# 'Deeds *and* Words': The Woman's Press and the Politics of Print

The support of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in funding this research is gratefully acknowledged.

1 Lytton 1914: 66. Lytton was right to charge mainstream publishers with censorship of suffrage ideas, whether overtly or covertly, as her autobiographical *Prisons and Prisoners* (1914) was itself prefaced with a 'Publisher's Note' from William Heinemann 'disclaim[ing] agreement with some of Lady Constance Lytton's views expressed in this volume' (1914:vii).

*Our movement has had to combat all the conditions of an era of darkness, ignorance, and barbaric repression. When newspapers will not accept, publishers will not print, and booksellers will not sell the true facts concerning us, then a rapid means of irrepressible communication had to be sought.*[1]

*Contrary to the popular impression, to say in print what she thinks is the last thing the woman-novelist or journalist is commonly so rash as to attempt. In print, even more than elsewhere (unless she is reckless), she must wear the aspect that shall have the best chance of pleasing her brothers. Her publishers are not women. Even the professional readers and advisers of publishers are men. The critics in the world outside, men. Money, reputation–these are vested in men. If a woman would win a little at their hands, she must walk warily, and not too much displease them* (Robins 1913:5–6).

ELIZABETH Robins, an American actress resident in Britain during the first half of the twentieth century, well captures the staunchly masculine, frock-coated clubbiness of the literary world in the years preceding the First World War. Impeccably homosocial, this world comprised interlinked circles of writerly activity in which to be male was to display the essential badge of membership—to secure the would-be writer's foot upon the lowest rungs of literary prestige. From there it was possible to ascend: the literary world was composed of gentleman publishers, predominantly male panels of publisher's readers, and tight circles of like-minded male reviewers, guiding the cause of literature forward by their discerning critical labours. Even in its innovations,

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the sphere of the pre-war man-of-letters obeyed the principle of androcentrism: membership of its burgeoning professional societies was overwhelmingly male; legitimizing itself as a valid academic discipline, the new subject of English literature was taught by males, in male-directed British universities to largely (or, in Oxbridge, exclusively) male degree-taking students. Seeking to explain women's poor representation amongst the more prestigious strata of the world of print, Robins looks not for explicit restrictions on female literary participation, but focuses instead on a more insidious type of male exclusivity: the cliquish masculine culture of public discourse. So pervasive was this intellectual hegemony that its partiality and tendentiousness were able to masquerade as objective, universal, rational. A discourse proudly proclaiming itself universal was in fact, as Robins and her contemporary Constance Lytton knew through bitter publishing experience, a conversation between males, carried on primarily for an audience of males. The 'woman-novelist or journalist' might have been rendered conspicuous in such an elevated sphere by her novelty, but her status was that of a mere interloper and usurper. Precisely because her foothold upon literary respectability is so precarious, she must be on her best behaviour, walking warily so she does 'not too much displease them'. In a literary reflection of the Edwardian ideal of womanhood, the woman writer must remain attentive to the needs and wishes of others—a polite and interested auditor at a discussion in which she plays no active part.

Yet in advising women writers to adopt a placatory tone, Robins was somewhat disingenuous. For Robins's essay 'Woman's Secret', in which this passage occurs, was published in book form in 1913 at the height of the militant phase of the struggle for British women's suffrage, a campaign in which Robins had for six years been prominent as a lobbyist and organizer. In a memorable phrase, Jane Marcus asserts in her introduction to *Suffrage and the Pankhursts* (1987) that the rhetorical and historical significance of the militant British suffrage movement lies in its 'discourse of interruption' (17): the splitting asunder of 'patriarchal cultural hegemony by interrupting men's discourse with each other' (9). To this end, early twentieth-century suffragists sought to intervene specifically in the discursive sphere of public life by seizing control of their own image-making in the press and in the booming popular print culture of the day. A wide range of feminist presses were active publishing suffrage material in the years before the outbreak of the First World War and, allied with the range of suffrage newspapers and shops that mushroomed in London and the regions, women were, for the first time in the twentieth century, in control of cultural enterprises for disseminating their subversive political message. The most publicly prominent of the militant suffrage organizations, the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) adopted the motto 'DEEDS NOT WORDS' in protest against the empty lip-service paid to women's suffrage by

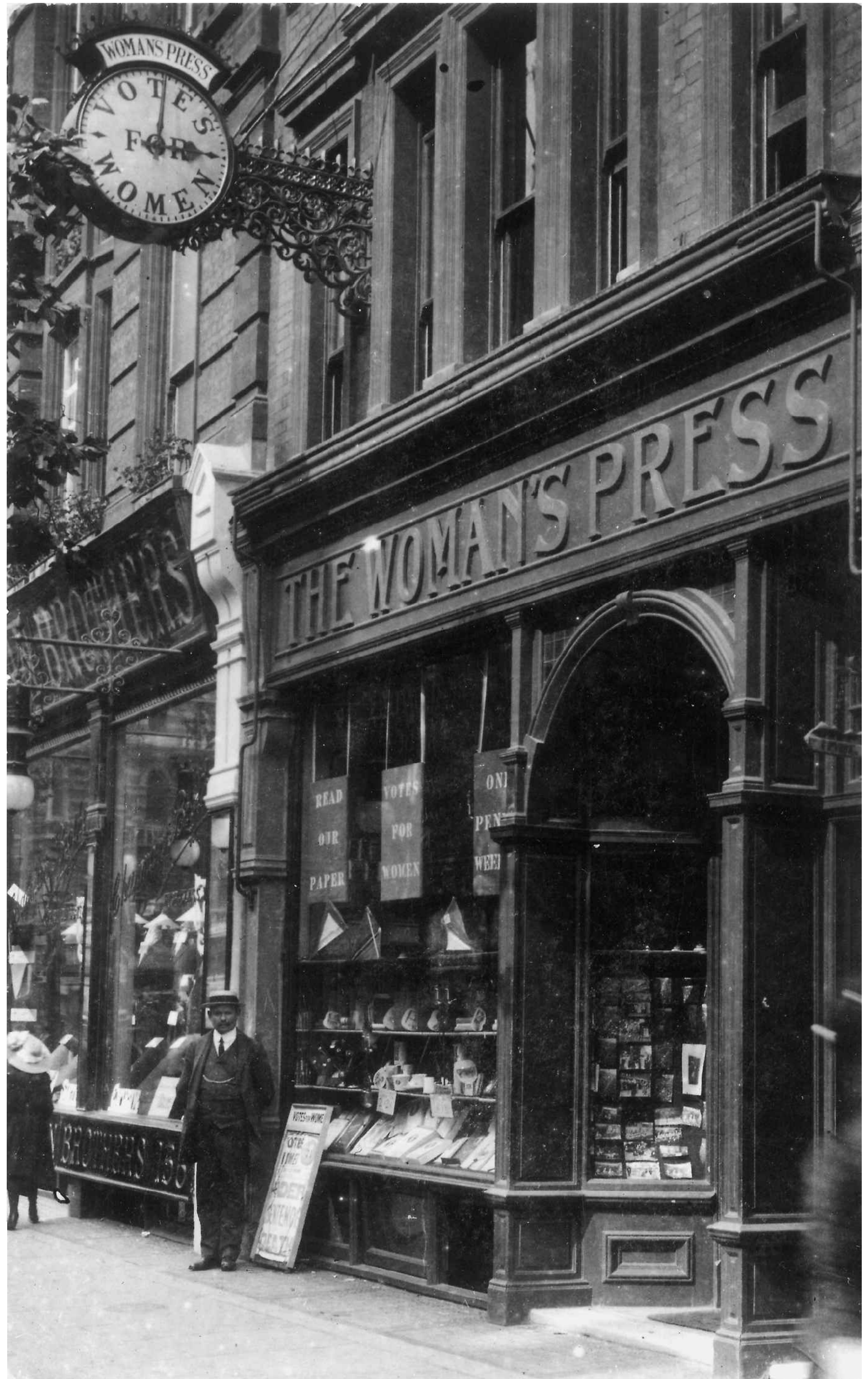
Laodicean members of parliament who failed to translate their personal pro-suffrage sympathies into effective party policy. Yet, read in light of the organization's astute understanding of the printed word and its radicalizing potential, 'DEEDS *and* words' perhaps more accurately encapsulates the amalgam of activism and advocacy that lay at the movement's heart.

There is evidence of at least eleven pro-suffrage presses in addition to the Woman's Press operating in London between the opening shots of the militant campaign in 1905 and the outbreak of war in August 1914: the presses of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies; the Woman Writers' Suffrage League; the Artists' Suffrage League; the New Constitutional Society for Women's Suffrage; the International Women Suffrage Alliance; the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association; the Church League for Women's Suffrage; the Women's Freedom League; the 'Votes for Women' Publishing Office; the International Suffrage Shop (a publisher as well as a retail outlet for suffrage books and paraphernalia); and the Women's Printing Society (see Women's Suffrage Collection). The very fact that an essay such as Robins's which was critical of mainstream publishing practice could yet achieve publication implies the existence of a radical press subculture in pre-war Britain.

Robins herself circulated at the centre of agitation over women's lack of parliamentary representation, sitting as first president of the Women Writers' Suffrage League (WWSL), and operating as a member of the directing executive committee of the WSPU between 1907 and 1912. Moreover, the publishing history of Robins's 'Woman's Secret' itself bears testimony to the range and dynamism of feminist publishing activity in pre-war Britain. It appeared originally in pamphlet form, having been printed in 1907 by Garden City Press, Letchworth under the auspices of the WSPU. After the establishment of the WSPU's own suffrage imprint, the Woman's Press, in 1907, the essay was published as part of a collection of Robins's suffrage lectures and writings for British and United States newspapers, entitled *Way Stations* (1913). Woman's Press publications, having been edited by chief suffrage protagonist Frederick Pethick Lawrence,[2] were then sold at the WSPU's Woman's Press shop in Charing Cross Road, and were advertised, along with a wide sampling of suffrage fiction, poetry, drama and non-fiction, in the WSPU's own newspaper *Votes for Women*. While the *content* of Robins's essay accurately indicts mainstream literary industries for their conservatism and sexual chauvinism, the *context* of its publication highlights a vibrant Edwardian feminist publishing network covering all aspects of literary production from writing to publicity and sales. Clearly, then, there *were* situations in which the woman novelist might be so rash as 'to say in print what she thinks', the only proviso being that she must first have guaranteed control of the medium before imparting her radical message.

From amidst pre-war Britain's vibrant milieu of feminist print activity

2 The Pethick Lawrence surname frequently appears hyphenated, especially earlier in the century when this seems to have been the couple's preferred form. I follow throughout the non-hyphenated style adopted by the couple later in life and used by Fred Pethick Lawrence for his autobiography *Fate Has Been Kind* (1943). Pethick Lawrence is commonly referred to in the autobiographies and memorabilia of WSPU members as 'Fred'. This shortened version of his given name is adopted throughout.




The Woman's Press shop in Charing Cross Road, and the much commented-upon 'Votes for Women' clock. Reproduced courtesy of the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection.

this article focuses at greater length on the Woman's Press, the WSPU's publishing imprint and the hub of the literary suffrage world within which Robins circulated. It does so mindful of recent critics' disapprobation of academic over-concentration on the WSPU at the expense of investigating pre-war suffragism in all its ideological and geographical diversity (Leneman 1995, Holton 1996, Joannou and Purvis 1998, Purvis and Holton 2000). Yet, in choosing to focus upon the publishing arm of the WSPU, the aim here is to problematize received understandings of this suffrage group by revisiting not the thrice-trodden ground of its tactics or campaign strategies but, instead, its *discursive* activism in the realm of print. The availability of source materials further prompts such a focus: the annals of *Votes for Women*, the autobiographical accounts of four of the WSPU's inner circle, and the Pethick Lawrence archives in Trinity College, Cambridge supply a wealth of material about the role of a publishing outlet within a suffrage organization that is unequalled amongst lower-profile and less institutionalized British women's suffrage imprints.

The existence of the Woman's Press has been widely recognized within contemporary suffrage research, in part because the autobiographies of the movement's key figures make reference to it (E. Pethick Lawrence 1938, F. Pethick Lawrence 1943) and in part because scholars have had profitable recourse to its publications for primary source material about the policies and ideology of the WSPU itself (Hale 1974, Vicinus 1985, Atkinson 1992, Green 1997). Yet rarely have the practical political and more abstractly ideological implications of the Press's existence as a feminist publishing house been explored. This omission is curious and worth rectifying in light of the foregoing decade's spate of revisionist analyses of first-wave feminism, whether they be critiques of suffragette fiction and drama as interventions in the sphere of the Edwardian novel of ideas or problem play (Mulford 1982, Fitzsimmons and Gardner 1991, Stowell 1992, Miller 1994, Park 1996), attempts to construct or revise historiographies of the movement (Marcus 1987, Dodd 1990, Purvis 1996, Joannou and Purvis 1998), or the drawing of connections between suffrage and contemporaneous politico-cultural debates, be they patterns of masculinity (John and Eustance 1997), the British imperial programme (Burton 1991), or Irish nationalism (Owens 1984, Ryan 1992). Moreover, an appreciation of suffrage publishing also enhances understanding of feminist press activism in the later decades of the twentieth century, contextualizing modern feminist presses within a historical framework and disproving the received view (one, admittedly, promulgated on occasion by 1970s feminists themselves) that second-wave feminist publishing exploded without precedent on to the literary marketplace.[3] Contemporary British presses such as Virago and The Women's Press frequently republished key suffrage texts—notably Ray Strachey's 1928 account of the suffrage campaign's history, *The Cause* (Strachey 1978), and

3 June Arnold's landmark article 'Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics' (1976) suffers from such second-wave myopia when assessing the chronology of feminist publishing. Arnold states (mistakenly) that 'the first feminist movement was briefly just as popular as ours, just as sought after by the finishing press [Arnold's disparaging label for mainstream publishers]. . . . [But] when they neglected to build their own press, they had access to none' (26).

Robins's own 1907 WSPU *roman-à-clef*, *The Convert* (Robins 1980). But in their publicity they declined to draw an explicit line of inheritance between their own press practice and that of their Edwardian publishing predecessors (Owen 1998).[4]

An investigation of the Woman's Press prompts re-evaluation of suffrage feminism by revealing the extent to which the public and political activism of the suffragette movement relied upon literary activity, revealing suffrage agitators' complex understanding of the power of print in moulding public perceptions. The movement's goal was to problematize the British public's insufficiently critical reception of printed information by establishing alternative media that would in the first instance 'make strange' male hegemony over communications and—by extension—call into question the monopoly of privileged males over the parliamentary franchise. In a manner which strikes the early twenty-first century as curiously postmodern, the suffrage movement recognized the fluid appropriability of imagery and types, wrestling for the cultural upper hand through a barrage of written, visual and performative propaganda. Throughout the suffrage campaign, the image of the suffragette was a site of intense contestation between pro- and anti-suffrage adherents, and the Woman's Press constituted a key weapon in the WSPU's battle for positive representation and a 'fair press'.

## *The Woman's Press: 'A Recognised Publishing House'*[5]

The history of the Woman's Press, from its establishment as an independent business early in 1907 to its demise in the political uncertainties of late 1914, can be viewed through various interpretative lenses. This discussion contextualizes the Woman's Press within multiple interpenetrative narratives: the organization of the WSPU; the nature of suffrage publishing and distribution networks; and ongoing debates over the appropriate degree of women's intervention in public discourse. No individual analytical framework should be regarded as definitive and indeed, given their very plurality, it would be self-defeating to give a higher priority to any one classificatory context. This shifting focus conveys the nature of the Woman's Press as a site of intense contestation within the suffrage movement—a movement which was itself prone to factions, splinter groups and surprisingly swift changes of allegiance. Furthermore, the sources themselves prompt such a relativist critical approach. Because the archives of the Woman's Press are no longer in existence, much of what can be gleaned about its activities must be derived from autobiographies of the WSPU inner circle, in particular those of Fred and Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, the wealthy philanthropic couple who sat on the organization's executive committee and were involved in key policy decisions (1938, 1943), of Sylvia Pankhurst, an artist, socialist and the second

4 The scarce work which has appeared on the history of women's publishing (as distinct from republished women's writing) has tended to be sponsored by individual feminist authors and editors, rather than by the feminist press movement as a whole. On the acknowledgements page of Stanley with Morley 1988—chapter 3 of which provides the only previous sustained analysis of the Woman's Press—the authors thank 'Candida Lacey of Pandora Press [UK] for getting us interested in the first Woman's Press and Ruthie Petrie of Virago Press for suggesting we make our look at The Woman's Press [*sic*] an important focus in the book' (189). In a rare delineation of publishing's neglected matrilineal descent, Ros de Lanerolle, then managing director of The Women's Press, is also thanked 'not least for continuing the honourable tradition of its predecessor' (189). For an outline of de Lanerolle's tempestuous experiences at The Women's Press, and of the continuing hard political choices faced by contemporary feminist publishing, see Murray 1998.

5 'A little later it changed its name to the Woman's Press, thereby laying the foundation of its present position as a recognised publishing house' (F. W. Pethick Lawrence 1911).

of the three Pankhurst daughters (1931) and, although she mentions the Press by allusion rather than directly, of Christabel Pankhurst, the eldest Pankhurst daughter and co-founder of the WSPU (1959). Both the Pethick Lawrences and Sylvia Pankhurst at different points felt the personal and political chill of expulsion from the WSPU at the command of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst; hence bias and partisanship play an even more prominent role in deciphering these histories than is usual in the genre of political autobiography. Even the seemingly more objective accounts of Woman's Press activities contained within the pages of the official WSPU newspaper, *Votes for Women*, must be interpreted in the light of vested interests: first, they should be read through the shifting veils of political propaganda, bearing in mind the WSPU's policy objectives at any given point in time; and second, taking into account the fact that Fred Pethick Lawrence, the Woman's Press's 'first secretary' and effective commissioning editor, was with his wife Emmeline the co-editor of the newspaper in which the accounts appear.[6]

Above all, it is crucial to factor into the account the Woman's Press's overriding political impetus. It was by no means an independent high-art press fuelled by belletristic enthusiasm, but rather a component part of a highly organized and well-funded lobby group with a singularity of focus that distinguishes it from most political movements before or since. Politics and immediate legislative reform in favour of female suffrage were the chief preoccupations of the WSPU, and the organization's interest in literature was as a means rather than as an end in itself. Embracing the highly political nature of the Woman's Press, this analysis outlines the Press's varied role as a suffrage publishing house, before turning to its engagement in contemporary print politics, and to the ambiguities and tensions created by Fred Pethick Lawrence's role as a male directing the communications department of a feminist organization. The principal strategy is to approach the Woman's Press simultaneously from a variety of viewpoints because, given the highly charged political atmosphere and mercurial nature of WSPU politics, it would be critically misguided to privilege any one governing narrative context. Equally, it would be self-defeating because it is in the very tensions between contesting accounts of the Woman's Press's development and achievements that it is possible to glimpse feminist politics and literary history being simultaneously formulated and enacted.

## *'The Written Word Has . . . to Supplement the Spoken Word'*[7]

Viewed within the context of British women's suffrage politics as a whole, the Woman's Press appears easily classifiable as the publishing arm of the militant WSPU, distinguishable by its opposition to the press of the

6 'A "Votes for Women" Clock', *Votes for Women*, 6 May 1910, p. 514.

7 F. W. Pethick Lawrence 1911

constitutional suffragists' National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). Yet the simplicity of this analytical shorthand—defining the two groups as essentially divided over militancy—has been queried as a speciously cut-and-dried retrospective construction of what was in fact a more fluid and complex contemporary reality (Holton 1986, Purvis and Holton 2000). Yet even when viewed within the context of the WSPU alone, the Woman's Press emerges as a complex entity, fulfilling variant roles for the numerous strong personalities within the organization.

The WSPU's nominal president was its co-founder Emmeline Pankhurst, always the Union's biggest drawcard speaker and public figurehead. Yet after the relocation of the WSPU from Manchester to London in 1906, she was increasingly inclined to delegate Union policy-making in favour of undertaking a hectic national and international public speaking schedule. From 1906, the Union's ideological position and political tactics were dominated by a triumvirate comprising Christabel Pankhurst, the Pankhurst daughter most closely involved in Union activities, and Fred and Emmeline Pethick Lawrence. As a result of his financial skill, journalistic experience and bar qualifications, Fred Pethick Lawrence headed the Union's accountancy, publishing and newspaper departments as well as providing legal representation in the wake of suffragette raids and protests. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, an executive committee member and the Union's honorary treasurer, engineered vast fundraising meetings at London's Royal Albert Hall and other prestigious venues which were designed to fill the Union's 'war chest' (E. Pethick Lawrence 1910). Yet, because of their highly stage-managed theatricality, these fundraising events garnered widespread press attention and were in themselves considerable public relations coups. Ray Strachey, a participant in and historian of the suffrage movement—and a not always sympathetic chronicler of the WSPU—cannot but extol the scale and excitement of WSPU campaigning as co-ordinated by the vast Clement's Inn central London headquarters:

> All, indeed, was action! action! and as fast as money came in it went out again, spent upon organisation at Headquarters and in the country, upon the weekly paper and the vast educational campaigns. Everything was turned to good account—meetings, processions, posters, leaflets, flags, banners, drums, shows, ribbons, coaches, omnibuses, and even boats; anything, in fact, which could be used to make a noise and a stir and keep enthusiasm burning and the Cause shining in the public eye (Strachey 1928:311).

Although the Woman's Press fell, strictly speaking, within Fred Pethick Lawrence's sphere of responsibility, so vital a component of the WSPU's vast propaganda arsenal was too important to escape the attention of other members of the WSPU inner circle. While a commonality of interest reigned

as to the Press's ultimate goal—securing the vote for women—the *means* by which the Woman's Press was to translate that goal into actuality were perceived differently by each individual. In the eyes of Emmeline Pankhurst, the Press's role was to record for posterity the text of speeches delivered in the heat of mass meetings. It represented a means of extending the audience of a verbal event beyond those physically present at the time of address. The implicit hierarchy of communicative media that this view suggests is confirmed by Emmeline Pankhurst's statements on her preferred propagandizing methods. Her primary medium of political discourse was oral rather than written—even her autobiography appears to have been ghosted with the assistance of a sympathetic journalist—and her private correspondence records her conception of written prose as a second-best alternative to the improvisational heat and immediacy of public speaking: 'Oh, dear, why do I always feel as if I were in the dentist's chair when I try to write?' (quoted in Marcus 1987:9). Christabel, by contrast, was at ease in both oral and written modes, her legal training at Manchester University underpinning her celebrated court advocacy in suffragette trials, and her lead articles and editorials appearing regularly in the pages of *Votes for Women* and its successor publication, *The Suffragette*. The Woman's Press published texts derived both from Christabel's public speeches and from her written articulation of Union policy. Yet, significantly, Christabel appears to have taken less interest than the Pethick Lawrences in the propagandizing possibilities of reaching a non-politicized audience through publishing suffrage fiction and drama.

The literary and artistic figures who contributed to the Press's list seem largely to have been maintained within the Woman's Press stable by the diplomatic and networking skills of the Pethick Lawrences. Private networks of acquaintanceship as reconstructed through letters and autobiographies suggest that the influential social circle around the wealthy Pethick Lawrences was instrumental in recruiting progressive writers such as John Masefield (1909) and Evelyn Sharp (1911) to the Press (John 1997). Where writers were already drawn into the circle of the WSPU through family connections—for example Israel Zangwill (1909, 1912) and Laurence Housman (1908, 1910, 1911)—the pragmatism of the Pethick Lawrences was important for translating pro-suffrage goodwill into a saleable literary commodity. Evidence derived from annual publishing lists also suggests that it was the Pethick Lawrences who grasped the full potential of politically informed fiction and drama for furthering The Cause. Between 1907 and 1912, the Woman's Press published two classics of suffrage drama, Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St John's *How the Vote Was Won* (1909) and Elizabeth Robins's *Votes for Women!* (1910), in addition to Evelyn Sharp's short stories of suffrage activism, *Rebel Women* (1911), and a British edition of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 feminist classic, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1910).

After the Pethick Lawrences' dramatic expulsion from the WSPU in 1912, the Woman's Press list became geared almost exclusively towards non-fiction propaganda pieces such as Christabel's exposé of male immorality and venereal disease, *The Great Scourge and How to End It* (1914b), Gertrude Colmore's suffrage hagiography of the 1913 Derby martyr, *The Life of Emily Davison: An Outline* (1913), and the eleventh edition of Emmeline Pankhurst's standard suffrage vade-mecum, *The Importance of the Vote* (1914). The Union's heightened seriousness and the hardening of its political position in the face of the Liberal government's cynical scuppering of a parliamentary suffrage bill during the years 1912–14 to some extent explains the narrowing of the Woman's Press list during this period. But the overwhelming preponderance of the Pankhurst surname amongst the author lists in the post-1912 period reflects another political reality; having purged the Pethick Lawrences and their more stalwart supporters from the Union, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst were pursuing an increasingly autocratic policy within the organization, demanding unswerving political allegiance along military—rather than democratic—lines. Small wonder then that, against this background of increasing political stalemate outside the Union and an officially sanctioned cult of personality within, the always politically informed nature of Woman's Press publications ossified into trenchant reiteration of the party line by the Union's leaders.

## *'Under the Clock': 156 Charing Cross Road*[8]

Considering the Woman's Press in the context of WSPU leadership politics tends to cast the Press as a pawn in various power struggles and as a tactical enhancement to individual public profiles. While there is an element of truth to this picture, it would be unrepresentative to emphasize the Press's role in its owners' careers without highlighting also its concomitant role in the lives of its readers. The most startling element of the Woman's Press project is the boldness of its scale: having experienced viciously hostile coverage in the mainstream media, and having become inured to mainstream publishers and booksellers refusing to distribute their material, the WSPU leaders determined to bypass such networks altogether. Rather than attempting to infiltrate or cajole conventional publishing channels, the WSPU opted instead to subvert them through replication—establishing a network that WSPU militant Constance Lytton dubbed a 'rapid means of irrepressible communication' (1914:66). Accordingly, virtually the entire life of a WSPU publication was enacted within a chain of production and distribution directed by pro-suffrage adherents. A book or pamphlet might begin as a speech or manuscript by a suffragette or a member of a sympathetic allied group (such as the WWSL or the men's pro-suffrage societies, the Men's

8 'Under the Clock', *Votes for Women*, 13 May 1910, p. 533.

League for Women's Suffrage (MLWS) and the Men's Political Union (MPU)). It would then pass through the editorial department at Clement's Inn headed by Fred Pethick Lawrence and staffed by female 'literature secretaries' (F. Pethick Lawrence 1911:793); subsequently it would be licensed out to printers to appear under the Woman's Press colophon, and finally it would be packaged by suffragette workers and distributed to its chain of shops for sale to the party faithful or to 'passers-by, to whom it is the first introduction of the subject of Votes for Women'.[9] The WSPU's network of shops was a key tactical advantage in the suffragette campaign. Comprising ten shops within Greater London and seventeen shops in the regions (including branches with a local flavour in both Scotland and Wales), WSPU outlets aspired to the status of women's community centres, selling a myriad of WSPU-licensed products such as Votes for Women tea, insignia in the Union's colours of purple, white and green, badges, postcards, china and clothing, in addition to a wide range of suffrage literature (see the photograph on p. 200). A 1910 postcard depicting the inside of the Charing Cross Road shop shows an artfully posed suffragette perusing the pages of *Votes for Women* while surrounded by suffrage regalia, posters for coming rallies and portraits of the movement's leaders. The sheer number of similar extant suffrage postcards suggests the potentially infinite commercial reproducibility of the suffragette image, its proselytizing power radiating centrifugally from the movement's leadership.[10] In its grasp of commercial marketing and the need for easily identifiable insignia, the WSPU again prefigures the modern political campaign, with its reliance on the visual and its blurring of ideology and salesmanship.

The manner in which the various departments of the WSPU intermeshed is well illustrated by the publicity surrounding the 1910 opening of the WSPU's flagship shop at 156 Charing Cross Road, in the heart of both London's bookselling district and the West End. The 13 May 1910 edition of *Votes for Women* records that celebrated actress Fanny Brough and novelist Evelyn Sharp (later a Woman's Press author) had opened the new twelve-room premises that were to house all aspects of Woman's Press activities other than the editorial department, which was to remain under Fred Pethick Lawrence's control at the Clement's Inn Building nearby on the Strand.[11] In the publicity surrounding the opening, much is made of the clock attached to the shop 'bearing the letters of VOTES FOR WOMEN in place of the hour numbers'.[12] This fact was a spur for donnish jokes in the mainstream press:

> According to the papers the Suffragists' new depot in Charing Cross Road is to have a clock, the figures on the face of which will be Votes for Women. But that will never do—thirteen hours to the day: it wouldn't be cricket. Possibly the papers are wrong, inconceivable as this may seem,

9 *Votes for Women*, 13 May 1910, p. 530.

10 See the Women's Suffrage Collection in the Museum of London, and Atkinson 1989, 1992.

11 'Under the Clock'.

12 'A "Votes for Women" Clock'.

> and the first word will read, not Votes, but Vote—which is more to the point still.[13]

In part the move was prompted by commercial considerations: the WSPU's Fifth Annual Report covering 1910–11 reveals that the Woman's Press was generating over £9,000 of the Union's total annual turnover of £29,000 and was thus a crucial component of the organization's finances (E. Pethick Lawrence 1938:251). Yet the political role of WSPU shops as recruiting centres was also cannily assessed by the Union's leadership, in particular by the commercially savvy Fred Pethick Lawrence. The advertisements carried in *Votes for Women*, and almost certainly copywritten by him, emphasize the safely conventional nature of the flagship shop's location, and the ease with which a visit might be incorporated into a respectable middle-class woman's West End shopping expedition: 'This splendid Shop is in a leading thoroughfare, and only Three Doors from Oxford Street, And 50 Yards from the Tottenham Court Road Stations, on the Hampstead and Highgate and Central London Tube Railways.'[14] Keen to appeal to the mainstream of respectable British womanhood, the WSPU's products, publications and premises were artfully designed to offset the radicalism of the Union's cause and the notoriety of its activism with an aura of feminine decorum and discernment. The as-yet-unpoliticized bourgeois wife might be transformed into a fighter for The Cause if lured inside by a subtle blend of suffragism and salesmanship: 'No one can gauge the value or the extent of the propagandist work carried on from the many centres throughout the country where the magic words "Votes for Women" are seen over an attractively dressed shop window!'[15]

Respectability was, however, an aura easily dispelled. On 21 November 1911 a mass WSPU demonstration was held at Caxton Hall to protest the government's failure to keep faith on the cross-party Conciliation Bill, which had been proposed ostensibly in the interests of extending the franchise to women. The more radical suffragettes also met that evening at the Charing Cross Road premises for briefing on the stone-throwing and window-smashing raids to be mounted in the West End that evening, resulting in virulent condemnation of the WSPU in the next day's mainstream press and 223 arrests (Rosen 1974:153–4). If the shop could serve as a meeting point for militants, safe from the eyes of the Metropolitan Police plain-clothesmen who kept Clement's Inn under constant observation, it was, conversely, also to bear the brunt of public hostility stirred by the WSPU's latest tactic of destroying both public and private property. Within four months of the first 1911 window-smashing raid, the WSPU co-ordinated the most famous enactment of its 'broken windows' policy:[16] at 5.45 p.m. on the quiet Friday evening of 1 March 1912 over 120 women stationed in the major shopping precincts of Oxford Street, Regent Street and Piccadilly simulta-

13 'Under the Clock'.

14 'The Woman's Press', *Votes for Women*, 13 May 1910, p. 531.

15 *Votes for Women*, 6 October 1911, p. 7.

16 The title of a 1912 *Votes for Women* lead article by Christabel Pankhurst explaining and justifying the WSPU's window-breaking campaign (reprinted in Marcus 1987:123–4).

neously produced hammers and demolished expensive plate-glass windows, a protest that a fulminating *Times* leading article the following day execrated as an act of 'temporary insanity' wrought by 'demented and maniacal creatures'.[17] When further 'displays of malevolence' the following Monday evening (4 March) caused widespread damage in the prestige shopping districts of High Street Kensington and Knightsbridge, vigilante groups targetted the Woman's Press's headquarters for retaliation.[18] A distinctly partisan *Times* leader the following day approvingly quotes what are probably fictitious hecklers, the paper stopping just short of positively egging the stone-throwers on:

> A band of 200 young men, who were said to be medical students, marched to the premises of the 'Women's Press' [*sic*] in Charing Cross-road, where a quantity of suffrage literature were [*sic*] displayed. They broke the windows with stones amid loud cheers from a crowd that had followed them. A large number of men [also] assembled outside the International Suffrage Shop in Adam-street, Strand, and broke the windows there amid such exclamations as 'That's right! Let them have it!' and 'Pay them back in their own coin!'[19]

That a suffrage shop could be simultaneously political target, commercial outlet and recruiting centre highlights how tightly interlinked the strands of politics, sales and literature were in the WSPU's strategy. Moreover, it illustrates the pivotal role that the Woman's Press played in mediating the image of the suffragette for the public at large. When conservative public ire was roused it was, significantly, the Woman's Press shop, and not the widely-known WSPU headquarters at Clement's Inn, which attracted retaliatory vandalism. In this explosive atmosphere of militant protest and conservative counter-attack, the Woman's Press premises could become quite literally a site of contestation, illustrating in the most concrete form the larger ideological struggles taking place around suffrage identity.

## *'Bands of Zealots'*[20] *or the 'March of the Women'?*[21] *The Struggle for Control of the Suffragette Image*

The need to give the WSPU a good press and to infuse the public image of the suffragette with a halo of righteous struggle rather than the brand of hysterical spinsterhood was the primary rationale behind the formation of the Woman's Press. Yet, on closer examination, this broad policy reveals additional and more diffuse aims for the Press: a desire to diversify the formats of suffragette propaganda; to place the movement within a written political present as well as to leave an historical record of its activities for

17 'Suffragist Outrages', *The Times*, 2 March 1912, p. 8.

18 Ibid.

19 'Further Suffragist Outrages', *The Times*, 5 March 1912, p. 8.

20 Ibid.

21 The title of a suffragette marching song composed in 1911 by WSPU member and close friend of Emmeline Pankhurst, Dr (later Dame) Ethel Smyth.

posterity; and a desire to counteract mainstream press misrepresentation and distortion by engaging in metacommentary on the nature of communications media. Suffrage research has long commented upon the centrality of written discourse to the votes for women movement (E. S. Pankhurst 1931, Marcus 1987, Solomon 1991). But critics have less regularly examined the WSPU's keen awareness of external press politics, evidenced by its critical commentary on the organization's own depiction in mainstream periodicals and newspapers. The aim of such a manoeuvre was to challenge radically the Edwardian public's confidence in the reliability of the printed word and the self-proclaimed objectivity of the British press. In unashamedly endorsing partisan coverage of current affairs, the WSPU discovered and exploited a curious ideological paradox: that the authority of the printed word can be called into question via the medium of publishing.

Paramount amongst the WSPU's reasons for starting the Woman's Press was to provide an outlet for suffrage propaganda, and even the Union's key figures had no qualms about using what was even then a somewhat loaded term—propaganda—to describe the output of their Press. Fred Pethick Lawrence, outlining the history of the Woman's Press for a 1910 article in *Votes for Women*, drew a direct connection between sales of the Press and potential recruits:

> Figures as to trade may not sound of interest, but when it is remembered that every £1 taken in the sale of 1d. pamphlets means that 240 people are reading about the movement, then a full sense of the propaganda and interest which lie beneath these figures will be appreciated.[22]

The Press's director also realized, however, that when assessing the readership of pamphlets and periodicals, actual audience size might be significantly larger than sales figures suggested, on account of the tendency for such publications to be circulated. Accordingly, Woman's Press booklets, such as those archived in the Museum of London's Women's Suffrage Collection, were stamped 'WHEN READ PLEASE PASS IT ON', and *Votes for Women* readers were constantly urged to disseminate suffrage literature at social events and especially when on holiday in provincial Britain. In aiming to reach an ever-larger audience through the medium of print, the Woman's Press implicitly acknowledged a key political advantage that British women, in particular those of the middle class, had over other unenfranchised groups: namely, a high level of literacy and a sophistication in interpreting political and social debates in printed form. In opening the Woman's Press headquarters in Charing Cross Road, novelist Evelyn Sharp elaborated upon the tactical advantages of attempting to radicalize such a highly literate segment of the population. Alluding to the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820, in which radicals inspired by French revolutionary rhetoric attempted to assassinate the prime minister and cabinet, she cited the Tories' charge that

22 'A "Votes for Women" Clock'.

> it was the fault of education, that if the Radicals had not been taught to read and write, this discontent would never have spread, and that the discontented ought to be kept dumb. This was just what the Woman's Press was not going to do. By means of VOTES FOR WOMEN and other literature the Woman's Press was educating the country, and helping women to make their just demands heard by the Government.[23]

Given Emmeline Pankhurst's constant reiteration that militancy should result in no loss of life or physical harm beyond that inflicted by suffragettes upon themselves, one cannot but imagine that Evelyn Sharp's Cato Street allusion fell somewhat short of a public relations triumph in the leadership's eyes. Yet Sharp's key point—the catalyst role played by literacy in fermenting nineteenth-century democratic revolt—was one that the women's suffrage movement had early imbibed, and which infused the activism of the WSPU at all levels.

Having before them the precedent of an influential mass suffrage agitation in the form of Chartism (and its subsequent nineteenth-century labour manifestations), the twentieth-century women's suffrage movement could not but be aware of the necessity of recording its ideas and actions for the benefit of future generations. This sense of situation at (and participation in) a key historical moment pervades suffrage literature and rhetoric, but it is enunciated specifically in relation to the Woman's Press in the introduction to the Press's *Suffrage Speeches from the Dock* (1912). The book is essentially a collection of selected highlights from the 1912 conspiracy trial of Emmeline Pankhurst, Fred Pethick Lawrence and Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, who defended themselves against charges of having conspired together and incited the widespread window-smashing raids of March earlier that year. Proud to offer the public 'these suffrage speeches from the dock' in a 'rather more permanent form', the introduction frames what follows as not only a handbook for the edification and instruction of a contemporary audience, but also as a socio-political document for historians and activists of future ages:

> We believe that for the importance of their subject-matter and as oratory these speeches will hold high and permanent place among the great speeches of the world. And truly the criminal's dock is the finest of all platforms from which to utter a vindication of political liberty (1).

The curious terminological relativism by which one age's criminal subversive may become the next age's champion of liberty was underlined for suffragette leaders by a contemporaneous struggle for self-determination and parliamentary representation: Irish Home Rule. With the benefit of historical hindsight, the synchronicity of these two protest movements—both thorns in the side of successive Liberal governments and both

23 'Under the Clock'.

ultimately (or at least, in the case of Ireland, predominantly) successful—provokes curiosity as to how the WSPU viewed what was in some sense an analogous struggle. Frequently the Union's response was one of pique that any other issue should monopolize that parliamentary time which Liberal leaders such as Asquith averred was so scarce that space in the parliamentary programme could not be found to pass a Private Member's women's franchise bill through its final stages. For single-issue campaigns, the drawing of parallels between ongoing political struggles inevitably, in some sense, dilutes the movement's proclaimed uniqueness and threatens loss of momentum. In a rare 1912 article in *Votes for Women*, however, the Irish cause figures not as potential distraction of the public mind away from weightier women's suffrage issues, but as inspirational precursor. It provides a case-study of the way in which the successful criminal prosecution of a protest movement's leaders may, paradoxically, buoy that movement on a wave of public sympathy. The deciding factor, it appears, is an oppositional group's control of the printed record:

> It is not the first time that 'Speeches from the Dock' have made the finest propaganda for the noblest cause of resistance to blind and unreasoning oppression! Every Irish patriot of the last hundred years knows that, and soon our cause will have a volume of such speeches as large and as valuable as Ireland has.[24]

Yet, if the Irish nationalist struggle piqued the interest of *Votes for Women*, it was more as an historical event than as a contemporary campaign for self-determination. In so far as it illustrated the utility to a revolutionary group of radical rhetoric in printed form, Ireland was deserving of the WSPU's attention. But the complex interplay between suffragism and Irish republicanism was, by and large, considered a distraction by the WSPU executive. WSPU activism in Ireland, such as Christabel Pankhurst's September 1913 visit to Ulster, angered Irish suffragists by its tone of imperialist superiority and its high-handed disregard for the intricacies of the local political situation (Owens 1984:70–1). Thus, although the WSPU was enthusiastic in its support of intra-suffrage media commentary, and although it promoted critical analysis of the British media in general, when faced with the complex intermeshing of two contemporaneous radical movements and their media representations, the WSPU's tendency too often was simplistically to construe republican tactics as precursors to the main event of the suffragette campaign.

*Votes for Women*'s editorial remarks about the Irish tradition of radical rhetoric necessarily direct attention to the role of the Woman's Press as a conduit for transferring the WSPU's powerful oratorical tradition—the speeches from the dock, the mass meetings in the Royal Albert Hall, the soapbox speeches in public forums and the outdoor by-election rallies—into

24 *Votes for Women*, 8 March 1912, p. 350.

printed form. The rationale for this translation of spoken events into the printed word was primarily to attract a geographically dispersed and socially diverse cross-section of the community. Firebrand speeches at rallies and vast demonstrations tended to attract self-identified suffragettes and had the advantage of appealing in particular to working-class women whose literacy levels and leisure time may have been limited. But for many middle-class women it was printed books and pamphlets that provided the medium of choice because their purchase involved minimal public statement of allegiance and the books themselves could be decorously sampled and digested within the confines of the home. This untapped constituency of non-aligned middle-class women was one to which the WSPU was particularly keen to appeal, as the involvement of 'respectable' women had power to dispel hostile public perceptions of screeching and ill-kempt suffragettes. Hence Woman's Press publications packaged their radical content in tasteful pastel covers with Art Nouveau-influenced designs and employed standard layout. Elizabeth Robins, in her role as both actress and novelist, well understood the WSPU's need to mould itself into a cross-media organization that could sell its speeches as books to middle-class women and that could, conversely, mine its books for vivid spoken quotations to catch the imagination of less literate working-class supporters. Either medium alone, she emphasizes, was an insufficient use of the suffrage propaganda arsenal: 'The magnificent platform work being done from various centres must be supplemented and further spread about the world through the medium of the written word' (cited in Whitelaw 1990:71). The immediacy of the rousing speech and the longevity of the printed word were designed to work in tandem so that the WSPU could both initiate and—most importantly—maintain supporter enthusiasm in the midst of a political landscape in constant flux.

## *'The Platform Which the Control of an . . . Organ of Opinion Provided':*[25] *The WSPU's Politics of Notoriety*

Suffragette policies and publicity were continually evolving during the years 1905–14, as each new by-election, deputation to the prime minister, showcase trial or spate of activism was assessed for its tactical advantages and political expediency. But one element which remained near constant throughout the years of suffrage struggle was the mainstream press's hostile representation of suffragettes as unattractive, spinsterly, badly-dressed, sexually-frustrated hysterics. This deeply damaging stereotype, perhaps epitomized in the savage *Punch* cartoons of the period, hit its mark precisely because of its adept inversion of the model of Edwardian womanhood.[26] It

25 'I gathered round me a little circle, to plan out with me how best we could utilize the platform which the control of a daily organ of opinion provided' (Fred Pethick Lawrence on his proprietorship of the *Echo* newspaper (1901–04) in F. Pethick Lawrence 1943:56).

26 See Tickner 1987, Jury 1997, and 'Fawcett's Funny Girls—Cartooning for Equality', an exhibition of cartoons relating to women's rights campaigns, Art Connoisseur Gallery, London, 15 October–27 November 1997.

thus presented a formidable obstacle to the WSPU's campaign to create a positive public profile for the figure of the suffragette. Nevertheless, outraged insults delivered from the modern pulpit of the *Times* editorial or the pages of *Punch* at very least attested to the suffrage movement's existence on the political landscape, and its impingement (however negative) on the collective consciousness. Christabel Pankhurst, in her posthumously published memoir of militancy, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* (1959), states that it was press silence that, 'by keeping women uninformed, had so largely smothered and strangled the movement' (55). She perceived that, for a recently revivified political movement seeking coverage in the illustrated penny newspapers, there was no such thing as bad publicity: 'Yet even exaggerated and distorted reports, which made us seem more terrible then we were, told the world this much—that we wanted the vote and were resolved to get it' (1959:70).

This conviction that negative publicity was at least preferable to an obscuring silence prevailed most strongly in the early days of the WSPU, when novel militant tactics were being experimented with as a means of provoking debate on a moribund issue. But as the movement for the vote gathered momentum and came to occupy a prominent position on the political stage, favourable commentary became a tactical necessity, and WSPU leaders were less given to display wry amusement in the face of relentlessly demonizing reports in the mainstream press. Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, in a *Votes for Women* article entitled 'What We Think of Criticism, and Our Answer to It' (1909), lambasted the major dailies for the false mask of objectivity they wore to disguise their blatant anti-suffrage bias, concerned that 'sincere and conscientious' women 'do not realise that these leading articles are written by those who are personally or officially opposed to women's enfranchisement'. But her article concludes on a patronizing note that was to be heard increasingly as the WSPU autocracy strove to instil support for the controversial policy of extreme militancy amongst its grass-roots membership: 'We must remember how hard it is for the majority of women to understand the real meaning of this battle, or the tactics of the campaign.' The Woman's Press and its associated periodical *Votes for Women* were designed to bridge this gap, stating and elaborating the party line for the movement's footsoldiers. Yet there was little toleration shown for criticism of the inner-circle leadership in either medium. The Pankhursts and the Pethick Lawrences were convinced of the need for a 'free' press in so far as it would present the suffrage cause in a positive light, but a free and open press at the service of disgruntled factions within the WSPU itself formed no part of their plans for a unified and militant political movement.

The suffragettes, as an outsider political group, with some reason

suspected a conspiracy amongst the mainstream editors to subedit journalistic copy in line with individual newspapers' suffrage policy: 'We suspected that [sympathetic journalists'] copy was touched up in newspaper offices by those who had no first-hand knowledge of the movement, and that they themselves were perhaps under instruction "not to encourage it"' (C. Pankhurst 1959:70). Moreover, media barons such as *Express* proprietor Lord Beaverbrook are indicted by Christabel as part of a conspiracy of newspaper potentates 'meeting in conclave and agreeing to be blind and dumb concerning the doings of the militants' (1959:55). But as the WSPU's militant tactics escalated in their notoriety and shock-value, the threat of The Cause being relegated to media silence diminished. In its place arose a discursive field of free and fast appropriation of images, arguments and tactics between anti-suffrage and pro-suffrage lobbies, a field in which the Woman's Press—because of its status as an independent apparatus of media production—assumed crucial importance for the militants.

Lisa Tickner, in her detailed study of the imagery of the suffrage campaign, *The Spectacle of Women* (1987), terms this contest for specific symbols and their political connotations 'intertextuality':

> Representations of the 'feminine', together with overt and covert arguments regarding the appropriate moral, social and political functions of women, were constantly produced in such contemporary institutions and discourses. . . . Suffrage propaganda is sited within (and cites) this *intertextuality*, which provided its major themes and the context in which it sought to make its effects (1987:152).

Because Tickner's focus is on the visual arts and suffrage—the elaborate banners, posters and pageantry of suffrage parades and spectacles—her emphasis is on intertextuality as a process at work between the realm of the artistic and the political. Yet the notion of interdisciplinary blurring and discursive cross-fertilization applies equally well to the literary realm of suffrage fiction and, more specifically, to the literary industries controlled by suffrage groups which secured the entry of pro-suffrage texts into public discourse. That the suffragists' elaborate semiotic struggle relied crucially upon media outlets remaining in suffrage hands is made clear by the insistence of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst in October 1912 that the Pethick Lawrences surrender control of the Woman's Press to the remaining WSPU executive, while being permitted to retain their joint editorship of *Votes for Women*. The creation and publicizing of a new periodical masthead clearly implied a certain unavoidable degree of campaign disruption, but to have lost the administrative structure, distribution channels and sales outlets guaranteed by the Woman's Press would have severely jeopardized the WSPU's programme of discursive interventionism (Stanley with Morley 1988:92). To be once again reduced to the state of political aphasia in

which 'newspapers will not accept, publishers will not print, and booksellers will not sell the true facts concerning us' was, for the publicity conscious Pankhursts, an unthinkable outcome.

## *'The Man's Share':*[27] *Fred Pethick Lawrence and the Limits of Masculine Jurisdiction*

What degree of significance should be attached to the fact that, although the Woman's Press was twentieth-century Britain's first high-profile, self-proclaimedly feminist press, it was in fact run by a man? Fred Pethick Lawrence's role as 'first secretary' of the Woman's Press does not appear—on the surface—fundamentally to have compromised the feminist agenda of the WSPU's print enterprise. But the very ambiguity of his role within the hierarchy of a women's suffrage organization foregrounds debate over male involvement in suffrage politics and—in particular—in the production of the suffragette image.

As a man, Pethick Lawrence was barred from membership of the women-only WSPU, yet his status as manager of its business interests, co-editor of its newspaper, legal representative, effective co-treasurer, chief donor and regular public speaker gave him, in a *de facto* sense, what Sylvia Pankhurst described as 'a large controlling part in the affairs of the Union' (1931:267). In his memoirs, *Fate Has Been Kind* (1943), Pethick Lawrence confirms the Edwardian public's perception of him as not only a key administrator, but also a key policymaker within the WSPU's controlling triumvirate: 'the daily executive control of the agitation passed for a time unobtrusively and almost unconsciously into the hands of an unofficial committee of three persons—Christabel, my wife and myself' (75). The exact ratio of power wielded by individual members of this 'unofficial committee' and that retained by the oft-absent Emmeline Pankhurst has itself been the subject of extended critical debate (Purvis 1996, Balshaw 1997). But it is Fred Pethick Lawrence's centrality to this group, and the indispensability of the financial and editorial skills that he brought to a political lobby group still in its infancy that are vital to a consideration of his role *vis-à-vis* the Woman's Press. The various statements that Pethick Lawrence made in order to reconcile the contradictions inherent in his position should be read in the context of the period in which they were articulated—for his comments made in the heat of the pre-war suffrage agitation concede less of the troubling ambiguity revealed in his *ex post facto* justifications.

Pethick Lawrence's most frequent contemporary explanation for his involvement in suffrage politics was as the movement's sponsor or 'Godfather' (the name by which he was known to the Pankhurst family

27 The title of Fred Pethick Lawrence's defence of male involvement in the women's suffrage movement, itself adapted from the peroration of his address to the jury in the WSPU leaders' 1912 joint conspiracy trial (see F. Pethick Lawrence 1912).

and to rank-and-file suffragettes generally), the model of a supportive spouse standing by a cause with social and democratic right on its side (Brittain 1963:46):

> I am a man, and I cannot take part in this women's agitation myself, because I am a man; but I intend . . . to stand by the women who are fighting in this agitation. Knowing what methods have succeeded in history, I am not going to say that these methods have been a mistake. I say that because I think in the first place it is not merely that it is a women's battle, it is not merely a battle for women—it is a battle for the good of the people of this country, a battle waged by one half of the community whose deeds are valuable to the other part of the country and should not be excluded. And when I see other men standing out against this agitation, then I am more determined to stand in with it; and I feel this further, but for some of those men who have stood in with this agitation there might be a danger of this agitation becoming a sex war. I say it is because of the men who have stood in the battle that a sex war has been prevented (F. Pethick Lawrence 1912:31).

Yet by the time Pethick Lawrence was penning his memoirs in the early 1940s, the battle for equal women's suffrage had long been won, and Pethick Lawrence, in his role as historian of the movement, was able to reveal somewhat more candidly his actual role in suffrage campaigning:

> I did not at first deem it my business to take any active part in the struggle. The day had gone by when 'ladies' expected 'gentlemen' to be kind enough to tell them how to get the vote. This was a campaign organized by women and executed by women who were out to show the stuff they were made of. . . . There was no lack of initiative, drive, courage and enthusiasm. But . . . there was a danger that by the very exuberance of its growth the movement would outrun its own co-ordination. There was a need for . . . 'planning' on the business side (1943:71).

The battle now won, Pethick Lawrence was freed from the awkward enquiries of the pre-war era as to what legitimate role a man could play in a movement fighting for women's self-determination. But in his insistence that his role was primarily one of administrative support, Pethick Lawrence understates his own executive influence, obscuring the extent to which his was a powerful voice in the articulation of Union policy. It is difficult to reconcile Pethick Lawrence's autobiographically endorsed image of WSPU triumvir with his earlier public persona of attentive husband and self-effacing spouse. The impression left by the account in *Fate Has Been Kind* is of guardedness on the issue: Pethick Lawrence seems aware of an ideological inconsistency, yet he is simultaneously loath to deny his important role in suffrage history.

Just how significant a figure Fred Pethick Lawrence was in the administrative and organizational hierarchy of the WSPU is highlighted by one of the rare references to the Woman's Press in the private correspondence of the Union's leaders. In a frostily formal exchange between Emmeline Pankhurst and Fred Pethick Lawrence, written in the immediate wake of the couple's forced 1912 departure from the Union, Pethick Lawrence enquires as to how the business affairs of the Woman's Press should be transferred to the Pankhursts and thus disentangled from the Pethick Lawrences' remaining interest, *Votes for Women*. 'The Woman's Press account', Pethick Lawrence writes, 'at the present time is in my name and is operated on by my signature. . . . Will you please let me know to whom I am to hand over the balance?'[28] Commissioning editor of the Woman's Press, chief publisher, reader and—by this evidence—sole signatory on its account, Pethick Lawrence's control over the suffrage publishing house was near complete. Furthermore, Pethick Lawrence's power base within the Woman's Press could potentially have left him vulnerable to allegations of a conflict of interest, given that he acted as both author and commissioning editor of numerous Woman's Press works. Prolific in his written defence of Union activities, he in 1908 produced the pamphlet *The Opposition of the Liberal Government to Woman Suffrage*, and followed this with the book-length propaganda piece *Women's Fight for the Vote* (1910), and his intriguing defence, already cited, of men's involvement in the movement, *The Man's Share* (1912). Despite this potential for conflict, it is unquestionable that Pethick Lawrence used his far-reaching influence with discernment and produced books and pamphlets in greater profusion and of consistently higher literary and production standards than those of other British suffrage presses. What decided Pethick Lawrence's fate as a suffrage publisher was not, in the end, his immense energy, commitment and practical achievements but rather his ideological anomalousness in a women-only cause—a Pankhurst-decreed fate not so much kind as politically expedient.

An organization so demonstrably attuned to the politics which underlie media representations and so alert to the mainstream press's power as gatekeeper of public discourse cannot have failed to realize the vulnerabilities of their arguments for women's self-determination in the face of Pethick Lawrence's actual role within the WSPU. In the event, the Pankhursts' decision that his detrimental impact had begun to outweigh his self-sacrificing contributions to the Union did result in a more consistent WSPU policy. But, ironically, in attempting to buttress the public image of the Union, they severely compromised the status of the Woman's Press as a publisher of progressive literary fiction, drama and non-fiction. By 1914, the range of its new commissions drastically curtailed and its list of authors reduced to Pankhurst-loyal WSPU insiders, the Woman's Press had declined from a once lively centre of suffrage debate to an obedient service press. The

28 Letter, 15 October 1912: Pethick Lawrence Papers, Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge, PL Box 9.33.

Press had, of course, always produced propaganda. But under the editorial auspices of Pethick Lawrence it had sought to publish not merely tendentious, repetitious broadsides but to connote by the term 'propaganda' a politically committed, polyvocal literature. That the Woman's Press under Pethick Lawrence succeeded in reconciling the conflicting pressures of political commitment and literary value into a viable arrangement bears testament to the possibility of feminist publishing walking a difficult aesthetic/ideological tightrope. But the brevity of the Woman's Press's active life simultaneously suggests that such a balancing act is always and inevitably highly precarious.

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