

# Suffragettes

Dr J. Graham Jones re-examines the reopening by Lloyd George in September 1912 of the village institute at his native Llanystumdwy, when the proceedings were blighted by constant suffragette interruptions.

## Lloyd George and the Suffragettes at Llanystumdwy

Among the Lloyd George correspondence acquired by the National Library of Wales from the third Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor in 1987 is a single stray letter, dated 19 October 1912, from Evan William Evans (1860–1925), a native of Dolgellau, a prominent journalist, editor and publisher, and owner of the Dolgellau-based printing office where *Y Goleuad* was produced. The *Goleuad* company assumed responsibility for the publication of a number of local newspapers and journals and several substantial volumes. Evans was himself an avid local historian and Calvinistic Methodist, and a diligent collector of manuscripts and printed works. The former group now constitutes the Frondirion Manuscripts in the custody of the National Library.<sup>1</sup>

The 1912 letter reads as follows:

*The Suffragists at Llanystumdwy*

Frondirion  
Dolgelley, Oct. 19, 1912

To the Right Hon D. Lloyd George MP

Dear Mr Lloyd George

I find in to-day's paper that questions are to be asked in the House of Commons on Monday about the treatment of the Suffragists at Llanystumdwy. I was present at the meeting and was quite close to two of the women who disturbed the proceedings, and who were ejected.

The reports published in many of the newspapers were greatly exaggerated. It has been repeatedly

asserted that the hair of one of the disturbers was actually pulled off in handfuls by the crowd. I was close by at the time and saw what did take place. The hat of the woman was taken off, and handfuls of hair did come off with it. A friend of mine picked up the hat, and I have it now in my possession as well as a considerable quantity of the 'hair' said to have been plucked off. But will you allow me to assure you that this woman did not on that occasion suffer the loss of any of her own hair! It was false hair that was artfully inserted inside the hat in such a way that it looked like natural hair, and of course 'it came off in handfuls'. I have been endeavouring to find out the name and address of the rightful owner of the hat and false hair, but so far I have failed. It was I think a very clever bit of stage acting and it came off well!

Yours sincerely  
E. W. Evans<sup>2</sup>

The letter casts further light on an occasion of considerable interest. The intensive suffragette campaign to secure the enfranchisement of women was one of the most prominent political themes of the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War. David Lloyd George, Liberal MP for the Caernarfon Boroughs since 1890, President of the Board of Trade, 1905–08, and subsequently Asquith's radical Chancellor of the Exchequer, was inevitably in a pivotal position. Until about the end of 1905 the suffragette campaign was strictly constitutional, relatively low-key, and generally keeping well within the law. From that point on, however, the techniques

of disruption ever more widely employed by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) brought their demands increasingly into the public domain, while the eligibility of women to serve on town and county councils from 1907 onwards gave the movement a powerful fillip. Moreover, the election of a relatively left-wing Liberal government under Campbell-Bannerman in January 1906 raised real expectations of legislative change. It was estimated that fully 400 MPs in the new parliament, drawn from all political parties, were pledged to the principle of women's suffrage, while the prime minister was himself a convert to the cause.<sup>3</sup> Four members of the new Liberal cabinet were said to be stalwart supporters of the suffragette cause – Sir Edward Grey, Haldane, Birrell and Lloyd George.<sup>4</sup> Other Liberal ministers were generally hostile, among them Asquith (the Chancellor of the Exchequer), Lord Loreburn (the Lord Chancellor), Churchill, Lewis Harcourt, McKenna and Herbert Samuel. They tended to argue that women did not want the vote and did not need the vote, as they had no real grievances of their own and were already adequately represented. These sharply contrasting viewpoints caused a deep rooted schism within the Liberal Party at a time when it was attempting to maintain a positive mantle of radicalism.

In the event, private members' bills were introduced in the Commons in 1907 and 1908, but, deprived of government support, inevitably made but little headway. Lloyd George, who succeeded Asquith as Chancellor in April 1908, regularly faced well-orchestrated heckling during many of his public speeches, which he sometimes found difficulty in completing because of the constant interruptions. In October he was called as a prosecution witness in the celebrated trial at Bow Street of Mrs Pankhurst, Miss Christabel Pankhurst and Mrs Drummond. To an audience at the Albert Hall on 5 December he was optimistic concerning the inclusion of women's suffrage in a future Reform Bill.<sup>5</sup> It was noted that his speech took two hours to deliver (instead of the anticipated twenty

minutes) because of the incessant interruptions by militant members of the WSPU lodged firmly (and somewhat menacingly) in front-row seats. During 1909, fully preoccupied with the preparation of the 'People's Budget', Lloyd George was inevitably more than happy to fall in with Asquith's delaying tactics as a number of imprisoned suffragettes went on hunger strike, provoking the government to institute the highly publicised process of forcible feeding.

By the beginning of 1910 the suffrage issue had attracted considerable public sympathy and support, and appreciable parliamentary backing. Asquith, however, refused to introduce a women's suffrage measure, and in the January general election, the Liberals remained committed simply to carrying his nebulous 1908 pledge to give consideration to the franchise question generally into the new parliament, not to any bolder initiative. Following the poll, the WSPU declared a truce which lasted to some extent until 1912. In the spring of 1910 the re-elected Liberal government set up an all-party Parliamentary 'Conciliation Committee' charged to draft suffrage legislation. The outcome was the first Conciliation Bill which proposed that the vote should be given to women who were £10 householders, with the further stipulation that married women could not qualify in respect of the same property as their husbands. The measure received the cautious endorsement of the suffrage societies on the 'half-a-loaf' principle, and of Conservatives who depicted it as a means of strengthening the anti-radical vote in the country. Both Lloyd George and Churchill opposed it for the very same reason, the former writing to his brother William during the debate on the second reading in July, 'Women's Debate going strong. F. E. Smith delivered a crushing speech against. I am dead against this Bill & mean to vote against it.'<sup>6</sup> Publicly he opposed the measure as being insufficiently broad and incapable of amendment. Both Lloyd George and Churchill voted against, but the bill was carried by a majority in the Commons, thereafter being referred to a committee of

the whole House, temporarily blocking its progress. 'Women Suffrage killed for this year – killed altogether as far as yesterday's Bill is concerned', wrote Lloyd George to William, 'The suffragettes are for the moment concentrating their hate on Winston, although annoyed with me also.'<sup>7</sup> On several occasions violent scenes ensued.

A revised Conciliation Bill was introduced by a private member in the spring of 1911, a measure which removed the £10 householder qualification of the previous bill. In May Lloyd George voted in favour of it, and indeed seemed to endorse the revived clamour in favour of 'Votes for Women' at a time when he was fully preoccupied with his National Health Insurance commitments. By the end of the summer he had come to endorse a comprehensive reform of the franchise on lines which he expounded insistently to the Liberal Chief Whip, the Master of Elibank:

I am very concerned about our pledges on the Female Suffrage question. We seem to be playing straight into the hands of the enemy. The Conciliation Bill could, on balance, add hundreds of thousands of votes throughout the country to the strength of the Tory Party ... We have never really faced the situation manfully and courageously. I think the Liberal Party ought to make up its mind as a whole that it will either have an extended franchise which would put working men's wives on the Register, as well as spinsters and widows, or that it will have no female franchise at all ... We are likely to find ourselves in the position of putting this wretched Conciliation Bill through the House of Commons, sending it to the Lords, and eventually getting it through. Say what you will, that spells disaster for Liberalism.<sup>8</sup>

The suffragette camp in turn became highly suspicious of Lloyd George's sincerity and intentions, Christabel Pankhurst writing in October:

There exists a conspiracy of wreckers and reactionaries who are bent

upon carrying widening amendments in Committee in the hope of destroying the majority for the Bill ... The particular amendment which Mr Lloyd George intends to promote is one to give a vote to the wife of every elector, in virtue of her husband's qualification. This provision would apply to no less than six millions of women, so that the Conciliation Bill, instead of enfranchising one million women ... would enfranchise seven million women.<sup>9</sup>

She was fully aware that no such measure stood any prospect of clearing the Commons without government support, and had come to the conclusion that the strategy of the devious Lloyd George was 'not, as he professes, to secure to women a large measure of enfranchisement, but to prevent women from having the vote at all'.<sup>10</sup> Within weeks Prime Minister Asquith had announced, somewhat unexpectedly, that it was the Government's intention during the next session to introduce a measure providing manhood suffrage for all *bona fide* residents, the bill being capable of amendment so that it might include the enfranchisement of women.<sup>11</sup> 'Asquith's declaration on manhood suffrage has taken everyone by surprise', wrote Lloyd George to William, 'It is entirely my doing. But I am amazed at the readiness & the proflitude [*sic*] with which he took the fence. I anticipated much more trouble. The Pankhursts are furious.'<sup>12</sup>

Asquith's announcement inevitably heralded a return to a somewhat more militant attitude on the part of the WSPU, while Christabel Pankhurst's intense fury was directed, first and foremost, at the 'turncoat' Chancellor of the Exchequer. In her broadsheet *Votes for Women* her wrathful indignation knew no bounds – 'The Government's latest attempt to cheat women of the vote is, of course, inspired by Mr Lloyd George. The whole crooked and discreditable scheme is characteristic of the man and of the methods he has from the first employed against the Suffrage cause.'<sup>13</sup> H. N. Brailsford, the secretary of the Conciliation Committee, had already informed Liberal journalist C. P. Scott that Christabel



David Lloyd George in 1903

'envisaged the whole suffrage movement ... as a gigantic duel between herself and Lloyd George whom she designed to destroy'.<sup>14</sup> The energetic suffragette campaign continued unabated, violent outbreaks ensued regularly, and political meetings were often interrupted. 'Meeting a great success. No interruptions inside', reported a relieved Lloyd George in mid-December, 'Women outside were troublesome flinging things at the car but no harm done. All of us delighted this strenuous session is over. Now for rest & recreation.'<sup>15</sup>

As the new year – 1912 – dawned, feelings ran high and passions intensified. Persistent conjecture ensued that suffragette-inspired assassinations were being planned against both Asquith and Lloyd George. The former, it was rumoured, had only narrowly escaped death after a hatchet had been flung into his car-

riage at Dublin. By the spring of 1912 intense disillusionment and mounting exasperation prevailed in the suffragette camp because of the breaking was compounded by occasional arson attacks. As yet another Conciliation Bill was debated in the Commons chamber during March 1912, an exasperated Lloyd George, still one of the ministers more sympathetic to the suffragette cause, wrote dejectedly to his brother William:

1 March 1912. Suffragettes broken out once more. Smashed PM's windows – shop windows in Oxford St & Charing X. Lunatics.<sup>17</sup>

4 March 1912. Suffragettes raving mad. Another outbreak of window smashing in West End to day. They are destroying the last chance of carrying their Bill.<sup>18</sup>

5 March 1912. Newydd. Bydd y

Pankhursts a'r Pethicks i gyd yn y  
gaol cyn y boreu – os y delir hwy.  
[*News. The Pankhursts and the Pethicks  
will all be in the gaol before morning – if  
they are caught.*]<sup>19</sup>

The next day came the news that Sir A. A. Haworth had been narrowly defeated in his bid to retain the traditionally safe Liberal division of Manchester South in a by-election necessitated by his appointment as a Lord Commissioner of the Treasury. Lloyd George wrote stoically to William:

South Manchester. Bad luck. Strike – suffragettes, undoubtedly prejudicially affected result, probably lost us the seat. It was also the worst constituency in which to fight Insurance ... We must set our teeth & fight through the next 2 yrs. At the end of that time we war through into more favourable country. Benefits flow in. Home Rule & Welsh Disestab<sup>l</sup>. will be through & we can put forward more attractive fare. Cabinet quite resolute.<sup>20</sup>

It was rumoured in political circles that the third Conciliation Bill (again defeated on its second reading at the end of March) had been torpedoed by a whispering campaign initiated by Lloyd George and Churchill that Asquith would resign following the introduction of a private member's women's suffrage bill. This heartfelt fear, it was said, led to the loss of Irish Nationalist supporters of the suffragette cause, who looked suspiciously at any factor which might impede or delay the progress of their measure.<sup>21</sup> The fury of the more militant suffragettes knew no bounds; Lloyd George had become their especial *bête noir*. Every public function which he attended saw the Chancellor harried and threatened by the 'female lunatics'. At the end of June he was to address a political meeting at Walthamstow in Essex, a parliamentary division represented by Sir John Simon, the Solicitor General:

I am off with Llwydyn [his daughter Olwen] to a meeting at Walthamstow in the Solicitor General's constituency. I shall probably be harried by the female lunatics. I

am the only man in the Cabinet who could render them effective help & yet they have pursued me with unexampled malignity. Poor old PM, he has been worried by them these past weeks – & he minds them much more than I do.<sup>22</sup>

Two weeks later, about to deliver a speech at Kensington, Lloyd George was attacked by a male suffragist supporter who came close to striking him on the head, provoking a scuffle which resulted in the Chancellor being pulled to the ground.<sup>23</sup> On another occasion Prime Minister Asquith was clutched by the lapels of his suit and shaken forcefully. Such tactics caused something of a rift in the ranks of the suffragette sympathisers; at the end of August Mrs Fawcett asserted that the militant faction had a 'large share' in causing the defeat of the third Conciliation Bill in March, and had become 'the chief obstacles in the way of the success of the suffrage movement in the House of Commons, and far more formidable opponents of it than Mr. Asquith or Mr. Harcourt'.<sup>24</sup>

Further violent outbursts inevitably ensued. Upon his return from a late summer vacation at Marienbad (which he had at least ostensibly taken for the sake of his health<sup>25</sup>), Lloyd George attended the National Eisteddfod at Wrexham where on 5 September his speech was interrupted by persistent heckling – 'When are you going to give votes for women?' He responded, 'I do not know what these foolish people gain for their cause. (Here another male interrupter was put out.) I was saying that I fail to see what they think they gain by insulting a whole nation in the national festival of its democracy (Applause).'<sup>26</sup> Violent scenes ensued outside the Eisteddfod Pavilion as the suffragette sympathisers were mobbed by the crowd:

An auburn-haired lady had several of her tresses torn out by the roots. In spite of the protection afforded by the police the terror-stricken suffragettes were hustled and knocked about, and to protect them from the violence of the angry crowd the police eventually rushed them into one of the

ante-rooms behind the building. One of the constables remonstrated with the crowd and a suffragette, whose blouse was in tatters, and whose hair hung across her shoulders replied, 'We will go on doing it until we get the vote!' A man in the crowd was heard to explain, 'They are in Wales now. They are among ancient Britons, and we will show them how to deal with suffragettes.'<sup>27</sup>

Only two weeks later even greater savagery attended the opening of the village institute presented by the Chancellor to his native Llanystumdwy. To finance the munificent gesture he had made use of libel damages of £1,000 paid to him in 1909 by *The People* newspaper which had printed a series of articles suggesting that Lloyd George was about to have been cited as a co-respondent in a divorce action, but that the would-be plaintiff had been bought off for £20,000. The Chancellor sued the newspaper, making use of the professional services of Rufus Isaacs, Raymond Asquith (son of the prime minister) and F. E. Smith. Damages of £1,000 were eventually paid to Lloyd George which, three and a half years later, he contributed to the building of the village institute.<sup>28</sup> Ironically, by the time of the institute's opening in September 1912, the Chancellor was embroiled in an even more menacing affair – the infamous Marconi scandal – which again threatened to destroy his political career.

The opening of the institute was a notably high-profile occasion. The outer gates of the grounds were to be unlocked by Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, and the door of the institute by Sir Rufus Isaacs, the Attorney General. Both ministers were then to deliver short speeches, followed by Lloyd George and his close political associate C. F. G. Masterman. The Chancellor and his wife were then to give tea to the village schoolchildren and old age pensioners, while the new institute was to be the venue of an evening concert with Isaacs presiding and Masterman conducting.<sup>29</sup> A week before the occasion, fully aware that suffragette interruptions were almost certain, the officials of the Criccieth

branch of the National Union for Women's Suffrage had communicated with the WSPU:

The suffrage cause is progressing steadily here under the auspices of the NUWSS [National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies]. Militant methods will only injure the cause which both societies have at heart. Personal attacks on and abuse of Mr Lloyd George on the part of strangers in his native village will naturally not be tolerated, especially on an occasion such as this, which is not even political. Serious damage will be done to the Suffrage cause if any attempt is made to prevent Mr Lloyd George and his guests from speaking.<sup>30</sup>

An evasive reply was received: 'We beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter. Speculation as to possible antics of ladies to-day is now all the more intense, as the reply is a polite intimation to wait and see.'<sup>31</sup> Mrs Pankhurst, it was reported, was unwilling to comment.

On the morning preceding the opening, Lloyd George and C. F. G. Masterman played golf on the Criccieth golf links against Sir Rufus Isaacs and G. P. Williams of Criccieth. An autumn picnic on the banks of the Chancellor's beloved River Dwyfor followed in the afternoon. For the opening ceremony itself the Chancellor was accompanied by his wife, children and brother William, together with political associates like Ellis W. Davies (Caernarfonshire Eifion), J. Herbert Lewis (Flintshire), Ellis Jones Griffith (Anglesey) and H. J. Ellis Nanney, his Conservative opponent in the Caernarfon Boroughs in 1890 and 1895.<sup>32</sup> Lloyd George's brother William was responsible for presenting the deed of gift of the land and premises to the institute trustees, noting that the gift was subject to two conditions: no intoxicating liquors were to be sold or consumed on the premises, and it should never be made a condition of membership that members should belong to a particular sect

or party in religion or politics. Mr Masterman delivered the only English speech of the afternoon:

As I am the only Englishman speaking this afternoon, perhaps I might be allowed to say in the name of a few hundred thousand Englishmen I am very glad to join in the demonstration. We are grateful to you for having brought him up and taught him the way he should go – with some difficulties perhaps – (laughter) – and given him to us – (cries of 'Oh, no') – for the comfort of some, for the disturbance of others, and for the interest and excitement of all (Laughter and cheers). I think you will all agree with me, whatever our politics are, and perhaps with different motives in your hearts, when I say that Mr Lloyd George is one of the few men given to us during a century of whom it may be said that his life has changed the world a little. (Cheers)

Lloyd George's opening sentences were immediately drowned by a cry of

#### Violent treatment of WSPU hecklers, Llanystumdwy, 21 September 1912



'Votes for Women' from a woman near the platform. 'Put her in the river', retorted the crowd as she was escorted away by a police constable and buffeted by the bystanders. As the Chancellor urged his listeners not to harm the suffragette sympathisers who were disrupting the meeting, a succession of interruptions followed. In the words of one of the press correspondents, 'Their treatment on the outskirts of the crowd was, however, the reverse of mild. Each was assaulted in turn, and it was only through the intervention of a police constable and the congestion at that particular spot that one woman was saved being placed under the village pump.'<sup>33</sup> Lloyd George spoke as follows:

I have now been nearly a quarter of a century in political life, and I think I may say that, whether locally or nationally, I have during that period generally been in the hottest of the conflict, and I am glad to be able to give you my observations after twenty-five years ... I am very anxious that this institute should provide at least one meeting place in the village where the villagers, without distinctions of creed, can come together to promote common objects and find joy in the same common entertainments.<sup>34</sup>

It was noted in the local press that the protestors had been stripped naked by a gang of local rowdies.<sup>35</sup> The London papers, too, reported these alleged incidents graphically and in detail. One of the women present described the events as a 'revelation of the latent beast in man', while, in the words of Sylvia Pankhurst, 'Men and women were beaten, kicked and stripped almost naked. The hair of the women was torn out in handfuls.'<sup>36</sup> It was further reported that the shirts of the protesting women were mercilessly cut up and distributed among the crowd as souvenirs of the momentous occasion.<sup>37</sup> Lurid press publicity inevitably ensued; a large picture of the women being assaulted and mauled dominated the front page of the *Daily Mirror*, and similar photographs occupied a full page in the *Illustrated London News*.

Two of the Liberal politicians present recorded the events in their personal diaries. Sir John Herbert Lewis' description of the occasion was predictably bland: 'Went by early train to Carnarvon & motored thence to Llanystumdwy for the opening of the Institute by the Chancellor. A huge crowd, a great suffragette disturbance followed by calm & an excellent meeting. In the evening a rollicking Concert in the Hall – Rufus Isaacs in the chair, Masterman conducting. That was a brilliant idea of LG's for the attempts to pronounce the various items caused endless fun.'<sup>38</sup> Ellis W. Davies outlined the scene in greater detail:

The crowd was dense but very well-behaved & was representative of all parties & sects, the only exception being the local landowners. They were noticeably absent save Sir Hugh Ellis Nanney, who fought an election with Lloyd George. One felt it a pity that political and social bitterness prevented others from being present at a function to do honour to the most eminent of living Welshmen & one wondered how narrow and petty their minds must be. Is it any wonder that as a class they are held in such contempt by the people?

He proceeded to describe the events which he had witnessed:

When the Chancellor got up to speak he had a great ovation but no sooner had he appealed to the crowd in Welsh to be gentle with any suffragettes present than one of the women quite near the stage shouted 'Votes for Women' & in the attempt to lead her out – she herself fighting & kicking those who tried to protect her – the crowd pressed down & [an] ugly rush was made for the platform. No sooner was one disposed of than other women cried in other parts of the field & whilst no doubt in the crush – at times dangerous – feeling got the better of some men, the accounts in the paper were untrue & on the whole the women came well out of a row into which they deliberately entered with a view of breaking up a social gathering & judging by their

appearance no one would conclude that they were other than paid rowdies of a low class who did their work merely because they were paid. In time peace was restored but the excitement made it impossible for the Chancellor to speak effectively.<sup>39</sup>

Davies' words confirm the opinion of E. W. Evans in his letter sent to Lloyd George a month later. One of Lloyd George's earliest biographers, Herbert du Parcq, who penned his work close to the events which he was describing, made exactly the same point: 'They got some rough handling, which Mr Lloyd George did all in his power to restrain. There is, however, fortunately, no doubt that the attack which they provoked was very far from being as savage or as effective as many accounts in the newspapers led the public to believe. The ladies, expecting, as they were bound to expect, a summary retribution, had been prudent enough to put on old clothes, and these were badly torn; but the personal injuries which they suffered were happily slight.'<sup>40</sup>

These more moderate, dispassionate accounts give a more balanced version of the events at Llanystumdwy in September 1912. At the time, however, the exaggerated language of those involved inevitably received widespread currency in both the local and national press. The London *Evening News* published a lengthy account of an interview with Mrs S. Watson, one of the agitators attacked by the crowd, who claimed:

I am bruised all down my side and arms and have had the skin kicked off my ankles. I still can hear the noise which was made by the tearing out of my hair in handfuls ... I received a violent blow from behind, and my hat was torn off. In my pocket I had a dozen bannerettes with the sticks in a bundle. Some one snatched these from my pocket and struck me fiercely on the head. At that I became half unconscious, but I realised that I was being attacked from all sides. My hair was being torn out in handfuls. Once I was beaten down to the ground, but two constables and two other men

succeeded in getting me up and out from among the hooligans. I was taken to a cottage, but the woman refused to give me admittance. The same thing happened at another cottage, but at the third, with the help of the police, I succeeded in getting inside. I was driven miles in a trap to get away from a remote railway station. The guard put me in his van, and told me that had I gone into one of the ordinary carriages the men would have thought nothing of flinging me on the line. He told me that the hair which had been torn from my head was distributed among the men as a souvenir of the meeting. Nearly all my clothing was torn to pieces.<sup>41</sup>

The Conservative *Western Mail*, too, published detailed accounts of the proceedings, concluding:

The Welshmen behaved like fiends, and but for the heroic action of the Welsh policemen they would undoubtedly have been killed. One of them informed me that, though the men were bad, she had most to fear from the Welsh women, who took their hatpins out of their hats and made every attempt to use them. Neither would the Welsh women allow the suffragettes to take refuge in their cottages. Wales just now is in the very bad books of those suffragettes who seek relaxation from their domestic duties to cry "Votes for Women", on any and every occasion.<sup>42</sup>

Subsequently the press was bombarded with impassioned epistles from irate suffragette sympathisers, enraged by their view of the events at Llanystumdwy. The following letter is typical of dozens published in various newspapers during the weeks immediately following the attacks:

*Llanystumdwy: A Woman's Protest*

To the editor

Sir, - When women ask Cabinet ministers about the vote, it is called by newspapers 'suffragette tactics'. When they are hustled, trampled upon, and finally thrown out to a kindred crowd of 'wild beasts', their hair torn out in

handfulls, bereft of their garments, and even indecently assaulted, the newspapers term it 'retaliation'. 'Retaliation', forsooth! When will newspaper leader-writers realise a sense of fairness, and teach men to be manly towards his counter-part woman?

In his speech on Saturday Mr Lloyd George declared: 'There is no country in the world where political warfare is fought under stricter and more honourable rules of fair play than Great Britain.'

When has fair play ever been accorded to women since the beginning of their political agitation? The militant methods adopted by the Women's Social and Political Union six years ago consisted simply in questioning Cabinet Ministers after political meetings and in sending deputations to the Prime Minister at Westminster. Their legitimate asking of questions was answered by their violent ejection and the decision of Cabinet Ministers that thenceforward political meetings should be held for men only ... Is this the 'fair play' that Mr Lloyd George talks about? The only negative comfort that I could glean after reading about the Llanystumdwy horrors in this morning's paper is that such dastardly outrages could not be perpetuated anywhere outside the area in North Wales that suffers delirium each time the Chancellor visits that district. It was all very well for him to have said on Saturday 'No violence!' This accords ill with the hint he gave them recently about 'the little Eisteddfod sticks being useful'. It is full time that we had ministers sincere enough to be fair to women and to concede to them in this country what women in other parts of the Empire (such as Australia and New Zealand) use for human betterment, namely the vote, I am, &c.

Margaret Finlay  
Stow Park - Terrace, Newport, Mon.  
Sept. 23<sup>rd</sup>. 1912<sup>43</sup>

Ironically, the Llanystumdwy Institute, like many other such buildings in England and Wales, had been hailed in the

North Wales press as a focal point of the village designed 'to break the monotony of rural life. The Llanystumdwy Institute will do a great deal to supply recreation for the folk of that parish, and make country life there more genial to the young people.'<sup>44</sup>

The opening sentence of the letter sent by E. W. Evans to Lloyd George also referred to the questions about to be asked in the House of Commons concerning the Llanystumdwy disturbances. Lord Robert Cecil had in fact already asked the Home Secretary for his reaction to the 'serious assaults' which had occurred on 21 September, only to be told that 'the police were unable to identify any of the assailants ... Many of the persons at the meeting came from outside the county, and were strangers to the police who were there on duty, and who were fully occupied in affording protection to the women.'

Lord Robert persisted, referring to the photographs published in the newspapers, but was again given an evasive reply.<sup>45</sup> The matter was again raised the following day,<sup>46</sup> and again more forcefully on 21 October by Lord Robert Cecil and Mr Harold Smith who demanded to know whether 'as a result of investigations into the recent disturbances at Wrexham and Llanystumdwy, any information [had] been obtained as to the pulling out of women's hair; and, if so, whether any action [was] to be taken'. The Home Secretary replied that evidence of two cases of assault had been gathered by the Chief Constable, but he refused to elucidate further as criminal proceedings were likely. A further pertinent question on 'the pulling out of the women's hair' provoked no response. Finally, Mr Smith asked pointedly, 'May I ask if this is an attempt to whitewash the Chancellor of the Exchequer?' 'There is not the slightest ground for any suggestion of that sort', retorted Reginald McKenna, the Home Secretary.<sup>47</sup>

By this time the cause of 'Votes for Women' had been effectively blocked within parliament. The Liberal government was really in no position to push through any such measure; it was far

from united on the matter, and Prime Minister Asquith was firmly in the anti-suffragist camp. The subject largely vanished from parliamentary debate during what remained of the pre-war period. It re-surfaced briefly in January 1913 during the debate on the government's Franchise and Registration Bill. 'Insurgence & Women's Suffrage engaging my attention today', wrote Lloyd George to his brother, 'Although I hate the militants one must not allow that to deflect his judgement on a great question of principle.'<sup>48</sup> 'Have no idea what will happen in the voting', he went on a week later, 'except that I think we shall be beaten by a small majority. It is entirely the fault of the militant section'.<sup>49</sup>

In the event, the Speaker of the House of Commons, James Lowther, ruled that the measure could not be amended to include women's suffrage clauses. Claiming betrayal, the WSPU immediately embarked upon another campaign of destruction. Christabel Pankhurst allegedly designed a strategy which included the 'pouring of acids into pillar boxes, the cutting of telegraph wires, and the slashing of pictures in public galleries ... [suffragettes] set fire to empty houses, they destroyed golf courses, they threw bombs at churches'.<sup>50</sup> On 19 February the house which was being built for Lloyd George near the golf course at Walton Heath was blown up, and Mrs Pankhurst immediately claimed responsibility, and, charged with incitement to commit a felony, was in due course sentenced to three months' penal servitude. The Chancellor was also the recipient of regular assassination threats, and Scotland Yard detectives were assigned to shadow him, followers which irked him somewhat when he took a late summer holiday at Marienbad together with Sir Rufus Isaacs. He continued to be a major target for suffragette violence right through until the outbreak of war.

One writer argues that the women's suffrage cause during the immediate pre-war years fell victim to the Chancellor's loss of influence which in turn he attributes to the impact of the Marconi scandal:

At a time when the Government was pressing a Franchise Bill and was split on suffrage, the only man with political force enough to secure the inclusion of suffrage, and prevent the break-up of the Government, was being embarrassed by charges of corruption ... At the very time when his political instincts told him that the Liberals must break out of the sterility of coercion on suffrage, he was a captive of the chief architect of that policy – the Prime Minister ... The Marconi affair is the crucial backcloth to the struggle that, at least in public, went on to amend the Government's Franchise Bill.<sup>51</sup>

But it should also be noted that Lloyd George's freedom of manoeuvre was severely restricted, too, by Asquith's implacable opposition to the cause, and by the fact that his fellow radical *par excellence* within the Cabinet, Winston Churchill, was at best equivocal on women's suffrage. Whatever the reasons, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the failure of the pre-war Liberal governments to enfranchise women was one of the worst blots on their record.

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- 1 *Dictionary of Welsh Biography down to 1940* (London, 1959), p. 234.
- 2 NLW MS 21,790E, f. 352, E. W. Evans to D. Lloyd George, 19 October 1912.
- 3 M. G. Fawcett, *Women's Suffrage* (London and Edinburgh, 1911), p. 69.
- 4 Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain, 1866–1914* (London and Toronto, 1967), pp. 64–65.
- 5 D. Lloyd George, speech at the Albert Hall, 5 December 1908: *The Times*, 7 December 1908.
- 6 NLW, William George Papers 2403, D. Lloyd George to William George, 11 July 1910.
- 7 *Ibid.* 2404, DLG to WG, 13 July 1910.
- 8 National Library of Scotland, Murray of Elibank MSS 8802, f. 308, Lloyd George to Elibank, 5 September 1910.
- 9 *Votes for Women*, 6 October 1911.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *The Times*, 8 November 1911.
- 12 NLW, William George Papers 2524, DLG to WG, 8 November 1911.
- 13 *Votes for Women*, 10 November 1911.
- 14 Trevor Wilson (ed.), *The Political Diaries of C.P. Scott, 1911–1928* (London, 1970), p. 57.

- 15 NLW, William George Papers 2543, DLG to WG, 16 December 1911.
- 16 Cited in Rover, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
- 17 NLW, William George Papers 2561, DLG to WG, 1 March 1912.
- 18 *Ibid.* 2562, DLG to WG, 4 March 1912.
- 19 *Ibid.* 2564, DLG to WG, 5 March 1912.
- 20 *Ibid.* 2565, DLG to WG, 6 March 1912.
- 21 Rover, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
- 22 NLW, William George Papers 2615, DLG to WG, 29 June 1912. The next day he wrote, 'Yesterday's meeting was a very great success. Never saw suffragettes better handled – a little too roughly – but that you cannot help when people are enraged'. (*Ibid.* 2616, DLG to WG, 30 June 1912).
- 23 Lord Riddell, *More Pages from my Diary, 1908–1914* (London, 1934), pp. 81–82, entry for 14 July 1912.
- 24 *Evening Standard*, 22 August 1912.
- 25 See NLW MS 20,431C, DLG to Margaret Lloyd George, 17 and 28 August 1912.
- 26 *North Wales Weekly News*, 13 September 1912.
- 27 *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 6 September 1912; *North Wales Chronicle*, 6 September 1912.
- 28 See *The Times*, 23 September 1912, 6c.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 12 September 1912, 8e, and 21 September 1912, 9a.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 20 September 1912, 5e.
- 31 *South Wales Daily News*, 21 September 1912.
- 32 This account is based on *ibid.*, 23 September 1912, and the *North Wales Weekly News*, 27 September 1912.
- 33 *South Wales Daily News*, 23 September 1912.
- 34 *North Wales Weekly News*, 27 September 1912.
- 35 *North Wales Observer and Express*, 27 September 1912.
- 36 Sylvia Pankhurst, *The suffragette Movement* (London, 1977), p. 392.
- 37 See the *Daily Telegraph*, 23 September 1912, and the *Daily Mirror*, 23 September 1912.
- 38 NLW, Sir John Herbert Lewis Papers B26, diary entry for 21 September 1912.
- 39 NLW, Ellis W. Davies Papers 7, diary entry for 21 September 1912.
- 40 Herbert du Parcq, *Life of David Lloyd George*, Vol. III (London, no date), p. 607.
- 41 Cited in the *South Wales Daily News*, 24 September 1912.
- 42 *Western Mail*, 24 September 1912.
- 43 *South Wales Daily News*, 24 September 1912.
- 44 *Carnarvon and Denbigh Herald*, 27 September 1912.
- 45 *House of Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, Vol. XLII, cc. 1061–62 (15 October 1912).
- 46 *Ibid.* c. 1248 (16 October 1912).
- 47 *Ibid.* cc. 1717–18 (21 October 1912).
- 48 NLW, William George Papers 2674, DLG to William George, 16 January 1913.
- 49 *Ibid.* 2680, DLG to WG, 23 January 1913.
- 50 Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860–1914* (London, 1990), p. 202.
- 51 David Morgan, *Suffragists and Liberals: the Politics of Women Suffrage in England* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 108–09.