

cratic tradition and impose it on the colony. By the time of the Middle-Eastern mandates, which followed the 1914–18 war, the routine was so well established that the British government felt confident in creating several new monarchies out of the ruins of the Turkish Empire. One, in Jordan, still survives.

Contrary to the hesitations of leaders so diverse as Palmerston and Gladstone, Liberals of the next generation, whether as orthodox as Rosebery or as radical as Chamberlain, were enthusiasts for Empire. The Empire did not lack for Liberal pro-consuls or civilisers assuming the ‘white man’s burden’. But even by the time that Lloyd George’s government inherited the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, the sun had begun to set on the British Empire. As it did so, the flaws of the ornamental system became clear and the difficulties inherent in empire for Liberals become explicable.

The weft and warp of ornamentalism were static and rural societies of an essentially Conservative mythology. Ornamentalism did not provide well for the ambitions of modernising urban middle classes, the constituencies from which Liberalism drew its strength in the metropolitan homeland. It was these same constituencies that Macaulay and other civilisers had sought to create in the colonies. Ornamentalism aimed to recreate the idyllic paternalist rural community that was fast decaying in England. As Cannadine puts it, ‘Sir Edward Lutyens noted with pleasure and recognition, going out into “India like Africa” made him feel “very Tory and pre-Tory Feudal”’. Cannadine is not primarily concerned with arguing a party case but the evidence he presents

highlights a fundamental difference between British parties of the left and right on a subject which dominated government for roughly two centuries.

It will come as no surprise to students of British history that Ireland never fully accepted ornamentalism. The full panoply of monarch’s representatives, peerage, decoration and receptions was employed but never won the hearts of the majority. The dispersion of Irish and other rebels that was facilitated by the Empire’s efficient communications had the effect of transferring their dissension into the settler colonies. Moreover, the success of the Irish rebellion of 1916–22 provided both a model for budding nationalist movements in the colonies and a warning to their rulers. The British like to think of the period after the Second World War as not so much the decline of Empire as the growth of Commonwealth, but Cannadine demonstrates that the Empire was not relinquished voluntarily and that the British regularly deserted their collaborators to leave the newly independent states in the hands of the modernisers who had resented ornamentalism and its beneficiaries.

The case presented by Cannadine is a useful response to the views of those who see the British Empire entirely in terms of exploitation by an overbearing racist military caste. He reminds us that the reality is more complex and that the British co-opted as well as exploited, and provided opportunities for some while repressing others. Empire brought benefits to the conquered as well as the conquerors. The book is well written and a pleasure to read but, as the section on the decline of Empire reveals, ornamentalism is only part of

the story, a part that is in danger of being lost but which is neither a complete explanation of British success nor the inevitable flaw in its design. Rather, a co-optive hierarchy was one of the tools by which

a small offshore European nation was able, for a while, to maintain an Empire on which the sun never set.

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‘Parliament has never granted any important reform without being bullied’

Martin Pugh: *The Pankhursts* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2001; 537 pp)

Reviewed by **Sam Crooks**

Early on in this sympathetic but dispassionate biography Martin Pugh remarks that none of the Pankhursts remained long in an organisation that they did not themselves control. Emmeline was the daughter of a well-known Manchester Liberal family; her husband stood twice as a Liberal candidate. She was herself an early member of the Women’s Liberal Federation, but joined the Independent Labour Party only to resign five years later; she died a Conservative candidate.

Her eldest, and favourite, daughter, Christabel, was also a member of the ILP before fighting the 1918 election as a Coupon candidate, adopting Adventism and becoming an apologist for Mussolini. Banished to Australia following a family split, Christabel’s youngest sister Adela had moved across the political spectrum from the communist party to the fascist Australia First by the time of her death. Only Sylvia, a friend and lover of Keir Hardie, remained consistently on the left, rejecting the ILP in favour of a branch of the Communist Party. All four died

in straitened circumstances, dependent on the largesse of others, and only Emmeline in Britain.

Pugh covers the century from Emmeline’s birth in 1858 to Sylvia’s death in 1960. But the heart of his book is concerned with the thirteen years from the foundation of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903 to the report of Speaker Lowther’s conference in 1916 that recommended the granting of votes for women. Originating in 1867 with the National Society for Women’s Suffrage, certain women had already been permitted to vote in local elections, and by 1900 the House of Commons had voted in favour of national reform on a number of occasions. But there were disputes over the exact nature of the female franchise to be granted, and in any case government time was lacking. The WSPU was born of the Pankhursts’ belief that only militancy would force the government’s hand.

The WSPU’s early life was inauspicious – by 1905 it had only thirty members. What was to give it oxygen



was Christabel Pankhurst's realisation that for militancy to succeed it had to be newsworthy. Thus the period from 1906 to 1908 saw a number of WSPU-inspired incidents, including demonstrations, the storming of the House of Commons, and disruption of political meetings. On the one hand this worked – the WSPU's income from fundraising increased ten-fold (by 1909 it was double that of the Labour Party) and the number of its local branches overtook those of the older 'constitutional' suffrage movements.

On the other it significantly alienated the Liberal Party. The Pankhursts ignored the very creditable role of the Women's Liberal Federation which had, for example, named, and refused to canvass for, anti-suffrage candidates. The WSPU underestimated the energy and parliamentary time required to carry other of the new government's reforms such as unemployment benefit and pensions. They concentrated on the need for government legislation in the House of Commons, neglecting the requirement that it also be passed in the Lords, a much more difficult challenge. In meetings they targeted Liberal MPs indiscriminately, regardless of their views. And in by-elections they were prepared to support anti-suffrage Tory candidates over pro-suffrage Liberals.

Pugh describes Asquith's accession to the premiership in 1908 as 'changing everything'. He was to be the WSPU's most stubborn opponent yet, for a mixture of emotional and practical reasons. In particular he was uncertain that any extension of the female franchise would work to the advantage of the Liberal Party – a view shared by Lloyd George who, although sympathetic, believed that it could only be managed alongside an extension of the male franchise. The WSPU responded by stepping up their militancy to include damage to property such as window-breaking and the destruction of mail in letterboxes, initiatives that attracted prison sentences rather than fines. By 1909 the suffragettes were demanding the status of political prisoner and, on it being refused, embarking on hunger strikes.

The consequent adoption of forced feeding resulted in a propaganda triumph for the WSPU, and a tactical retreat by the government. Days after the January 1910 general election Emmeline Pankhurst announced that militancy would cease, to allow the government time to formulate a new approach to women's suffrage in the light of changed political circumstances. Liberal support was given to an all-party private member's initiative, the Conciliation Committee, that was to draft a compromise bill. A couple of months later Churchill, the new Home Secretary, announced that suffragettes would be accorded political prisoner status, thus easing the severe conditions in which they had been held. But the truce was not to last. Although the Conciliation Bill passed the Commons in July with a comfortable majority, the government refused to allow it any more time,

announcing only that they would grant facilities in the next Parliament.

Not to have made a firmer promise than this was undoubtedly a lost opportunity. But Pugh does not blame Asquith alone for the decision. Lloyd George and Churchill also voted against the Conciliation Bill. Although the January 1910 election returned the Liberals to office fairly comfortably in terms of seats it had left the Conservatives with over 46% of the popular vote compared with 51% for Liberals and Labour combined. The Conciliation Bill had proposed a vote for female heads of household and occupiers of property worth £10 annually. This would have helped the Conservatives who were known to benefit from middle-class female financial and organisational support. It would also have permitted wealthy men to endow their spouses with small gifts of property to permit their vote – so enhancing the incidence of plural voting that the Liberals were committed to eradicating.

In the event the Bill was re-presented to Parliament in May 1911 and carried overwhelmingly. Asquith promised a week of government time the following year, sufficient to pass the Bill through all its stages, and 40,000 suffragettes marched through London in celebration. But their joy was to be short-lived. Still convinced that the Bill would aid only the Conservative Party, Lloyd George worked hard to persuade his colleagues that the franchise must be extended to include working-class women without property as well, *and* that it must enfranchise some four million men currently excluded from voting. Thus in November 1911 Asquith

announced that the government would present its own bill in 1912 for a much wider extension of the franchise than originally envisaged. This would both be more democratic and reduce the impact of the property qualification and plural voting. Given that eventual success in the Lords could be guaranteed through the operation of the new Parliament Act there was no reason to compromise on a system based on wealth and privilege.

Pugh is unstinting in his praise for the breadth of this measure and does not hesitate to blame personal pique for the Pankhursts' rejection of it. He surmises that they had invested too much in the Conciliation Bill. A wider measure involving men as well as women would deprive them of the glory associated with a women-only measure. In fairness, the Pankhursts were not alone. However unsure their political touch, they had estimated correctly the sense of betrayal in the suffragette movement as a whole. When militancy was formally resumed a fortnight after Asquith's announcement it was with the acclamation of the whole of the WSPU.

From this point onwards, Pugh links the violence of the suffragettes with the wider problems of 1912 to 1914, particularly with events in Ireland, and with the advent of a new Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna. Government decisions had to have regard to the views of Irish Nationalist MPs. The growth of unionist and nationalist private armies in Ulster had the potential to marginalise the less violent WSPU militancy. And – a telling point – the government was taking no action to prosecute Conservative leaders such as F. E. Smith and Bonar Law, whose language and actions

in the north of Ireland were considerably more seditious than anything ever argued by the suffragettes. McKenna astutely connived at Christabel's self-enforced exile in France (to avoid further imprisonment) and acted to reduce the WSPU's income by threatening prosecution of donors.

The stakes were steadily raised on both sides. The government's new Bill had to be withdrawn for technical reasons early in 1913. WSPU militancy moved into full-scale arson (including an attack on Lloyd George's house) and rudimentary bombs. The government introduced the 'Cat and Mouse' Act which allowed prisoners to be released under licence if hunger striking was endangering their health, and then rearrested when they had recovered. Emmeline Pankhurst was sentenced to three years' penal servitude, a significantly more severe sentence than anything handed down before. Asquith, now under regular police protection, was taunted in the House of Commons: 'You will go down in history as the man who tortured innocent women. You should be driven from public life.'

Martin Pugh believes that these levels of militancy eventually became self-defeating. He demonstrates the fall in WSPU membership and income in the last years before the First World War. He also traces the mounting criticism of the Pankhursts from within the movement. Christabel, in Paris, was seen as too remote and unable to compromise. With her mother she expelled Sylvia and Adela, which was seen as indicative of their autocratic methods. There were concerns about the use of WSPU funds for their personal needs. And many members were simply worn

out by the endless round of arrest, prison, hunger strike and forced feeding. When McKenna offered the opportunity of absolute release in exchange for a promise of good behaviour it was widely, if discreetly, accepted. By 1914 Asquith was also sounding more conciliatory, aware of the need to hold a general election before the end of 1915 and anxious not to be outflanked by Labour and Conservative commitments to women's suffrage.

This was the state of affairs when war broke out. The government offered an immediate 'truce' which the WSPU – by now aware of its possible disintegration – were pleased to accept without loss of face. Emmeline and Christabel joined the war effort to promote industrial peace, and Sylvia to alleviate suffering in the East End of London. Meanwhile the recommendations of a Speaker's Conference at the end of 1916 enfranchised all men over the age of twenty-one and all women over thirty, subject to conditions including residence, possession of a local government vote or marriage to a local government voter. At a stroke 8.4 million women were enfranchised. In the Commons MPs voted through the changes by a majority of 330. In the Lords Curzon recommended that the Conservative peers abstain, thus assuring the Bill's passage before the election that would follow the war.

By then however the WSPU had been dissolved. Emmeline and Christabel had formed a new Women's Party as a vehicle for the latter's Parliamentary ambitions as a Coupon candidate in 1918. But the Pankhursts' hour of glory was over. Christabel was defeated and

although as individuals their actions were to command headlines for years to come they would never again aspire to their prewar effectiveness nor to so compelling a cause.

The Pankhursts left few records but Martin Pugh's meticulous research has painted a more rounded picture of the family than have previous biographers, including a greater awareness of Adela's role prior to her departure for Australia. He has addressed sensitively issues such as the relationship of WSPU members to women's movements more generally, and the nature of the very close friendships, sometimes physical, between a number of the leading protagonists. He portrays convincingly the intensity with which the Pankhursts pursued their various causes even to each other's detriment. Disappointingly, however, he does not attempt to analyse the extent to which the suffragettes *per se* achieved the vote for women, or whether this

would have been achieved in any case through constitutional means. The Liberal Party does not come out well from his story. He understands the party political considerations that so influenced Lloyd George but criticises Asquith's failure of leadership when it was needed and his preparedness to connive at measures that were basically illiberal.

Pugh has not been well-served by his editors. There is some repetition of events as he moves from sister to sister. Minor characters enter and leave the narrative without explanation. And the index is not worthy of a serious publisher. But this is not to detract from a fine biography of a dysfunctional family which, whatever its faults, succeeded in keeping women's suffrage on the agenda of a government that had chosen to follow other priorities.

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A writer and pragmatist at the Liberal High Table

John Powell (ed.): *Liberal by Principle: The Politics of John Wodehouse, 1st Earl of Kimberley, 1843–1902* (The Historians Press, 1996; 323 pp.)

Reviewed by **David Cloke**

Perhaps the first thought that springs to mind on reading the title of this book is 'Who and why?' Although an earlier book on Kimberley has been reviewed in these pages (*Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 23: Summer 1999) his is not a name normally associated with the great Liberal figures

of the second half of the nineteenth century. It is fair to say, however, that Powell largely succeeds in tackling these initially rather sceptical thoughts.

Whilst it is unclear from the title, this is not a biography of Kimberley. It is a collection of 274 documents including 251 letters (both from and to Kimberley),