

How different were the women's suffrage movements in the UK and Russia?

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Campaigning for women's suffrage had always been an important part of British politics. The NUWSS (National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies) started in 1897 which was the organisation on the suffragists lead by Millicent Fawcett. They carried out lawful protests including rallies, meetings and marches to try to convince Parliament that they deserved the vote. However, despite putting many bills before Parliament, some women felt that peaceful protesting wasn't getting them anywhere and the WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union) started in 1903. This group was lead by Emmeline Pankhurst and they broke windows, set buildings on fire, planted bombs, poured dangerous chemicals into post boxes and many more violent acts. This helped bring a lot of attention to their cause, forcing the issue into the public consciousness. However, it lead many to consider the suffragettes as terrorists and 'proved' people's opinions that women were too emotional and irrational to have the vote. They eventually got the vote in 1918 in the Representation of the People Act, but how was this achieved?

Arguably, one factor had nothing to do with the suffragettes, but the reigning political party; the Conservatives. Another great debate at the time was the need for men over 21 to get the vote without needing to have a property of over £5 and the Conservatives were very aware. However, they had a problem. If they gave in, working class men would get the vote, which was not in their interest as their party didn't do much for them. They knew that Labour would make the most of the opportunity, and the Conservatives wanted to stay in power. So they decided to grant women suffrage as long as they were over 30 and had a property of over £5. These middle class and rich women were much more likely to vote Conservative than Labour so it would counterbalance the men's votes. Therefore, the Conservatives gave some women the vote in 1918 to ensure that they would not lose power.

However, there were other factors that played a key part. The combined actions of the suffragettes and suffragists were also a highly significant agent of change. The suffragists had been working since 1866 to get women the vote, persistently put petitions before Parliament, their first mass petition being presented in 1866. This constant pressure on the government showed that women were serious about getting the vote and made men aware that they would not back down. Their peaceful protests showed that they could be trusted with the vote and that they were intelligent enough to contribute to society. Whilst the suffragettes may have damaged some of the suffragists' points, they raised awareness on the issue at a mass scale. They showed that women could get their voices heard: as Pankhurst herself said, the baby that is attended to first is the one that screams, not stays silent. The joint efforts of the Suffragettes and Suffragists made people really consider women's campaign for suffrage.

Another factor that ensured the suffrage movement's success was WWI. As many men had to go and fight in the trenches, a lot of jobs were left unattended to; women had to take up these jobs and replace the men, which proved that they were perfectly capable of playing a full part in society. For example, women became firefighters, munition workers and nurses – one hospital was set up exclusively by women and everyone was convinced it would fail. Instead, it became so successful that they had to look for larger premises! It was the perfect 'excuse' for the government to give women the vote without admitting that they had been in the wrong before: after 1918, there was no way women could be refused.

Ultimately, all of these factors came together to help change social attitudes about women's right to vote. If people hadn't been convinced that women couldn't change society, they wouldn't have been given the right to vote; however, the combined work of the Suffragettes and Suffragists, together with their work in the war convinced everybody that women could be responsible and use their vote for good. Therefore, the women's suffrage movement in the UK was successful because people managed to see past original views that women were feeble and useless, and see them as human beings – as well as it being of political benefit to the Conservative party.

Russian Suffrage

The Soviet Union was a state of Russia which existed from 1922-1991 Which has been succeeded by the 'Democratic' Russian Federation under the current presidency of Putin. Really, Suffrage for all in Russia, let alone Women, ought to exist today. Likely elections in Russia are being rigged by Putin's cabinet, so really the fight continues.

In the USSR women's rights were affected by the ideology that is Communism. Communism's main principle was that everyone is equal, however, the Communist ideology was really focused on the rights of workers and class issues rather than gender rights. Suffrage supporters would have picked on this. If Communism was about equality, then surely, they should have treated Women with full equal rights to Men? Lenin didn't agree with the idea of Women in kitchens as he thought that was a waste of muscle. Women mobilised in the workforce increased in the Soviet era from 423,200 in 1923 to 885,000 in 1930. This seems like equality for Women. The idea of women being in the workforce seems like gender equality, but people were forced to work anyway so it is equality in name, not reality. The Soviet Union relied on workers to run their country, not women. All workers would be referred to as *workers*, not women workers. However, this was equality in a sense. In the West, where barely any women worked outside of the home, there were women doing work outside of the home, which would have had a big impact on the West at the time as it would have seemed like the Russians were progressing faster than the USA, UK, France and Germany. In the Soviet Union the special women's unit, the Zhenotdel was created by the Soviet government to promote and sustain the rights of women. This is obviously good for the suffrage movement because it is a bargaining point for Russian suffrage supporters, therefore affected the environment for women's rights. When the men fought in WW2, many women took control of farms and agriculture, shifting governmental power and giving autonomy to the people because the government is focusing on the war, suffrage operations can take place behind the government's back, which is a factor for success. Some women took long range positions in World War 2, to use as propaganda to men to tell them that if they can do it, you can do it. Therefore, communist governments are much more liberal than western governments at women's rights. Lenin was a huge factor for women's influence outside the home, his own statement being that they are wasted in kitchens, which would have appealed to the ideals of communism, however, there are many sub-versions of communism, and so the power shift from Lenin to Stalin rather than Lenin to Trotsky shifted the social environment for women's rights because Trotsky and Lenin agreed on many ideas. If Trotsky succeeded rather than Stalin, the power transition would have been smoother. Trotsky believed in the idea of permanent revolution, which simplified, is the thought that the revolution is not just restricted to one nation, but many others. So, had Trotsky succeeded Lenin, he would have intervened in other countries and likely would have provoked or invaded other countries close to the USSR. What has this got to do with women's rights? Much it has. If the USSR didn't take an isolationist route, the politics in Europe and the world would have shifted and therefore women's rights would have changed if a Soviet takeover happened.