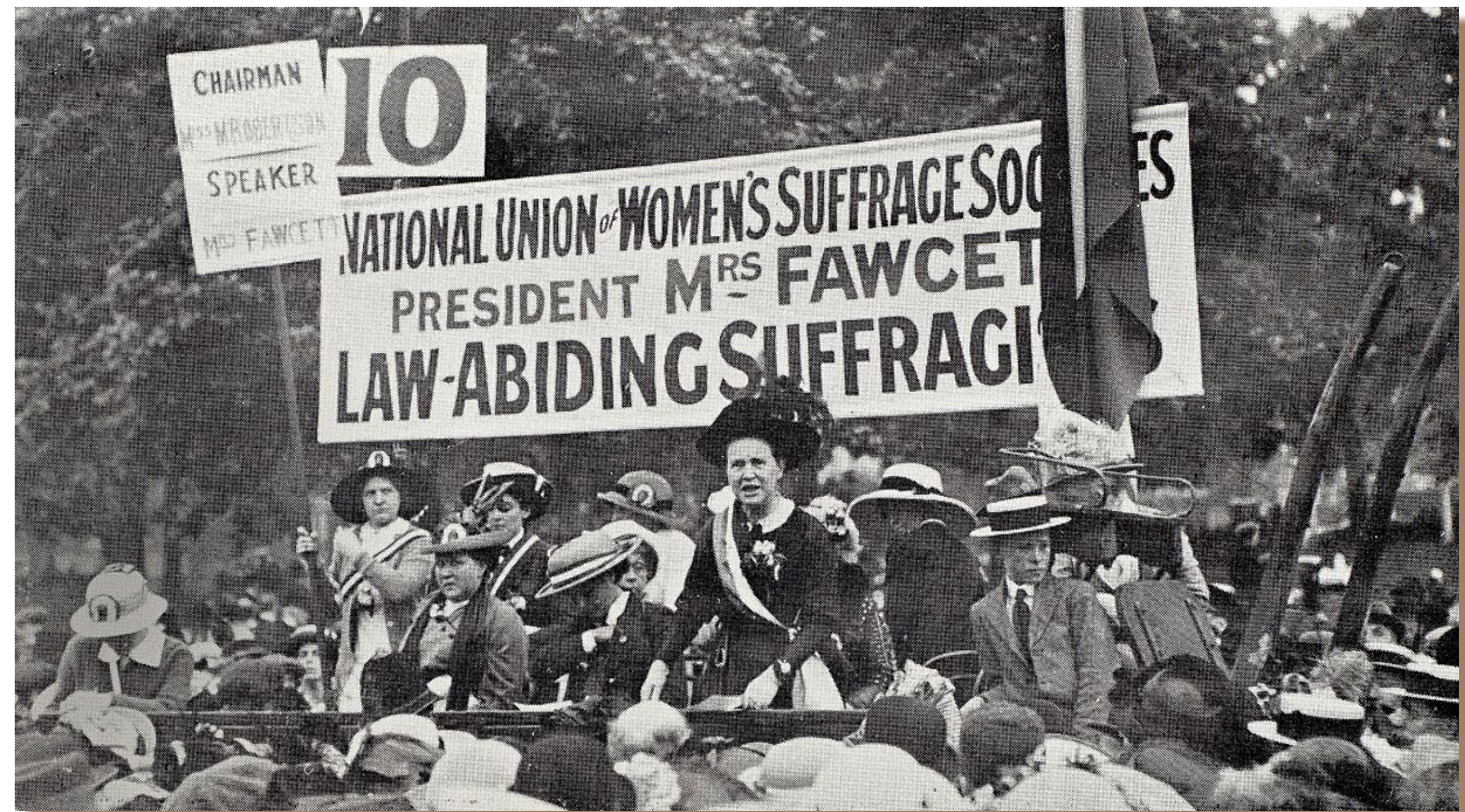


This is the first page of a pamphlet written by Josephine Butler, a member of the London Society for Women's Suffrage, in 1868.



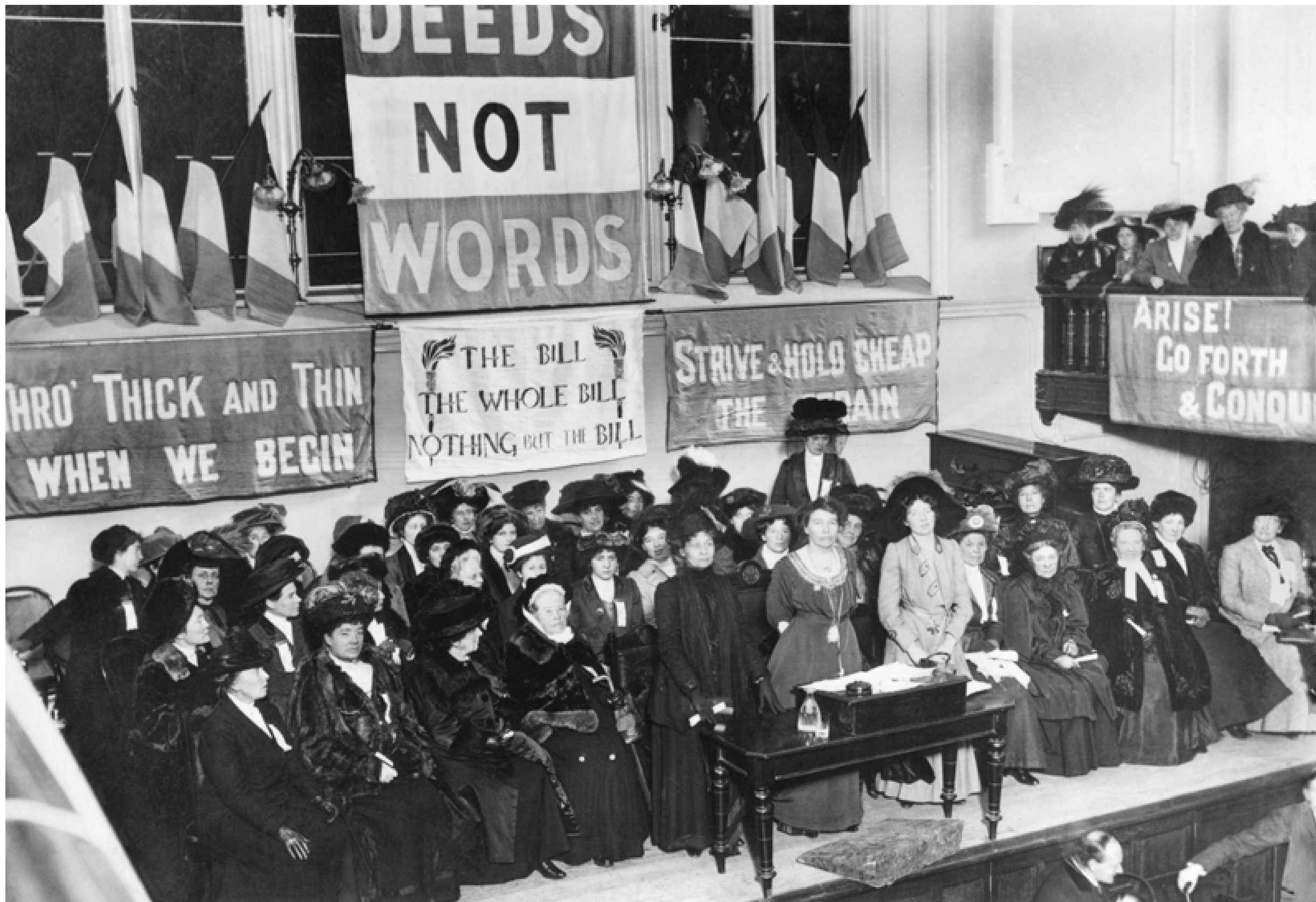


In 1897, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) was formed out of the many suffrage groups that had developed since 1867. It was led by Millicent Fawcett who aimed to bring attention to the women's suffrage movement through peaceful means, such as marches and petitions.





The NUWSS continued their campaigning for several years. They continued to behave in a peaceful and lawful manner to prove that women could be responsible. They increased the awareness of the women's movement but were unsuccessful in getting enough support from parliament to be granted suffrage.



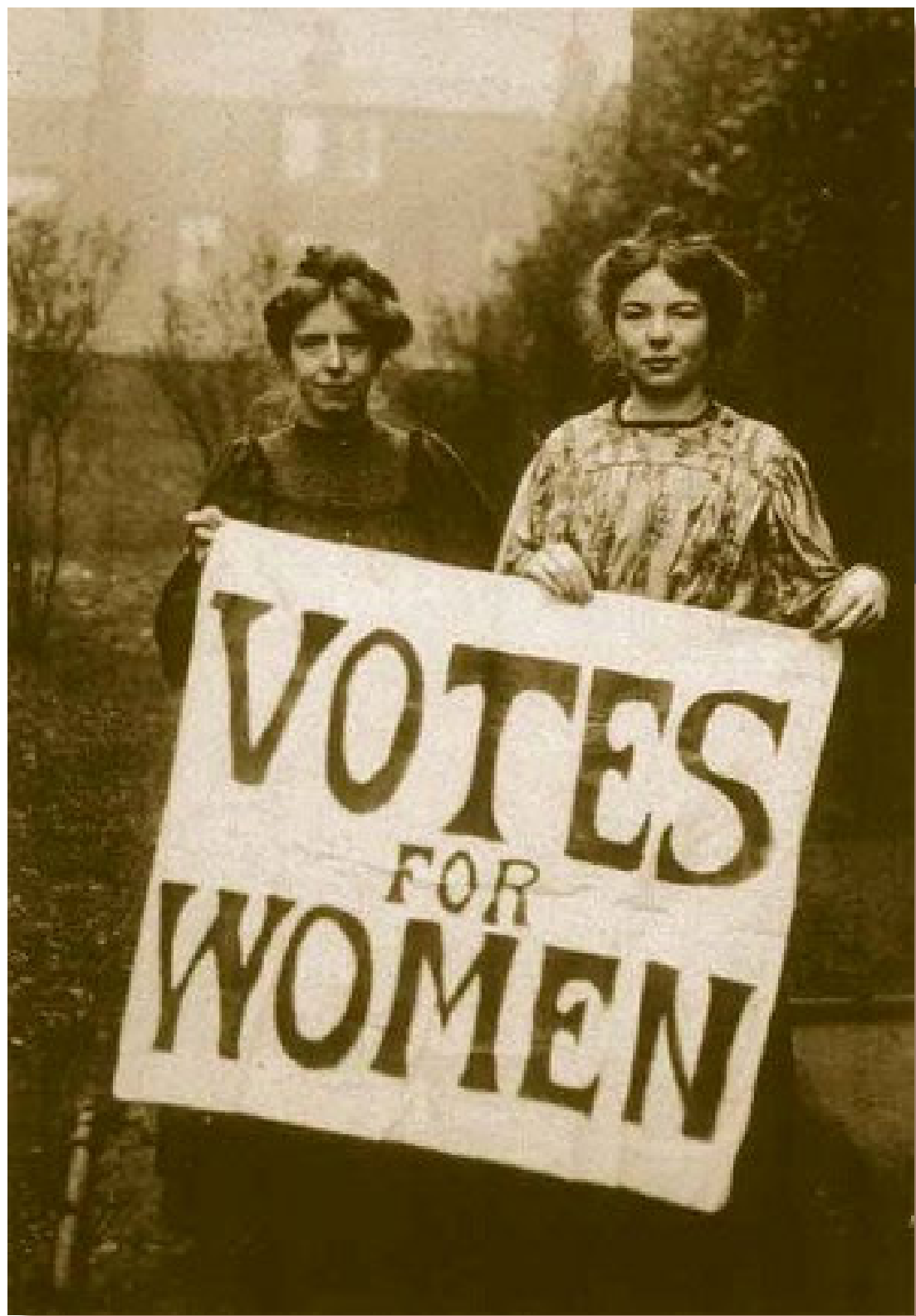
In 1903, a new group, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed by Emmeline Pankhurst. She was frustrated at the slow progress of the movement and decided that a more militant and forceful approach needed to be taken if women were ever to be given the vote.



Can you see what the motto of the WSPU was?



‘Deeds not words’ was the motto the WSPU lived by. An article written by The Daily Mail called the women of the WSPU the ‘suffragettes’ in an attempt to ridicule the women but it didn’t work. They adopted the term and said they were going to be the ‘suffraGETtes’ because they would get the vote!



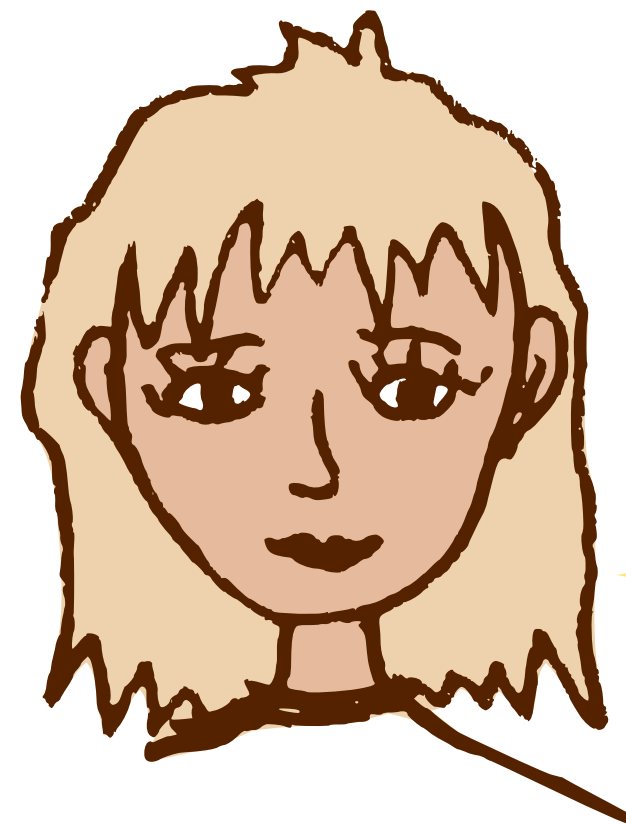
Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst (Emmeline’s daughter)



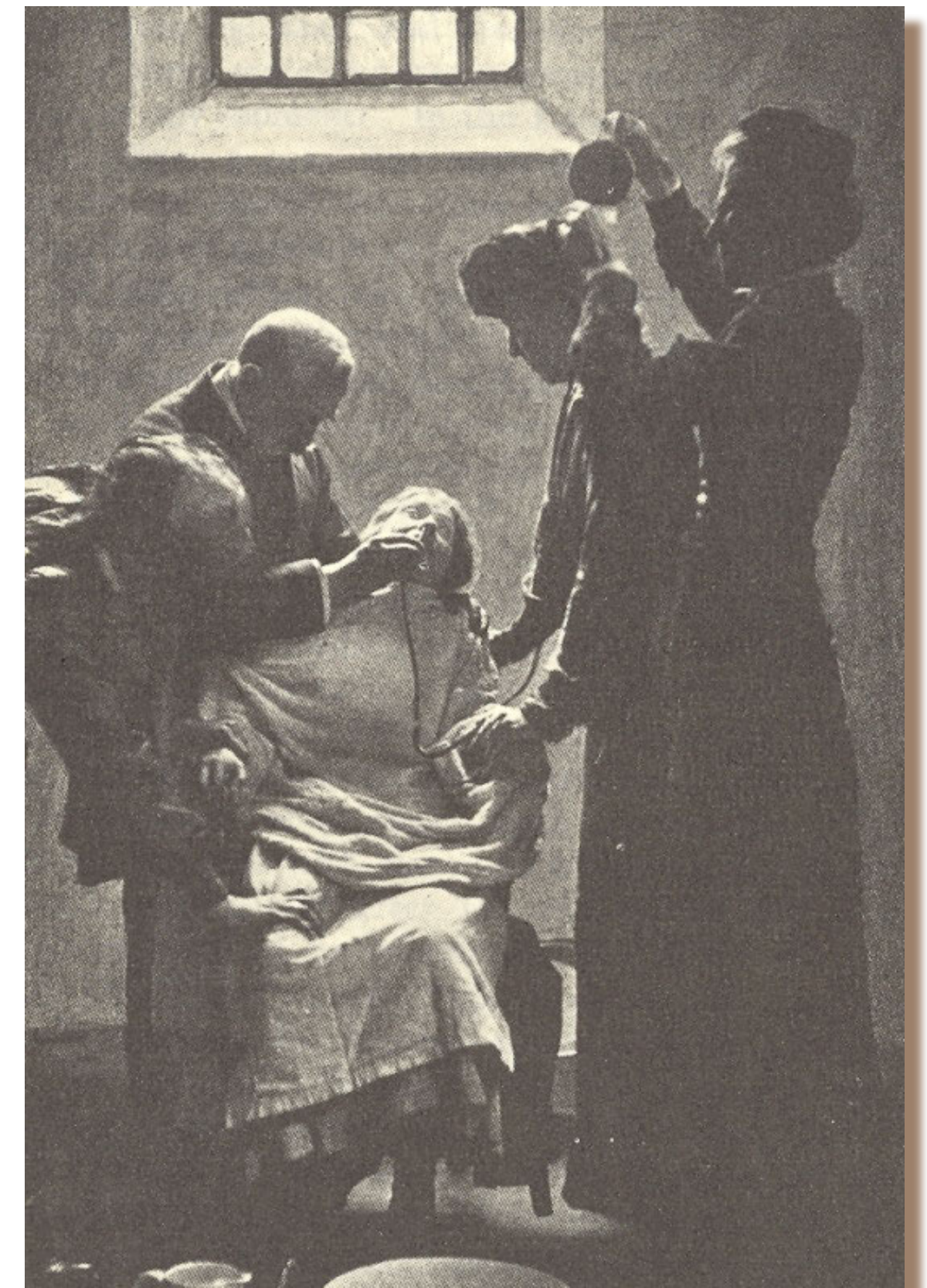
A meeting of the WSPU



The suffragettes organised marches, chained themselves to railings, smashed windows, set fire to buildings and did many other things to gain attention for their cause and to force the authorities to act. Many suffragettes were imprisoned. In jail, they often went on hunger strike to become martyrs for their cause.



The picture on the right shows a suffragette being force-fed in prison because she refused to eat. How does this picture make you feel?







One suffragette, Emily Davison, even jumped in front of the king's horse at Epsom racecourse in 1913. She suffered a fractured skull and died in hospital four days later. Emily was known for her extreme tactics and she had been arrested nine times before this.



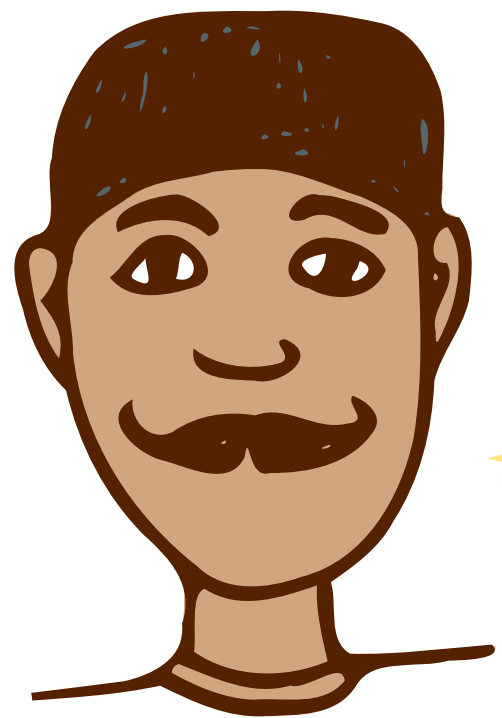
No one is quite sure what her intentions had been - some think she was trying to attach a suffragette's banner to the horse, others that she was trying to pull the horse down. Whatever her motives, her death united the suffragettes. Her funeral was organised by the WSPU and tens of thousands of people lined the streets in London as her coffin was transported to the church.

What do you think of Emily's tactics? Was she brave or foolish?

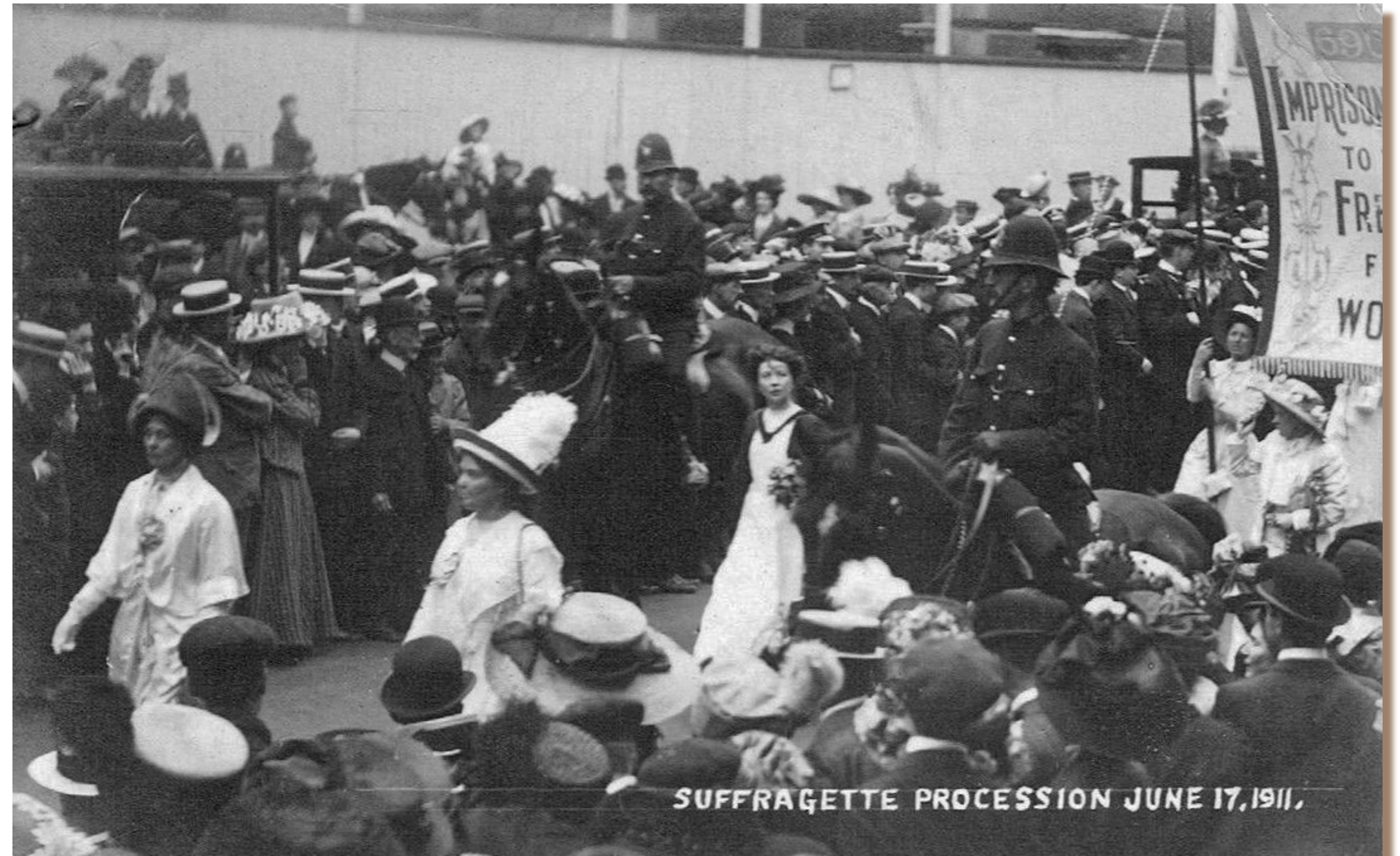


Many men viewed the actions of the suffragettes as proof that women could not be trusted to run their own affairs. They used the example of the violent, militant suffragettes to argue that if women were given the vote, it would be these unpredictable and volatile women who would vote.

By 1914, 11 years after the WSPU first formed, women still did not have the vote in Britain. In this year, a big event happened that changed everything.



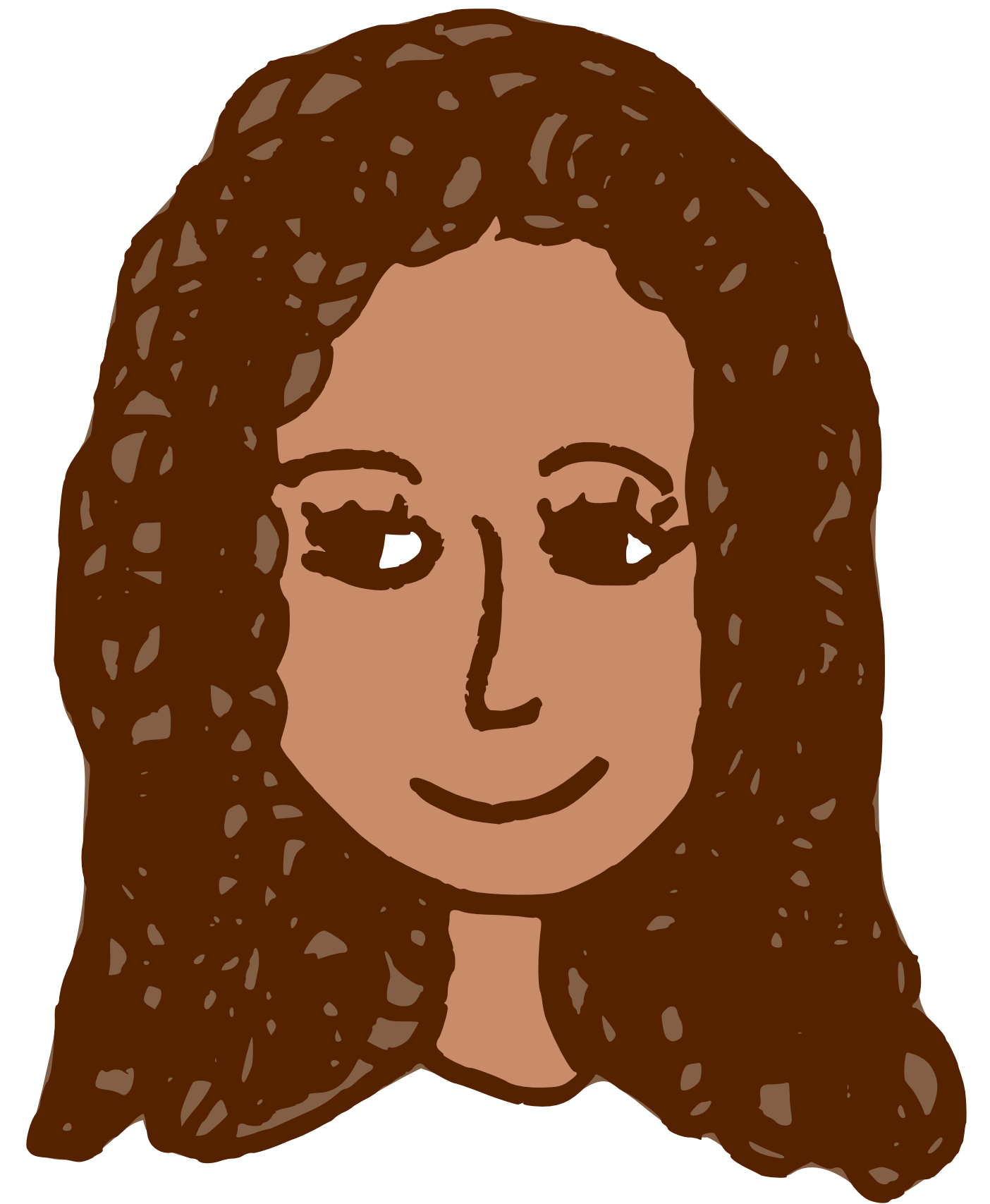
Do you know what this event was?





On 28th July 1914, World War I broke out. The suffragettes stopped protesting and everyone focused on pulling together as a country to help the war effort.

Let's have a look at some more photographs of the suffragette movement up until 1914. Think about what you can see, how the photos make you feel and whether you think you would have supported the suffragettes or not.



















TEA HOUSE, KEW GARDEN, DESTROYED BY SUFFRAGETTES

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Here are some of the arguments for and against women's suffrage.  
Which ones do you agree with? Which do you disagree with? Why?

A woman's place  
is in the home, not  
in politics.

Women do not  
have the correct  
education to use  
their vote wisely.

If male criminals  
and lunatics can  
vote, women  
should be able to  
too.

Women don't fight  
in wars like men do  
so shouldn't have  
the right to vote.

Women can already  
vote in some local  
elections so should  
be able to vote in  
parliamentary  
elections.

Many women don't  
want the vote and  
wouldn't use it if  
they got it.

Giving women a  
role in the harsh  
world of politics  
would change their  
gentle nature.

Women have to pay  
taxes so should be  
able to have a say in  
how their taxes are  
spent.

Women are equal in  
the eyes of God so  
should be treated  
equally.

Women have  
already been given  
the vote in some  
other countries.

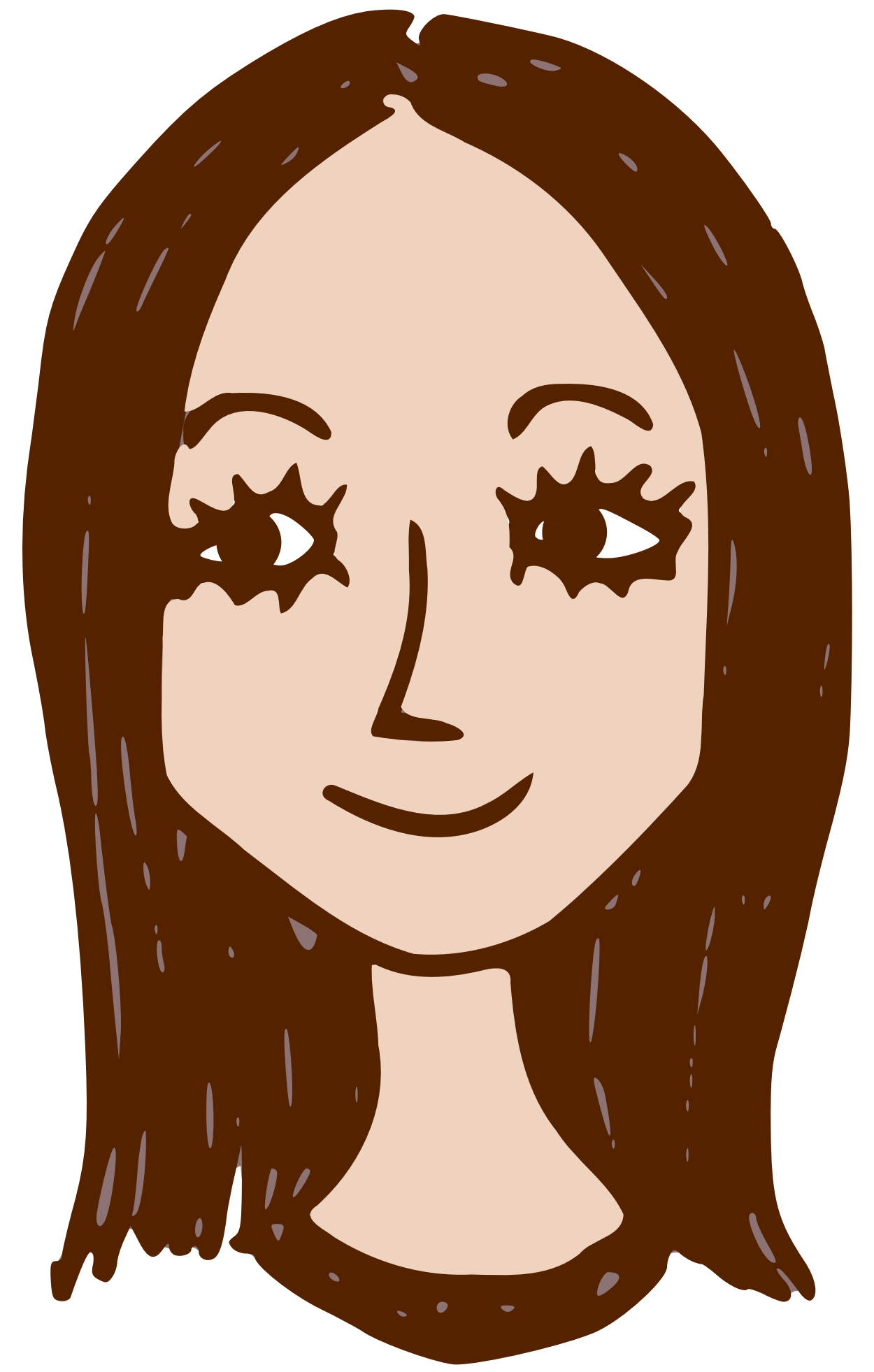




**PLENARY**



With a partner,  
see if you can list five facts  
you have learnt about the  
women's suffrage movement  
today.







What facts did you think of? Which facts do you think are most interesting?