

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #036

The Suffragettes // How Women Won The Vote

March 17, 2020

[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English, the show where you can improve your English while learning fascinating things about the world.

[00:00:17] Today we are talking about the Suffragette movement in the UK and how women won the vote.

[00:00:25] At the start of the 20th century in the UK, like much of the world, women were considered second-class citizens, unable to vote in national elections.

[00:00:38] The Suffragette movement saw women rise up in their masses.

[00:00:43] They **chained**¹ themselves to **railings**², **smashed**³ shop windows, and blew up houses.

[00:00:51] One was even killed by throwing herself in front of the King's horse.

[00:00:57] And by 1928 all women over the age of 21 were given the right to vote.

[00:01:05] Finally, they had managed to achieve the same **status**⁴ as men.

[00:01:11] The movement that did more than anything else for women's rights in the UK was called the Suffragette movement.

[00:01:18] And today we are going to tell the story of these brave women and how they won the vote.

[00:01:25] Before we get right into it though, this is just your **customary**⁵ reminder for those of you listening to the podcast on Spotify, Google Podcasts, iVoox or wherever you may get your podcasts that you can get your copy of the transcript and key vocabulary for this podcast on the website, which is Leonardoenglish.com.

¹ to fasten someone or something using a chain

² vertical posts, usually metal or wooden, that are used together with other such posts to form a fence

³ to cause something to break noisily into a lot of small pieces

⁴ an accepted or official position, especially in a social group

⁵ usual

[00:01:46] The transcript is really useful for following every single word and not missing anything.

[00:01:53] You can get it in PDF format, you can read it on the website, or even it now comes in animating form, so it scrolls across the page, just like subtitles.

[00:02:05] And the key vocabulary explains the harder words, so you don't have to stop to look up words and you can build your vocabulary at the same time as listening to the podcast.

[00:02:17] So go and check that out. It's at [Leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com).

[00:02:23] Okay then let's talk about the Suffragettes.

[00:02:27] We'll be talking about women's rights in the UK but it's worth just [painting the picture](#)⁶ of women's rights around the world at the start of the 20th century.

[00:02:41] If we were to [summarise](#)⁷ it, we'd probably say it was pretty [bleak](#)⁸, the [prospects](#)⁹ didn't look good for women.

⁶ to describe or show something in a particular way

⁷ to express the most important facts or ideas about something or someone in a short and clear form

⁸ if a situation is bleak, there is little or no hope for the future

⁹ the possibility that something good might happen in the future

[00:02:50] There are a few exceptions, but in general, the majority of countries in the world didn't allow women to vote, and if they did, it was normally [restricted](#)¹⁰ to a small selection of women - women who owned property or women who paid taxes, or it only allowed women to vote in certain elections.

[00:03:15] [Universal suffrage](#)¹¹, meaning that everyone was able to vote regardless of their status, didn't exist anywhere really, and certainly not in Europe.

[00:03:28] And towards the end of the 19th century, there was an increasing movement in the UK that pushed for women's rights to vote.

[00:03:40] There were a few laws that were proposed in [parliament](#)¹², but nothing really happened.

[00:03:47] The politicians - who were at that time, all men, of course, women weren't allowed to, to put themselves forward to be a member of [parliament](#) - these men didn't seem interested in giving women the vote, and every time there was [a bill](#)¹³ proposed, a law proposed, in [parliament](#), they would vote it down, they would vote against it.

¹⁰ limited, especially by official rules, laws, etc.

¹¹ everyone having the right to vote

¹² in some countries, the group of (usually) elected politicians or other people who make the laws for their country

¹³ a formal statement of a planned new law that is discussed before being voted on

[00:04:12] It seemed clear that the peaceful route of [petitioning](#)¹⁴ the government, of going to meetings and trying to persuade politicians to support women's rights to vote, it became clear that this wasn't having much impact, it wasn't very successful.

[00:04:33] And so in 1903 a new movement was formed called the Women's Social and Political Union, the WSPU for short.

[00:04:46] It was formed by a woman called Emeline Pankhurst, and it proposed a different approach to what had been tried previously.

[00:04:58] Their [motto](#)¹⁵, their [slogan](#)¹⁶, the catchphrase, I guess, was "deeds, not words".

[00:05:07] So deeds means action, it means getting stuff done.

[00:05:12] Pankhurst, who was the leader of the WSPU, she had been campaigning for women's rights since she was a girl, since the age of 14, so for 31 years, and she was [fed up](#)¹⁷ with men saying that they were going to change things.

[00:05:32] She was [fed up](#) with empty words.

¹⁴ to sign a document with large numbers of other people asking the government or authorities to do something or not to do something

¹⁵ a short sentence or phrase that expresses a belief or purpose

¹⁶ a short easily remembered phrase, especially one used to advertise an idea or a product

¹⁷ bored, annoyed, or disappointed, especially by something that you have experienced for too long

[00:05:36] And thus 'deeds, not words' was born.

[00:05:41] The WSPU was all about action, about showing men that women were serious about this and that they were going to [disrupt¹⁸](#) society until they got what they wanted.

[00:05:56] And so what did they do?

[00:05:57] Well, they were pretty disruptive.

[00:06:00] They protested, they [smashed up](#) windows of shops.

[00:06:04] They [chained](#) themselves to [railings](#).

[00:06:07] And they blew up postboxes.

[00:06:12] And they were horribly treated by men, and in particular, by the police.

[00:06:18] They were put into prison, of course, what they were doing, despite the fact that the objectives may have been good, what they were doing was illegal, and when they were put into prison, the Suffragettes, the women, they went on [hunger strike¹⁹](#), they refused to eat.

[00:06:39] And so the prison guards would force feed them, they would put a pipe down the women's throats and force food down their necks.

¹⁸ to prevent something, especially a system, process, or event, from continuing as usual or as expected

¹⁹ the act of refusing to eat in order to make a protest

[00:06:49] It's pretty horrible stuff.

[00:06:53] And although this frightened some men, the behaviour of the women, others [ridiculed](#)²⁰ the movement, and they took this as an opportunity to [ridicule](#) women.

[00:07:08] The name of the movement, the Suffragettes, actually comes from a name that was given to the movement by a male journalist from the Daily Mail.

[00:07:21] The name he gave them, the Suffragettes, was intended to [ridicule](#) their cause, to make fun of them, to [belittle](#)²¹ them.

[00:07:31] But instead of getting angry about it, they embraced it, saying that the get, the 'get' in Suffragette means that they were about *getting* the vote.

[00:07:45] And this wasn't some sort of part-time protest where women took part in it whenever they could.

[00:07:54] Many of the Suffragettes were arrested dozens of times and made active efforts to be put in prison.

[00:08:03] The disruption that they were causing was [vital](#)²², it was very important to [further](#)²³ their cause, to help people understand that they were serious.

²⁰ unkind words or actions that make someone or something look stupid

²¹ to make a person or an action seem as if he, she or it is not important

²² necessary for the success or continued existence of something; extremely important

²³ to develop or make progress in something

[00:08:16] What they were doing was not wrong, [per se](#)²⁴, it was an important step in the journey towards getting the vote.

[00:08:25] That was at least their theory.

[00:08:29] In one of her many [trials](#)²⁵ at [court](#)²⁶, Emiline Pankhurst, the leader of the Suffragettes, told the court, "*We are here not because we are law-breakers, we are here in our efforts to become law-makers*".

[00:08:46] Some of their actions proved more and more [militant](#)²⁷, more and more extreme, and ended up costing some of them their lives.

[00:08:59] In 1913, at the Epsom Derby, a famous horse race in the UK, a Suffragette called Emily Davison rushed onto the [track](#)²⁸ as the horses were running towards her.

[00:09:14] She was hit by the King's horse and knocked to the ground and died of her injuries a few days after.

²⁴ by or of itself

²⁵ the hearing of statements and showing of objects, etc. in a law court to judge if a person is guilty of a crime or to decide a case or a legal matter

²⁶ a place where trials and other legal cases happen, or the people present in such a place, especially the officials and those deciding if someone is guilty

²⁷ active, determined, and often willing to use force

²⁸ the part of a racecourse where the horses run

[00:09:23] It's still not clear exactly what her [motives](#)²⁹ were here.

[00:09:28] It didn't seem like she [intended](#)³⁰ to kill herself, and it may have been that she was just trying to put a Suffragette [banner](#)³¹, a sort of flag on the King's horse.

[00:09:42] But whether it was intentional or an accident gone wrong, didn't really matter at the end.

[00:09:49] It was [abundantly](#)³² clear that the Suffragettes were [for real](#)³³ and they would stop at nothing until they got the vote.

[00:10:00] By this time, in 1913 there was much stronger support for the Suffragette movement from men, and it looked likely that the vote would come relatively soon.

[00:10:13] However, in 1914 the First World War broke out, and of course, that put an end to the Suffragette disruption, as all attentions were focused on the war effort.

[00:10:29] Although on one level, this [stalled](#)³⁴ the progress of the Suffragette movement, it slowed things down, it actually helped in the background.

²⁹ a reason for doing something

³⁰ what was planned

³¹ a long piece of cloth with words written on it, sometimes stretched between two poles and carried by people taking part in a march

³² in large quantities or amounts

³³ serious, real, not pretend

³⁴ slowed down

[00:10:41] One of the reasons given for not allowing women the vote was that they weren't as capable as men, they weren't as strong and they weren't as able to have independent thought as men were.

[00:10:57] It obviously seems like [nonsense](#)³⁵ to us now, but at that time it was the [prevailing](#)³⁶ belief, it was what a lot of men thought.

[00:11:08] Anyway, during the First World War, while men were at the [front](#)³⁷ fighting, things back at home, back in the UK, were kept going by women.

[00:11:21] Whether it was working in the factories, producing [arms](#)³⁸, [bullets](#)³⁹, guns, and so on, or producing food to keep the population fed, it was clear, if it hadn't been already, that women were just as capable as men.

[00:11:40] And this [paved the way](#)⁴⁰ for women to get the vote, it put women on the path towards getting the vote.

[00:11:48] In February, 1918, while the war was still ongoing, the first women were given the right to vote.

³⁵ an idea, something said or written, or behaviour that is silly or stupid

³⁶ existing in a particular place or at a particular time

³⁷ a military front or battlefield is a contested armed frontier between opposing forces

³⁸ weapons

³⁹ a small, metal object that is shot from a gun

⁴⁰ if something paves the way for/to something else, it makes the other thing possible

[00:11:56] However, it wasn't universal.

[00:11:59] It was restricted to women over the age of 30 who owned property.

[00:12:05] So it was [a start](#)⁴¹, but certainly not what these Suffragettes had fought for.

[00:12:12] Women had to wait another 10 years, until 1928 for the full rights, which meant that women had exactly the same voting rights as men, so everyone over the age of 21 was able to vote.

[00:12:29] Just as a [side note](#)⁴², you may know that now the voting age in the UK is 18.

[00:12:36] That actually happened in 1970, and of course applied to men and women equally.

[00:12:44] And the Suffragette movement continues to inspire people and be remembered through popular culture.

[00:12:51] If you've seen the film, Mary Poppins, Mrs. Banks, the mother of the children returns from a [march](#)⁴³ and sings the song "Sister Suffragette".

⁴¹ the beginning of something

⁴² a minor related mention, a non-related point

⁴³ an event in which a large number of people walk through a public place to express their support for something, or their disagreement with or disapproval of something

[00:13:06] And more recently, in February 2019, female Democrat members of the US Congress dressed [predominantly⁴⁴](#) in white when they attended President Trump's State of the Union address.

[00:13:20] And the choice of white was because that was [in solidarity⁴⁵](#) with the movement.

[00:13:30] Now, it might seem mad to us that this was what had to be done to [grant⁴⁶](#) women just equal voting rights with men, but it seemed that [petitioning⁴⁷](#) and peaceful protest wasn't enough to get the job done.

[00:13:47] And of course, it wasn't just in the UK that similar women's movements existed and that women fought for the vote.

[00:13:57] The interwar period, the period between World War One and World War Two saw many Western countries give women the vote.

[00:14:06] Although there were a few [notable⁴⁸](#) exceptions.

⁴⁴ mostly

⁴⁵ in support of

⁴⁶ to give or allow someone something, usually in an official way

⁴⁷ to make a formal request for something, especially in a law court

⁴⁸ important and deserving attention, because of being very good or interesting

[00:14:10] France, for example, only gave women the vote in 1944, Greece in 1952 and Switzerland, not until 1971.

[00:14:22] And of course, unfortunately, there are still [a handful⁴⁹](#) of countries where women don't have the same voting rights as men, which I'm sure would have Emiline Pankhurst [turning in her grave⁵⁰](#).

[00:14:36] Okay then, I hope that this has been an interesting dive into the world of the Suffragettes.

[00:14:43] It's a fascinating story, I think.

[00:14:47] These women were obviously incredibly brave and suffered greatly for their cause, and we all have a lot to thank them for.

[00:14:56] Just as a final reminder, if you were looking for the transcripts and key vocabulary for the podcast, or for any other podcasts for that matter, you can check that out at leonardoenglish.com.

[00:15:08] You do need to be a member of Leonardo English to get access to all of this, but that includes bonus podcasts by the way, and of course, supporting the podcast and membership starts at just under two euros a week.

⁴⁹ a small number of people or things

⁵⁰ if you say that a dead person would turn in their grave, you mean that they would be very angry or upset about something

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[00:15:20] So do go and check that out, it's at [Leonardoenglish.com](http://leonardoenglish.com).

[00:15:25] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:15:29] I'm Alastair Budge and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Chained	to fasten someone or something using a chain
Railings	vertical posts, usually metal or wooden, that are used together with other such posts to form a fence
Smashed	to cause something to break noisily into a lot of small pieces
Status	an accepted or official position, especially in a social group
Customary	usual
Paint a picture	to describe or show something in a particular way
Summarise	to express the most important facts or ideas about something or someone in a short and clear form
Bleak	if a situation is bleak, there is little or no hope for the future
Prospects	the possibility that something good might happen in the future
Restricted	limited, especially by official rules, laws, etc.
Universal suffrage	everyone having the right to vote

Parliament	in some countries, the group of (usually) elected politicians or other people who make the laws for their country
A bill	a formal statement of a planned new law that is discussed before being voted on
Petitioning	to sign a document with large numbers of other people asking the government or authorities to do something or not to do something
Motto	a short sentence or phrase that expresses a belief or purpose
Slogan	a short easily remembered phrase, especially one used to advertise an idea or a product
Fed up	bored, annoyed, or disappointed, especially by something that you have experienced for too long
Disrupt	to prevent something, especially a system, process, or event, from continuing as usual or as expected
Hunger strike	the act of refusing to eat in order to make a protest
Ridiculed	unkind words or actions that make someone or something look stupid
Belittle	to make a person or an action seem as if he, she or it is not important
Vital	necessary for the success or continued existence of something; extremely important

Further	to develop or make progress in something
Per se	by or of itself
Trials	the hearing of statements and showing of objects, etc. in a law court to judge if a person is guilty of a crime or to decide a case or a legal matter
Court	a place where trials and other legal cases happen, or the people present in such a place, especially the officials and those deciding if someone is guilty
Militant	active, determined, and often willing to use force
Track	the part of a racecourse where the horses run
Motive	a reason for doing something
Intended	what was planned
Banner	a long piece of cloth with words written on it, sometimes stretched between two poles and carried by people taking part in a march
Abundantly	in large quantities or amounts
For real	serious, real, not pretend
Stalled	slowed down
Nonsense	an idea, something said or written, or behaviour that is silly or stupid

Prevailing	existing in a particular place or at a particular time
Front	a military front or battlefield is a contested armed frontier between opposing forces
Arms	weapons
Bullets	a small, metal object that is shot from a gun
Pave the way	if something paves the way for/to something else, it makes the other thing possible
A start	the beginning of something
Side note	a minor related mention, a non-related point
March	an event in which a large number of people walk through a public place to express their support for something, or their disagreement with or disapproval of something
Predominantly	mostly
In solidarity	in support of
Grant	to give or allow someone something, usually in an official way
Petitioning	to make a formal request for something, especially in a law court
Notable	important and deserving attention, because of being very good or

interesting

A handful

a small number of people or things

Turn in your grave

if you say that a dead person would turn in their grave, you mean that they would be very angry or upset about something

We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

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