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Millicent Garrett Fawcett: Leader of the Constitutional Women's Suffrage Movement in Great Britain

Cecelia Parks
Hollins University

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Cecelia Parks: Essay

When given the assignment to research a women's issue in modern European history, I chose to study Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the leader of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), the largest women's suffrage organization in Great Britain. I explored her time as head of this organization and the strategies she employed to become enfranchised, concentrating on the latter part of her tenure. My research was primarily based in two pieces of Fawcett's own writing: a history of the suffrage movement, *Women's Suffrage: A Short History of a Great Movement*, published in 1912, and her memoir, *What I Remember*, published in 1925.

Because my research focused so much on Fawcett's own work, I used that writing as my starting point. This proved difficult because Fawcett is quite prolific; she has written at least ten books and numerous articles. The biggest challenge I faced was deciding which primary sources to use. For example, I requested a political theory treatise Fawcett had coauthored with her husband, but soon realized that it was not relevant to my research. In the first draft of my paper, I did not consult *Women's Suffrage*, but upon revision I recognized that it would add more depth to my research and to Fawcett's story, so I included it.

After working with my primary sources for a few days, I started to look for scholarship specifically concerning Fawcett. This was difficult because most of the work on Fawcett in the academy consists of encyclopedia-style biographies, not critical analysis. To combat this challenge, I searched for information on the women's suffrage movement in Great Britain and the time period in general. This included women's role in World War I, the attitude towards women at the time, and Emmeline Pankhurst, the leader of the radical Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). This outside research, though often not directly related to Fawcett, provided valuable perspective and objectivity on her strategies. Because this broader search yielded more results, I had to carefully evaluate which ones were valuable. To do this, I first read the description or abstract included, then read and highlighted the most promising sources. I decided which sources to use during the writing and revision process, when I knew exactly what I needed.

Researching and writing this paper was definitely a learning experience. The main concept regarding research that I took away was to branch out in the research process and not to focus on only one aspect of the project. I struggled when I only searched for sources regarding Fawcett, but I was able to find strong sources when I widened my search. I learned to look at sources that may not originally seem relevant, such as *Women's Suffrage* or the article by Laura Mayhall. I also learned to embrace ambiguity in research—there are no clear answers, and nothing is one-sided. It is important to present the ambiguity in a paper like mine or the story is incomplete.

MILLICENT GARRETT FAWCETT:
LEADER OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN GREAT
BRITAIN

Cecelia Parks

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Millicent Garrett Fawcett's leadership of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) played a key role in the enfranchisement of British women. Though the NUWSS did not engage in militant tactics, Fawcett's insistence on constitutional (legal) methods of gaining suffrage and her political sagacity made significant contributions to the eventual success of the women's suffrage movement, which culminated in the passage of the first women's suffrage legislation in 1918. Though all of the strategies Fawcett used were constitutional and democratic, she chose them primarily because they were the most politically advantageous at the time of their implementation. Several crucial strategies that emerged from her strong ideology include protest marches, the support of the Labour Party by the NUWSS, and the suspension of the women's suffrage movement during World War I. These strategies are evident in Fawcett's memoir *What I Remember*, published in 1925, which addresses her entire life but focuses on her involvement in the fight for women's suffrage, as well as in her history of the women's suffrage movement written to raise awareness about the cause, entitled *Women's Suffrage: A Short History of a Great Movement*, published in 1912.

Millicent Garrett Fawcett was born in Suffolk, England, on June 11, 1847. She led a privileged life, with well-to-do parents and a good education. Her parents were fairly liberal and "remarkably free of the dominant ideology of male supremacy which saw the feminine as second-best."¹ Her sister Elizabeth Garrett Anderson demonstrated their liberal upbringing by becoming one of Britain's first female doctors. Growing up in a setting in which women were

¹ Janet Copeland, "Millicent Garrett Fawcett," *History Review* 13, no. 58 (2007): 36, accessed March 8, 2011 in EBSCO Academic Search Complete.

not considered inferior contributed to Fawcett's strong beliefs concerning women's issues, especially women's suffrage.²

Fawcett traced the roots of her views on women's suffrage to Mary Wollstonecraft, whom she admired greatly. She writes, "Mary Wollstonecraft started the demand of women for political liberty in England," and goes on to call her a "woman of exceptionally pure and exalted character."³ This shows her admiration for Wollstonecraft as well as giving the women's suffrage movement a strong moral foundation in a woman of good character. She believed that the women's suffrage movement was the "gradual diffusion and working out in practice of the principles proclaimed by Wollstonecraft."⁴ Fawcett also thought that citizenship in a democracy involved fulfilling various duties to ensure the proper functioning of the government and society; her respect of the government and the duties of a citizen contributed to her insistence on constitutional tactics in the women's suffrage movement. Fawcett also saw the women's suffrage movement as the gradual realization of the inevitable end of constitutional reform.⁵

Fawcett's beliefs about women's suffrage were far from the norm of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the period in which she worked. The domestic ideal was the dominant ideology concerning women. Women were thought to be naturally inclined towards

² Ibid.

³ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage: A Short History of a Great Movement* (1912; reprint, New York: Source Book Press, 1970), 5.

⁴ Joyce Senders Pedersen, "The Historiography of the Women's Movement in Victorian and Edwardian England: Varieties of Contemporary Liberal Feminist Interpretation," *European Legacy* 1, no. 3 (1996): 1053.

⁵ Laura E. Nym Mayhall, "Household and Market in Suffragette Discourse, 1903-14," *European Legacy* 6, no. 2 (2001): 190, accessed March 8, 2011 in EBSCO Academic Search Complete.

the domestic sphere, and were not expected to have any interests outside of that limited world. Women were certainly not thought to be as intelligent as men; Fawcett notes, “It is so difficult for most men to understand that it is a very left-handed compliment to a woman to say when she shows intelligence or force of character that she might be a man.”⁶ Because women were not presumed to be as smart as men, they were not considered to be capable of holding the same political rights as men, and politics was an exclusively male field. Any woman who seemed intelligent or wanted political rights was displaying masculine, and therefore improper, traits. Women “belonged as naturally to domestic life as did men to political life and ought not to be thrust into the hurly-burly of public meetings, canvassing, and voting.”⁷ Women were not thought to want, need, or be capable of holding a place in the political process. Fawcett’s demands for women’s suffrage, which she first articulated in 1870, were especially radical for the time because universal male suffrage was not implemented until 1884, when working class men were enfranchised. One prominent writer “vehemently opposed any extension of the franchise, referring to the ‘bovine stupidity’ of the working classes, whom he described as ‘crowds of people scarcely more civilized than the majority of 2,000 years ago.’”⁸ Women were considered even less deserving of the vote than working class men.

Though Fawcett’s views on suffrage were quite radical for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were not as radical as those of the militant suffragette movement. The

⁶ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *What I Remember* (1925; reprint, Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1976), 155.

⁷ Walter L. Arnstein, “Votes for Women: Myths and Reality,” *History Today* 18, no. 8 (1968): 533.

⁸ Robert Blackburn, “Laying the Foundations of the Modern Voting System: The Representation of the People Act 1918,” *Parliamentary History* 30, no. 1 (2011): 35.

militant movement was led by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), which was founded in 1903, six years after the NUWSS was founded. The suffragettes (as opposed to Fawcett's suffragists, who employed strictly constitutional means of gaining suffrage) felt that the movement was never going to succeed if they did not take extreme measures. Fawcett writes, "We were still, however, faced by the implacable hostility of the majority of the Liberal leaders... It was in face of these facts that the Women's Social and Political Union was founded..."⁹ At the time, the Liberals were in control of the government. The suffragists knew that the more conservative Liberals were not as likely to support their movement as other parties, such as the more liberal Labour Party. Emmeline Pankhurst, the founder of the WSPU, gives her reason for turning to militancy while referring to the earlier expansions of men's suffrage, saying, "Men got the vote because they were and would be violent. The women did not get it because they were constitutional and law-abiding."¹⁰ The radical action taken by the militants included disrupting meetings of opposition leaders, breaking windows, and rejecting any fines or imprisonment levied against them.¹¹ It is important to note that Fawcett actually supported the WSPU until they began using violence. She writes, "I did not hear, neither do I find in their writings, any trace of intentional violence or non-constitutional action at the beginning of their activity," and uses a positive tone when referring to the nonviolent suffragette movement.¹² She

⁹ Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 176.

¹⁰ Emmeline Pankhurst, "Why We Are Militant," in *Perspectives From the Past: Primary Sources in Western Civilizations, Volume 2: From the Age of Absolutism Through Contemporary Times*, ed. James M. Brophy, Joshua Cole, Steven Epstein, John Robertson, and Thomas Max Safley, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 630.

¹¹ Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage*, 65.

¹² Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 176.

notes the helpful effects the suffragettes had on the movement as a whole, galvanizing it and bringing attention to it. The women's suffrage movement "was the topic of conversation in every household and at every social gathering... Money rolled in in an unexpected way."¹³

Fawcett did recognize the benefits of the militant suffragette movement, but she did not support their violent actions.

While the suffragettes' approach was successful in drawing attention to the suffrage movement in general, their radical actions eventually harmed the movement. The suffragettes' strategy of "public disruption, self-harm, and terrorist activities... had served to damage the cause of women's suffrage and stiffen opposition among politicians who were determined not to give in to such threats of violence."¹⁴ Political leaders did not want to cave to the demands of such radical women. The militant tactics employed by the suffragettes eventually increased the opposition to the women's suffrage movement.

The militant movement gave all women fighting for suffrage a bad reputation with ordinary people. Fawcett cites an example from *The Times*, in which an elderly gentleman writes, "Will the lady... allow him to express his sincere thanks for a kindness from a woman, which is rare in this age of Suffragettes?"¹⁵ Fawcett also notes the controversy created by the suffragette movement. Some "vehemently approved" of the suffragettes, while others expressed "intense hatred and contempt."¹⁶ Those that disapproved, such as the old man writing in *The Times*, thought that women were losing the feminine traits of kindness, gentleness, and

¹³ Ibid., 184.

¹⁴ Blackburn, "Laying the Foundations of the Modern Voting System," 44.

¹⁵ Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 182.

¹⁶ Ibid.

hospitality because of the suffrage movement. The domestic ideal was being fractured by the radical actions of the suffragettes, and this threw gender norms into chaos. This change frightened many people, and served to strengthen the opposition to women's suffrage. However, Fawcett's comparatively extended discussion of the opposition to the suffragettes in her memoir shows that she recognized the impact the suffragettes had on the movement as a whole and that she was able to use the reaction to the suffragettes to determine the strategies of the NUWSS.

Fawcett's refusal to engage in militant tactics and her decision to rely on constitutional methods of protest grew out of the backlash against the suffragette movement. Fawcett writes that she chose to remain in the constitutional movement because:

I could not support a revolutionary movement, especially as it was ruled autocratically, at first, by a small group of four persons, and latterly by one person only... In 1908, this despotism decreed that the policy of suffering violence, but using none, was to be abandoned. After that, I had no doubt whatever that what was right for me and the NUWSS was to keep strictly to our principle of supporting our movement only by argument, based on common sense and experience and not by personal violence or lawbreaking of any kind.¹⁷

Fawcett's strong belief in democracy is evident here because she refused to support the militant movement primarily because it was not governed democratically. Fawcett also displays her respect for social order and the rule of law, because she does not want to disrupt that order simply to make a point; also, she does not see the suffrage movement as being outside and above the law simply because the government had not yet given in to the demands of the suffragettes.

However, these were not her only reasons for rejecting the militant movement. Fawcett viewed the suffrage movement as being firmly based in morals, particularly in the moral superiority of women. Fawcett writes:

Perhaps the mild degree of violence perpetrated by the suffragettes was intended to lower our sex pride; we were going to show the world how to gain reforms without violence,

¹⁷ Ibid., 185.

without killing people and blowing up buildings, and doing other silly things that men have done when they wanted the laws altered.¹⁸

She was reluctant to engage in militant tactics because they were what men had traditionally used in previous revolutions. Because she was firmly committed to the notion of women's moral superiority and saw the suffrage movement as based in the strong moral character of Mary Wollstonecraft, Fawcett wanted to show that women could accomplish social change without violence. Fawcett believed that the suffragettes' radical actions made women as a whole look crazy, and crazy women were not rational, moral individuals who could fully appreciate and use political rights. The militant movement harmed the entire suffrage movement by undermining the belief in women's moral superiority to men. However, the suffragettes did have one positive effect on Fawcett and the NUWSS: the radical actions of the suffragettes made the suffragists' constitutional protests seem very tame and sensible. The WSPU served as a "valuable foil" to the more traditional NUWSS, making the latter seem like the acceptable alternative to the government.¹⁹ When compared to the WSPU, the NUWSS reinforced the idea of women's rationality and moral superiority.

However, the notion of women's moral superiority backfired to some extent on the NUWSS. Some anti-suffragists used this notion to argue against the vote. If women were superior to men morally, then they did not want women to be lowered to the same level as men.²⁰ Others felt that politics would corrupt women. Fawcett writes, "The Anti-Suffragists... imagined that as soon as a woman got a vote she would throw to the winds her ordinary duties and

¹⁸ Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage*, 66.

¹⁹ Carol F. Cini, "From British Women's WWI Suffrage Battle to the League of Nations Covenant," *UCLA Historical Journal* 14 (1994): 83.

²⁰ Arnstein, "Votes for Women," 538.

occupations [and] neglect her home.”²¹ Some anti-suffragists believed that politics was a dirty business that would make women forget their proper place in the world and their role as the truly moral beings in society.

While the militants demanded immediate and complete suffrage for women, Fawcett was a gradualist who advocated pushing for change one step at a time. For example, when a suffrage bill was finally making its way through Parliament in 1918, she “greatly preferred an imperfect Bill, which could be passed, to the most perfect scheme in the world which could not pass.”²² In the 1918 legislation, she conceded to allow the voting age for women to be established at thirty years of age, compared to twenty-one years for men. Many in the suffrage movement wanted to hold out for full equality, but Fawcett was willing to compromise in the short term to realize more long-term changes and appeal to a wide variety of people.²³ This harkens back to her strong belief in democracy; any legitimate movement for change would have to be the will of the people, and Fawcett worked hard to ensure that women’s suffrage was what the people wanted. This willingness to compromise and insistence on constitutional methods of protest formed the basis of Fawcett’s strategy for the NUWSS.

One of the main constitutional methods of protest employed by Fawcett was the organization of protest marches, the first of which took place in February of 1907. These marches were a response to militant actions; the suffragists needed a way to draw attention to their movement and show their strength without resorting to radical suffragette tactics. Fawcett

²¹ Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 176.

²² *Ibid.*, 243.

²³ David Rubenstein, “Millicent Garrett Fawcett and the Meaning of Women’s Emancipation, 1886-99,” *Victorian Studies* 34, no 3. (1991): 375.

writes, “We, the old stagers, adopted new methods, one of the most successful of which was the organization of public processions in the streets.”²⁴ The second of these marches, held in 1908, was particularly successful in drawing attention to the women’s suffrage movement.²⁵

Fawcett chose to use protest marches as a way to compete with the militant movement in their drastic, attention-grabbing tactics and remind everyone that the WSPU was not the only suffrage organization, especially because the NUWSS was significantly larger than the WSPU. The NUWSS marches drew large crowds and spread the word about the constitutional women’s suffrage movement. The marches, though still perfectly legal, were much more radical and involved more risk than anything else the constitutional movement had organized before. “Proper” women did not march in the streets, and the marchers risked losing their jobs, damaging their reputations, and being heckled by observers.²⁶ Fawcett notes that “it must not be supposed that the comments made upon us were all complementary” and goes on to mention “one stern-looking... man walked rapidly down our lines facing us and saying from time to time, ‘Yes, yes, all one type, all alike, all old maids.’”²⁷ The stigma that came from participating in the protest marches was a significant risk taken by Fawcett; the marches could have damaged Fawcett’s projected image of women’s moral superiority, sensibility, and rationality. However, they did not, and the marches were employed successfully. Fawcett writes, “I believe we made a really favourable impression on the crowd of onlookers.” She goes on to mention that one

²⁴ Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 190.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁶ Harold L. Smith, *The British Women’s Suffrage Campaign 1866-1928* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), 23.

²⁷ Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 191-192.

prominent anti-suffragist changed her mind after seeing the 1908 march.²⁸ Protest marches conducted by the NUWSS were an effective response to the extreme actions of the suffragettes.

Fawcett's use of protest marches was also rooted in her firm faith in democracy. One of the main reasons for the marches was to display the strength of the women's suffrage movement. They were a way to communicate to Members of Parliament that women's suffrage was a popular concept with a large following; hopefully, the MPs would notice and support the movement. Protest marches also demonstrate Fawcett's insistence on only using constitutional methods. Fawcett could have easily been swept up in the militant fervor, or tried to compete with the militants by acting violently, but she refused to compromise her belief in the need for a constitutional movement and instead came up with a solution that peacefully drew attention to the suffragists.

It is important to note that while Fawcett probably considered other strategies in response to militancy, protest marches are the only strategy specifically discussed in *What I Remember*. How Fawcett arrived at protest marches as a strategy is not mentioned, either. Other "new methods" were mentioned, but "public processions in the streets" is the only specific method included.²⁹ The same is true of the support of the Labour Party and the decision to suspend the suffrage movement during World War I. Each of these choices must have required a lot of deliberation and debate, but Fawcett mentions none of that. These strategies are portrayed as the logical, obvious choice in each situation. This makes sense because it is Fawcett writing her own memoir, and she probably wanted to portray herself in the best possible light by highlighting those strategies that were effective and downplaying those that were not.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 190.

A second strategy used by Fawcett and the NUWSS was their support of the Labour Party. Prior to the defeat of the Conciliation Bill in 1912, which was the first real opportunity to gain women's suffrage, the NUWSS had not supported any specific party, but rather supported any individual who believed in women's suffrage.³⁰ After many of these individuals failed to vote for the Conciliation Bill, Fawcett and the NUWSS decided to abandon their non-party stance and support Labour. Fawcett explains their reasoning:

This, of course, was because Labour was the only party definitely supporting Women's Suffrage... A Suffragist who belonged to a Suffrage party was a better friend than a Suffragist who belonged to a party which was Anti-Suffrage or neutral.³¹

Fawcett did make exceptions to this rule; the NUWSS still supported loyal suffragists from other parties. However, no other specific party is mentioned in Fawcett's discussion of the choice to support Labour; supporting a party at all is portrayed as the only logical step after the defeat of the Conciliation Bill, and Labour is represented as the only logical party to support. The support of Labour allowed the NUWSS to back only those candidates most likely to help advance the cause of women's suffrage, which was a better use of the organization's resources and time. The political support given and received by the NUWSS is in contrast to the WSPU, whose violent tactics were condemned by most politicians. Fawcett notes, "no one has been more severe in his condemnation of militantism than Mr. Churchill."³² Churchill's high place in the government of the time (1908-1911) makes his views representative of the general opinion towards the WSPU. Therefore, the NUWSS, with its constitutional methods, was more attractive to parties such as Labour.

³⁰ Ibid., 206.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage*, 66.

It was to the political advantage of Fawcett and the NUWSS to support Labour, because they had pledged their support as a party to the cause of women's suffrage. Also, the previous strategy of supporting individual candidates regardless of party affiliation had obviously failed, so the NUWSS had to change with the times. Though this strategy was the most politically advantageous at the time, it was not without risks. If Labour candidates supported by the NUWSS had failed to win elections, the women's suffrage movement would have suffered tremendously. However, the Labour Party continued to grow in popularity and the support from the NUWSS paid off in the end. Some members of the Liberal and Conservative parties worried that the NUWSS would cease to support them, but Fawcett was able to allay these fears by portraying the change in NUWSS policy regarding parties as temporary, but she still had to tread carefully with any change in policy when it came to political parties.³³

Fawcett's support of the Labour Party demonstrates her faith in the democratic process and in constitutional methods of effecting change. She used the time-honored method of supporting one political party over others, which worked within the existing political structure, rather than working outside of it as the militant suffragettes did. If she had not had faith that working through the government would lead to social change, she would have joined the militants in their radical means of effecting change.

A final strategy that demonstrated Fawcett's political acumen as well as her commitment to her country and to her cause was the suspension of women's suffrage efforts during World War I. Though debates about the wisdom of this decision probably took place when war broke out in 1914, Fawcett portrays the choice to suspend suffrage efforts as easy and obvious. She writes, "We were trying to devise plans for keeping our organization in being—notwithstanding

³³ Smith, *British Women's Suffrage Campaign*, 65.

what we felt in the event of war to be absolutely necessary—the suspension of our political work.”³⁴ She does not discuss the factors that led to her decision to stop the political work of the NUWSS. Fawcett and the NUWSS also had to choose between joining the peace movement and supporting their country in war. Some members of the NUWSS felt that it was necessary to join the peace movement to maintain the image of women’s moral superiority. However, Fawcett disagreed. She noticed that men were distressed by the women’s pacifism because they interpreted it as a sign of weakness. Men were afraid that if given political rights, weak, pacific women would undermine Great Britain’s strength on the global stage as a military power. Therefore, Fawcett led the NUWSS in a policy of support for the war effort in any way possible.³⁵ The NUWSS encouraged all members of the various suffrage societies around Great Britain to engage in any kind of work that would “sustain the vital energies of the nation while the strain of war lasted.”³⁶ Under Fawcett’s leadership, women across Great Britain worked to raise money, care for those stranded or wounded by the war, preserve food, and eventually to even work in industry. However, Fawcett was shrewd:

Rather than accepting limited definitions of women’s gendered roles, she expanded the possibilities by claiming that women’s ‘nature’ made them eligible to be voting citizens, whether they were dutiful war industry or war relief workers, aggressive defenders of their country in opposition to pacifism, or adherents of peace after the war was over.³⁷

Fawcett used the war effort to portray women as good citizens who supported their country and thus were worthy of the right to vote. This was a highly effective approach. People, particularly

³⁴ Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 217.

³⁵ Smith, *British Women’s Suffrage Campaign*, 73.

³⁶ Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 219.

³⁷ Cini, “British Women’s WWI Suffrage Battle,” 94.

politicians, were impressed not only that the suffragists had given up their efforts during the war, but also at women's productivity and usefulness in the war effort in general. Fawcett notes the "extraordinary hardships" women went through in their war work as well as their patriotism.³⁸ Women who worked in industry "brought the same spirit to their work." She indicates the effect of women's work and attitude towards men, writing, "Men could hardly speak of these things without tears in their eyes."³⁹ Herbert Asquith, the former prime minister, was especially impressed by the women's contribution to the war effort; because of their contribution, he believed that a new order between men and women had come about and that women deserved more political rights in the new order.⁴⁰

Fawcett also noted the change in attitudes towards women after World War I. She notes that there was a "very great impression made throughout the country by the national value of women's war services and the ungrudging, unbargaining generosity of spirit with which they had been rendered."⁴¹ In the long term, the suspension of the women's suffrage movement during World War I was all to the suffragists' advantage. Public attitude towards women changed to see them as patriotic individuals who deserved full citizenship rights.

Suspension of the women's suffrage movement was a shrewd political move. It allowed the suffragists to show that they were truly dedicated to their country and that they would be good, responsible citizens who were worthy of political rights. Though Fawcett thought that the

³⁸ Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 226.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁴⁰ Blackburn, "Laying the Foundations," 44.

⁴¹ Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 226.

suspension would have potential positive effects, she could not have been sure.⁴² She expressed significant doubts about the eventual outcome of the suspension, writing, “I thought the hope of women’s freedom was indefinitely postponed, and that this was the supreme sacrifice asked of us at this stupendous moment.”⁴³ Though she felt that stopping the movement was the right thing to do, she was not sure that it would have the positive consequences that were eventually realized. Also, support for the war and women’s work during the war had the potential to make women seem masculine and undermine the notion of the moral superiority found only in women. However, the positive effects of the suspension of suffrage efforts during World War I outweighed any negative effects by far.

Fawcett’s suspension of the women’s suffrage movement during World War I displayed her patriotism and commitment to the constitution and democratic nature of her country. She saw that the women in the suffrage movement could help their country in a time of need, so she decided to support her country instead of pressing on with the suffrage movement. The suspension of efforts applied to all aspects of the suffrage movement, including the militant suffragettes, though the WSPU ceased to play a significant role in the suffrage movement after 1914. Fawcett’s leadership of the movement’s war efforts demonstrates her commitment to Britain and thus to its constitution because she was willing to make sacrifices to help Britain during the war. It also shows her commitment to democracy because she was acting in a way that would garner support for her movement from all levels of society.

Fawcett’s leadership of the NUWSS in constitutional and democratic methods of protest played a significant role in the success of the suffrage movement. However, the suffragists’

⁴² Copeland, “Millicent Garrett Fawcett,” 40.

⁴³ Fawcett, *What I Remember*, 221

work was not the only factor that led to the passage of the 1918 law that first granted women's suffrage. Fawcett identifies two factors that led to the passage of the bill: the "very great impression made throughout the country by the national value of women's war services" and "the extremely defective character of our old franchise law."⁴⁴ World War I brought the defects of the old law to light, because it banned soldiers fighting abroad from voting. Politicians recognized the need for reform, and the suffragists had shown themselves to be worthy of political rights, so women were granted limited suffrage along with the other reforms in the 1918 law. Though Fawcett was not wholly responsible for the success of the suffrage movement, she played a key role as the leader of one of the most prominent suffrage organizations.

Millicent Garrett Fawcett's political knowledge led to her commitment to democratic and constitutional strategies used to obtain women's suffrage. Her refusal to join the radical suffragette movement was a successful political move and demonstrated her commitment to constitutional methods of protest. Her moderate actions allayed fears that women were too emotional and irrational to be trusted with the vote. Fawcett portrayed women as rational creatures who simply wanted equal rights as citizens. She also did this through her support of gradual change towards women's suffrage. Other strategies employed by Fawcett included protest marches, the support of the Labour Party, and the suspension of the women's suffrage movement during World War I. All of the tactics Fawcett used were constitutional and peaceful, because she believed that they would be the most successful strategies to use; this demonstrates her political acumen. Fawcett's hard work and good strategies paid off in 1918, when the first law granting limited women's suffrage went into effect; it came about in part because of Fawcett's leadership of the NUWSS.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 226.

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