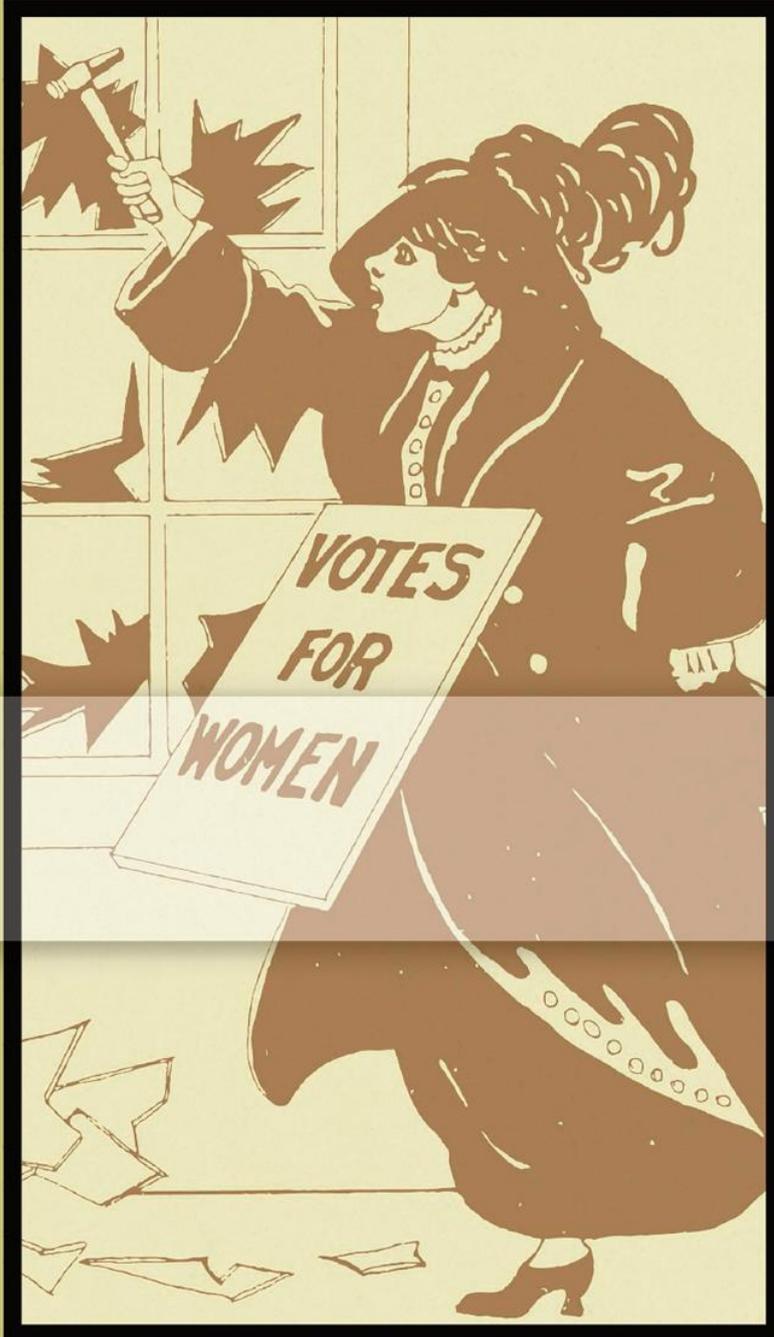


# HOW WOMEN WON THE VOTE



THE IRISH TIMES



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## The Long Road to Equality

Women's empowerment will progress only through their involvement in political processes and in shaping constitutions that guarantee the equal rights of all citizens.

*Mary Robinson*

“I didn't wash my finger for two days, purposely avoiding the water just so that the blue stain I received when voting remained there for as long as possible” – Alaa Murabit, co-founder of the Voice of Libyan Women

When I read Alaa Murabit's account of voting for the first time in Libya some weeks ago, I wondered if her experience was similar to that of the Irish women active in the campaign for female suffrage one hundred years ago. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and the other Irish campaigners followed in the footsteps of Anna Haslam and the 19th-century activists, and would themselves provide inspiration for later campaigns, including the women's movement of the 1970s with which I was involved.

Their campaign for female suffrage was intertwined with, and reflective of, the tensions, struggles and successes of the various political movements of the period: nationalism and unionism, Home Rule and the struggle for independence, socialism and labour. It would provide the foundations for the realisation of many of the political, social and economic rights attained by Irish women over the past century.

I began my journey as President in 1990 in the hope that women who had felt themselves outside of history would be written back into history – in the words of Eavan Boland, “finding a voice where they found a vision”.

“His” story has become “our” story as a generation of Irish feminist historians discovered that missing voice. This publication will bring to life the Irish struggle for female suffrage and underscore the scale of the challenge faced by feminist leaders in their efforts to secure for women the right to vote.

Irish women face many challenges today, but by examining our experiences in an international context, you get a sense of how far we have come since the 1970s. The challenges faced by women internationally will be very familiar to an Irish audience. They relate to political empowerment, health and reproductive rights, economic opportunities and educational attainment.

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index ranks 135 nations according to progress made in each of these four areas. The 2011 report concludes that no country in the world has achieved gender equality and that women remain well behind men in two crucial areas: political equality and economic power.

Less than one-in-five parliamentarians in the world today are women and yet all of the evidence suggests that countries experience higher standards of living when women are empowered as political leaders. Positive developments can be seen in education,

infrastructure and health, and concrete steps are taken to make democracy more effective. Traditional barriers to political participation – lack of adequate financial resources, disproportionate family obligations and lack of confidence in a predominantly male culture – continue to deter or defeat women candidates.

The promise of the Arab Spring has yet to materialise for Arab women although they emerged as key civic leaders in its initiation. Women in the region are battling for fundamental human rights in a political landscape that is frequently hostile to women's rights and participation. The stereotypical view of the invisible Arab woman was shattered by images of women standing side by side with men in protests in Yemen, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. However, women's empowerment can only be progressed by their involvement in political processes and in the shaping of new constitutions that guarantee the rights of all citizens equally. Increased violence against women in many of the region's cities threatens to undermine fragile gains made in the past year. Egypt's Tahrir Square, symbol of change a year ago, has become a place where women are singled out for sexual harassment.

For Alaa Murabit, founder of a Libyan women's NGO, the desire to make Libya a place Libyans can be proud of is slowly disappearing "in the midst of corruption, lawlessness and a lack of ownership over decisions made in a post-revolution Libya". But Alaa believes that the citizens of Libya will defend the democracy for which they fought and ensure that their opinions are heard. Challenging the patriarchal norms that have dominated these societies and restricted women's political participation will take time; these were not revolutions for gender equality. Women across the region need and deserve our solidarity and support in their pursuit of human dignity.

In an address to the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation Summit last year, Hillary Clinton said that "barriers and restrictions, some formal, some informal, erode women's abilities to participate fully in their economies and to support their families whether as employees or entrepreneurs". The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index stated that one of the most persistent gender gaps is unequal access to economic opportunities. In the developing world women bear the overwhelming burden of extreme poverty and deprivation, accounting for 70 per cent of the world's poorest.

There are deep-seated gender differences in time use, rights of ownership and control over land and assets, access to productive assets and credit, and access to training and education. As Secretary Clinton stated: "When everyone has a chance to participate in the economic life of a nation, we can all be richer."

The motto of The Irish Citizen newspaper, published by the Irish Women's Franchise League from 1912 to 1920, encapsulates not only the ideals of the campaign for female suffrage in Ireland but the longing of women the world over to be equal and active citizens in their societies: "For men and women equally the rights of citizenship; from men and women equally the duties of citizenship."

Grassroots women's organisations are emerging in countries across the world as women recognise the potential of co-ordinated action to bring about change, and the need to fill the

vacuum left by political leaders who have failed in their duty to protect and defend the rights of men and women equally.

In awarding the Nobel Peace Prize for 2011 to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkul Karman, the Norwegian Nobel Committee expressed the hope that it would help to bring an end to the suppression of women that still occurs in many countries, and to realise the great potential for democracy and peace that women can represent.

Inspired by the recognition of three powerful women leaders, the struggle to unleash the full strength of that potential continues apace. Irish women's organisations will continue to address the needs of Irish women but they must also look to champion the rights of women beyond our borders who are disempowered and oppressed, and support the courageous leadership of women such as Alaa Murabit who have such barriers to cross.

## Women's work

Women often wielded authority at home 100 years ago, but as public figures in professions such as teaching and nursing they were becoming much more common.

*Caitriona Clear*

In 1905, Mary Ann Kelly persuaded her adoring husband to sell his Kilkenny farm and buy her a drapery shop in Rathangan, Co Kildare. She was not unusual in her aspiration. The number of women drapers in their own right (not the wives of male drapers) rose by 40 per cent between 1891 and 1911.

More Irish girls and women than ever before, of all social classes, were leaving home regularly to take part in some kind of public life – work, schooling, buying and selling, activism and entertainment. Trades of all kinds struggled against the ready-made goods in shops, but female dressmakers and milliners (often working for and in drapery shops) held their own, as demand for reasonably priced, fashionable women's clothes soared.

While factory workers and servants saved their finery for their time off, teachers, nurses, secretaries, clerks in offices, telegraphists and telephonists needed to look presentable all day, every day. Their numbers rose dramatically in the quarter-century before the first World War.

National school teaching was the great career opportunity for girls from skilled working-class and small-farming backgrounds in Ireland. On-the-job training was sometimes paid, and scholarships increasingly available, so the burden on low-income parents was bearable. The first female president of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (1912-14) was Catherine Mahon from Birr; her parents were domestic servants. (National teaching was a lifelong job; the marriage bar was only introduced in 1933 for those qualifying on or after that date.)

Nursing was another lifelong career opportunity; a trained nurse could work in a hospital or on a private basis in the community, or for the Poor Law Union or Lady Dudley or Jubilee nursing associations. Women in jobs like these were the backbone of the cultural, political and social organisations that sprang up all over the country from the 1890s.

Annie MP Smithson, who took part in revolutionary nationalism and later became a prominent trade unionist and popular novelist, was a community nurse in the first two decades of the 20th century. Women from Jacobs Mills took part in the 1916 Rising, and factory workers on the island as a whole were also active in "war work" in 1914-18, nationalist organisations and Ulster unionism. In Dublin, Limerick and Cork they attended Irish classes and took part in amateur dramatics.

Women's factory work was mostly concentrated in the spinning mills and weaving and shirt factories of Belfast and Derry, which employed tens of thousands of women. Textiles also employed Munster women, though on a much smaller scale; the main factory employment of women outside Ulster was food processing of various kinds – biscuit-making, confectionery, jam-making and butter-blending. Meanwhile, "monster houses" (department stores) in cities and towns hired attractive and well-spoken young women as sales assistants. They usually

lived-in, in dangerously cramped dormitories, and were on their feet for 12-hour days with only short breaks – but considered their jobs more desirable than domestic service.

Desirable or not, domestic service occupied 30 per cent of the Irish female workforce on the eve of the first World War. Always the default occupation for girls whose parents could not afford to put them to a trade, service could be a good or a bad job, depending on the employer's sense of responsibility and the servant's ability to learn on the job and "better herself". Unless they were especially skilled (eg as a cook or a ladies' maid), women did not usually remain in service beyond their late 20s.

Having room and board enabled a servant to save for marriage to a sweetheart at home or to one of the tradesmen she had ample opportunity for meeting in town. The great advantage domestic service had over factory and shop work was that the servant could pace herself and work unsupervised; the downside was that she was always on call. But servants were not cut off from the spirit of the age, and employers' complaints indicate that by 1911 they were becoming more insistent on their time off. Many rural domestic servants bought bicycles on hire purchase, shortening the distance to friends, dances and home. Most adult women carried out daily life-maintenance of cleaning, cooking, organising and foraging, usually alongside looking after the young, old and sick.

Most dwellings in town and country, even the modern local authority "cottages" built from the 1880s onwards, lacked piped water (not to mind gas/electricity), which made this work unimaginably hard. Many of these women were the wives of farmers, shopkeepers and artisans, and often worked the farm or business with their husbands. Farmers' wives moved increasingly into poultry-rearing towards the end of the 19th century and the money they made was theirs to dispose of, giving them a degree of economic independence unknown to many urban women. Also, female farmers in their own right made up 14.7 per cent of all farmers in 1911. Some were single, but most were widows living with married offspring and their families. The fact they were referred to as heads of households, if only on the census form, indicates the authority that went with the title "farmer" was not necessarily masculine.

Females often wielded formidable authority in the home, but females as figures of public authority – the national teacher, the community nurse – were also becoming commonplace at this time. Most authoritative of all were the thousands of nuns working as teachers, nurses, outreach workers and administrators. Often representing state as well as church authority, they set a powerful example of a path that diverged from marriage and motherhood, and normalised spinsterhood as a way of life.

And what about Mary Ann Kelly? Her drapery business thrived, with plenty of custom from farmers' wives in Rathangan's prosperous hinterland. However, her husband, left in charge of the money, spent most of it on the Curragh racecourse. One of their many children was the novelist Maura Laverty (1907-1966), who wrote about the sharp-tongued mother she feared and respected and the gentle, idle father she loved. Mary Ann's story is an example of how women's working lives, whether married or single, were hedged around by family concerns and constraints.

## How the other half lived - life for poor women in Dublin in 1911

*Catriona Crowe*

The slums of Dublin were worse than those in London, Glasgow or Birmingham, with mortality rates per 1,000 of 22.3, compared to 15.6 in London.

Women bore the brunt of poor housing conditions, having to cook over open fires, fetch and carry water from distant taps, often up several flights of stairs, organise space so as to provide minimum levels of privacy, and try to keep draughty rooms with high, albeit ornate, ceilings warm in winter.

Buckingham Street in the north inner city is a good example of a typical tenement street. The 1911 census returns tell us that 16 houses contained 1,273 people, and 107 households, most of them living in single rooms. Thirteen of these households were headed by women, either single or widowed. Number 13 provides a good representative sample: eight households, all single rooms, except one which is two-roomed, 49 people. Occupancy of the single rooms ranges from three to nine people, with 10 in the two-roomed dwelling.

Margaret Hayden (39), shares a room with her unemployed husband, Edward (41) and their three sons aged 13, nine and four. She has been married for 16 years and not lost any children. They are Catholic. The spacing between the children indicates possible miscarriages. Rebecca Brennan (55) shares a room with her husband, Thomas (54) who is a house painter, and their son, Frank, a barber. She's been married for 20 years and had one child. The family is Church of Ireland, bearing out Sean O'Casey's portrayal of the tenements as a mixed religious environment, most memorably in the character of Bessie Burgess.

Margaret Furlong (28) lives with her husband William (31), a dock labourer, and their eight-year-old son, Christopher. There is also a Mary Furlong, aged eight, entered as a boarder, but the enumerator has scored through her name and written "put down in error" – possibly Christopher's twin sister, who may have died, as Margaret has lost one of her three children. Where is the other one? The family is Catholic.

Mary Kavanagh (39) shares two rooms with her husband Joseph (40) who is a general labourer, his brother Henry (42) who is a grocer's porter, and seven children, ranging in age from two to 17. Her two eldest sons, Patrick and John, 17 and 15, have jobs as messengers, which means four incomes are coming into the household. Unusually, Mary describes herself as a housekeeper; most women looking after households leave the 'occupation' box blank, despite working from dawn to dusk. The family is Catholic.

Lucy McNamara (30) lives in one room with her husband, Thomas (38), with five of their seven surviving children (she gave birth to nine), ranging in age from 12 days to 12 years. Poignantly, the names of the dead children, Bernard and Josephine, and their ages at death, five and seven months respectively, are entered on the census form, but scored through by the enumerator with the comment "error: dead". Poor Lucy obviously wanted to remember her

lost children on an official document. Thomas is described as a labouring man. He is illiterate. The family is Catholic.

Marjorie Dixon (48) shares one room with her husband, George (53), a bricklayer, and their five children, ranging in age from 10 to 24. One son is a bricklayer also, and two of the girls are laundresses. There is also a “nurse child”, Thomas Power, living with the family, possibly a relative. Marjorie’s child mortality levels are utterly shocking. Married for 28 years, she gave birth to 13 children, of whom only six survived. The family is Catholic.

Maryann Bishop (32) shares one room with her husband, Henry (46), a labourer, and their two daughters, aged 12 and one. Maryann is Henry’s second wife; they have only been married for two years. Many poor women died in childbirth, and their husbands needed to marry again to provide mothers for their children and keep them out of orphanages and industrial schools. The family is Catholic.

This quick snapshot of one street in Dublin gives an idea of what life was like for poor women and their families in Dublin in 1911. Child mortality and overcrowded accommodation challenge our modern ideas about emotional attachment to children, the need for privacy and personal space, and hygiene practices. Women were the main ones holding families together in these highly adverse circumstances.

## A history of her story

The Irish women's movement was created by unionists and nationalists, Home Rulers and republicans, liberals and socialists, Protestants, Catholics, and women of no religion. They deserve a place in the history books.

*Mary Cullen*

'Every person, without distinction of sex . . . shall enjoy the privileges and be subject to the obligations of such citizenship,' reads Article 3 of the 1922 Constitution of the Irish Free State.

This came after more than 50 years campaigning to win recognition as citizens for more than half the population. The first wave of the international women's movement began around 1840. It was not the first time women asserted that the roles allocated to them by society prevented their development as full human beings.

What was new was that in most countries in the western world groups of women organised to challenge laws, regulations and customs. The context was the economic and intellectual developments of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. With the industrial revolution and the expansion of manufacturing, commerce and finance, the middle classes grew in numbers and wealth. This had different results for women and men. Workplace and family home were increasingly separated as many middle-class families moved into the new suburbs. Middle-class women were increasingly confined to the domestic or "private" sphere, even as middle-class men were moving into political office and power.

At the same time Enlightenment thinking's emphasis on the power of human reason encouraged ideas of democracy and the equality of all human beings. Few male thinkers extended equality to females, but some women did and used it to support claims that women were human persons with the right and duty to develop individual potential and contribute to shaping society.

Laws and customs differed from country to country but gender relationships were similar enough for activists to see themselves as part of an international movement. In Ireland women shared the same general civil and political disabilities as other women in the UK. Under the common law a married woman's civil identity merged with that of her husband; she could not sue or be sued without his being joined in the action; he was the sole guardian of their children; her inherited or earned property came under his control to use or dispose of as he wished; if she left him his duty to support her ended.

In education, access to universities and degrees was confined to men, and thus entrance to the higher professions. Sexual double-standards pervaded laws and social attitudes. Voting in parliamentary elections, sitting in the House of Commons, and holding government office were confined to men.

Legislative change had to come from the UK parliament, so feminist co-operation was natural, and on some issues action in Ireland followed an English lead. The leading Irish

activists were middle-class, unionist in politics and Protestant in religion, with Quakers particularly prominent. To many Irish nationalists feminism appeared an English import. Politically active nationalist women, Catholic and Protestant, were involved in campaigns from Catholic emancipation right through to Home Rule and the Ladies Land League.

In Ireland there was organised feminist action on four main issues: married women's property, education, repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and the parliamentary vote. The issues interacted. Married women's property law restricted the autonomy of women of every social class. In conjunction with exclusion from the universities and professions it encouraged middle-class girls' education towards accomplishments leading to advantageous marriage rather than intellectual development and economic independence.

This kind of education restricted the development of women's potential, and would lessen their ability to use the vote to advance the common good. Feminists believed women would bring into political decision-making the values society associated with females, caring and nurturing. The vote was itself a civil right and exercising it would further women's self-development.

In 1875 Isabella Tod, a Presbyterian in Belfast and a leading figure in all the campaigns, summarised the feminist case. Women were "citizens of the state, inheritors with men of all the history which enobles a nation, guardians with men of all the best life of the nation; bound as much as men are bound to consider the good of the whole; and justified as much as men are justified in sharing the good of the whole".

Actions included setting up committees and associations, educating public opinion by letters to the newspapers and drawing room and public meetings, organising petitions to parliament, lobbying MPs to introduce and support legislation that promoted women's rights.

On the issue of married women's property, action in Ireland was essentially part of an English-led campaign. Committees were formed in Dublin and Belfast; petitions organised and MPs lobbied. Tod, the only female witness to a select committee of the House of Commons in 1868, explained that Irish feminists' main concern was for poorer married women who took employment to support their families. The law left their earnings completely at the mercy of their husbands. In 1870 the first of a series of acts giving married women gradually increasing degrees of control of their property was passed.

The Contagious Diseases Acts were passed in the 1860s to protect the sexual health of the army and navy. In designated areas – in Ireland the Curragh, Cork, and Queenstown – a woman suspected of being a prostitute could be sent for compulsory medical examination and, if suffering from venereal disease, for compulsory treatment, before returning to work. Feminists opposed the double standards that targeted the women but not the men. Here too action in Ireland was part of an English-led campaign. The issue was challenging as respectable women were not supposed to know much about sex or prostitution, still less make public speeches about them. But they did and eventually the acts were repealed in 1886.

Action regarding education and the vote developed in the context of political developments in Ireland. High schools and colleges for girls and women to provide higher standards and better teachers were established. These included the Ladies Collegiate School, later Victoria College, in Belfast in 1859, and Alexandra College in Dublin in 1866.

Irish feminists made major breakthroughs by successful lobbying to have the provisions of the 1878 Intermediate Education Act and the 1879 University Act extended to girls and women. The first opened the Intermediate Education Board's public examinations to girls' schools as well as boys', encouraging higher standards and a wider range of subjects. The second gave women access to degrees in the new Royal University, an examining and degree-awarding body that did not require attendance at specified institutions. By 1908 courses and degrees in all Irish universities were open to women.

Action on the parliamentary vote began in the 1860s. Isabella Tod founded the North of Ireland Women's Suffrage Society in 1872-3, and Anna and Thomas Haslam the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association (DWSA) in 1876.

Suffragists aimed at having amendments added to legislation extending the vote to widening categories of men, or at legislation solely for women's suffrage. In 1896, in the area of local government, Irish women won eligibility for election as Poor Law Guardians, and under the 1898 Local Government Act they gained the vote for all the new councils and eligibility for election to all except county and borough councils. To build on these achievements the DWSA changed its name to The Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (IWSLGA). The parliamentary vote remained elusive, and became the central feminist campaign in the early 20th century.

By this time the international suffrage movement was growing and becoming more assertive. Some suffragists, frustrated by the failure of constitutional methods, turned to civil disobedience, and some finally to physical violence. "Suffragettes" was the name given to the militants.

In Ireland more nationalist and Catholic women became active feminists. They were themselves increasingly active in the political and cultural revival, and had benefited from the pioneers' achievements. As Home Rule became a likely eventuality, suffrage interacted with the growing tension between nationalism and unionism. Some suffragists were unionist in sympathy and some nationalist. New organisations appeared, most strictly constitutional in method. Nationalist feminists faced the question: "Nation first or suffrage first." Should they campaign for UK suffrage legislation or put suffrage on hold until Home Rule was achieved, relying on Irish men to then give women the vote?

The largest groups included the long-established IWSLGA, non-party and constitutional, and the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), founded in 1908 by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Margaret Cousins, nationalist in sympathy and prepared to be militant. Its newspaper *The Irish Citizen* (1912-20) became a forum for feminist thinking. Its motto echoed the aims expressed by Isabella Tod 40 years earlier: "For men and women equally the rights of citizenship; from men and women equally the duties of citizenship."

In its pages the same holistic view of feminist aims continued; personal development linked to the belief that women would use the vote to help create a fairer, more caring society, and a general opposition to war as a solution to disputes. A strong pacifist strand included opposition to any use of physical force, and opposition with exceptions in the case of a just war or a just rebellion.

When the Home Rule Bill was introduced in parliament in 1912 both nationalist and unionist suffragists wanted any future Irish parliament to include votes for women. The Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) was lobbied to introduce a suffrage amendment to the bill. Individual members of the IPP had generally supported women's rights, but now John Redmond, afraid of jeopardising Home Rule, and himself anti-suffrage, refused and also prevented IPP support for a limited suffrage bill. The IWFL responded by breaking windows in Government Buildings.

Suffragette militancy in Ulster reached higher levels of violence during 1913 and 1914. In the north most suffragists supported unionist opposition to any imposition of Home Rule on Ulster. Angered by Redmond, they were further enraged when Sir Edward Carson reneged on an undertaking to include women's suffrage in a provisional Ulster Unionist government.

Feminism and suffrage also interacted with the Labour movement. Many young nationalist feminists were socialists. The Irish Women Workers' Union (IWWU) was founded in 1911 under the auspices of the ITGWU with feminist support, and during the 1913 Lockout nationalist feminists were actively involved in aid for the workers and their families. While 19th-century feminists believed middle-class women had a responsibility to help and lead their poorer sisters, now middle-class socialists argued that working-class women should lead themselves and decide their own priorities.

In 1914 the first World War made suffrage campaigning difficult. Unionist suffragists tended to suspend activity and engage in war work, hoping to strengthen the claim for the vote. In 1916, the close links between nationalist feminists and the leadership of the Easter Rising led to the Proclamation endorsing women's citizenship. The Republic claimed "the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman" and guaranteed "religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens". This became nationalist feminists' strongest argument in support of women's full citizenship.

As Sinn Féin grew after 1916 as the republican party it became clear that the new leadership was not committed to gender equality. Nation First and Suffrage First feminists joined forces to press for representation of women on all republican bodies.

In 1918 UK legislation gave partial suffrage, to women over 30 with a property qualification, and eligibility for election as MPs. In the December general election Constance Markievicz, as a Sinn Féin candidate, was the only woman elected to the Westminster parliament. But nationalist feminists believed that Sinn Féin men had been less than enthusiastic in promoting women candidates. "eaction has not died out with the Irish Party," commented The Irish Citizen.

The Sinn Féin elected members assembled in Dublin in January 1919, established Dáil Éireann and declared a Republic. The War of Independence from 1919-21 made suffrage campaigning impossible. But Cumann na mBan played a more active role than was possible in 1916 and the value of its contribution was recognised by male leaders. Nationalist feminists used this along with the 1916 Proclamation to insist that women's citizenship be included when a final settlement was reached.

Before the war ended the 1920 Government of Ireland Act had partitioned Ireland. In 1921 a truce was followed by negotiations, the Treaty and divisions over the Treaty. Republican feminists took opposing sides on the Treaty itself and during the Civil War that followed.

During 1922 the Constitution of the Irish Free State was drawn up. Continued feminist pressure succeeded and the Constitution gave the vote and full citizenship to all men and women over 21. Women in Northern Ireland achieved full suffrage in 1928.

However, in the Free State citizenship had been achieved in circumstances of revolution and war and did not reflect a consensus among male nationalists. This became clear during the 1920s and 1930s as first Cumann na nGaedheal, and then Fianna Fáil, governments passed legislation clawing back various elements of that citizenship.

Feminist organisations sidelined during the war years were back in action and resistance continued right up to the emergence of the second wave of the women's movement in Ireland around 1970.

At the same time feminists continued and developed their long-standing commitments to improving female education, employment opportunities and conditions, and to combating sexual double standards. They also took on the new challenge of actively promoting women's participation in politics and decision-making.

To sum up, the Irish women's movement was created by unionists and nationalists, Home Rulers and republicans, liberals and socialists, Protestants of many denominations, Catholics and women of no religion. It is an integral part of human history and Irish history, addressing basic questions of what it means to be an autonomous human being. How history is written matters to everyone. Historians aim to identify significant patterns of continuity and change in the past and interpret them for the present. History tells us how we got to where we are now, providing the base from which we make decisions about where we go from here.

For both boys and girls, women and men, knowledge of the women's movement, the gender relations that gave rise to it, its achievements and its failures, is important for understanding their past and for understanding themselves today. For most people, history is what is in the history books, and what is not there has not happened. We now have an impressive body of published research on the Irish women's movement. Already some survey histories of Ireland are including aspects of this. The challenge to all of us is to develop our understanding of the movement itself and to achieve its full incorporation into "mainstream" history.

## **Anna Haslam (1829-1922)**

*Carmel Quinlan*

Anna Haslam was born in Youghal, the 16th of 17 children of Jane and Abraham Fisher. The Fishers, Quaker merchants with extensive business interests in Youghal, were noted for charitable works, particularly during the Great Famine.

Anna was educated in Newtown School, Waterford and Castlegate, York. She was assistant teacher in Ackworth School, Yorkshire, where she met Thomas Haslam, a Quaker from Mountmellick. They married in 1854 in Cork Registry Office and lived together happily until his death in 1917. When Thomas became unable to work due to illness she established a stationery and toy business at their Rathmines home to support them both.

Anna's feminism was rooted in Enlightenment ideas of individual natural rights. She said her belief in women's equality came to her naturally and that it had always been taken for granted in her Quaker household. She espoused multiple causes: anti-slavery, married women's property reform, equal rights for women in education and employment, the repeal of the discriminatory Contagious Diseases Acts, and women's franchise.

A clear thinker and organiser with considerable administrative skills, her capacity for hard work was legendary. "To circularise every Irish member or to write 30 or 40 letters to prominent public men in her own hand was mere child's play."

She was held in great affection by all, even those who disagreed with her. A staunch unionist all her life, she believed that women would fare better under Westminster rule. She died in November 1922 and is buried beside Thomas in the Quaker burial ground in Temple Hill, Dublin.

## Read all about it: writing wrongs

Research on Irish feminism often concentrates on the pursuit of votes, but there were other issues and many debates within the movement which can be better understood by reading its 'Irish Citizen' newspaper.

*Louise Ryan*

Some young women grew frustrated with the slow progress of suffrage agitation in Ireland after many decades of constitutional lobbying led by the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association. Influenced by the militant strategies of the British Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), two university graduates, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Margaret Cousins set up a new suffrage group in Dublin in 1908. Named the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) it was impatient for change and ready to challenge social conventions. Although women-only, men could be associate members and two of the early male recruits were the husbands of the founding members – Francis Sheehy Skeffington and James Cousins.

Aiming to win the vote for women, on the same terms as men, the IWFL, whose leaders were nationalist in their political sympathies, vociferously lobbied to have female enfranchisement included in the Home Rule Bill. Although the IWFL described itself as militant, members did not engage in militant activity during its early years. It was frustration caused by the failure of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) to support votes for women in the Home Rule Bill of 1912 that finally sparked the outbreak of militant agitation in Ireland.

The opposition to female enfranchisement by the IPP and its leader John Redmond had a wider political cause. The IPP had forged an alliance in the British parliament with the ruling Liberal Party under prime minister Herbert Asquith. It was feared that if women were given the vote, Asquith, a vehement opponent of women's suffrage, would resign. In any ensuing general election it was thought the Conservative Party would sweep to power, thus delaying any chance of Home Rule. This gave the IPP a vested interest in supporting the Liberal government and keeping Asquith in power.

The IWFL decided that militant action was the only way to get the attention of the Irish Party and the British government. On June 13th 1912 eight women were arrested for throwing stones at Government Buildings in Dublin. When Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, Marguerite Palmer, and sisters Jane and Margaret Murphy, came to trial, 200 women, including the other arrested suffragettes, Kathleen Houston, Marjorie Hasler, Maud Lloyd and Hilda Webb, packed the court room. The women were each sentenced to either a fine or two months' imprisonment. All refused to pay and opted for prison, where they were soon followed by the other four.

However, the IWFL never achieved the levels of militancy associated with the Pankhursts and the WSPU in Britain. Not only were Irish women involved in less militancy, but the nature of their actions was usually milder than those of the British suffragettes. IWFL tactics rarely involved more than heckling politicians or breaking windows in government offices.

The vast majority of Irish suffragists were constitutional, opposing any form of militancy. Unlike the British movement, Irish suffragism was not polarised by a militant versus non-militant divide.

Research on suffrage activism has focused largely on the pursuit of the vote. Thus the movement may be misunderstood as a single-issue pressure group. We need to go beyond a focus on enfranchisement to uncover the complexity of identities, actions and motivations behind the suffrage movement.

The study of historical movements often fails to uncover their true dynamism, the lively discussions and debates underpinning their activism. One way of analysing and assessing such debates and the breadth of activity and campaigns undertaken by suffragists is through their newspaper, the Irish Citizen, published between 1912-1920. While edited for much of its life by Francis and later Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, the paper was not simply a mouthpiece for the IWFL.

Though a paper cannot give voice to all divergent views within the movement, with only the most literate and articulate being likely to be included, it is remarkable how many suffragists were represented in the pages of the Irish Citizen over its eight years.

In addition to the invaluable letters pages and “activities notice board”, which provide an insight into the views and activities of all suffrage groups, regular articles were penned by men and women representing a broad spectrum of groups, local branches and supporters.

On Saturday June 8th, 1912, the Irish Citizen editorial outlined its aims: “(a) to form a means of communication between Irish Suffrage Societies and their members, (b) to provide a reliable source of publicity for suffrage activities in Ireland, (c) to provide a means of cheap and effective propaganda.” To achieve these ends the editors requested that, “(a) all responsible officers of societies will send reports of meetings and notices of forthcoming events, (b) all suffragists should induce newsagents to display copies and posters, (c) those who have the power of expression will send us articles, notes and letters.”

Many contributors to the Irish Citizen described themselves as feminists and analysed the relationship between suffrage and feminism:

*“What is called the Votes for Women movement is but a side issue of a much greater and more far-reaching problem. It is true that the Votes for Women movement is the chief manifestation of feminism in these countries; but though public attention has been particularly focused on this one phase of feminism, the girl who first defied conventions by riding a bicycle . . . the poorest and meanest woman anywhere who is revolting against the conditions of her life and longing for a chance to relieve its monotony – all these are part and parcel of the great uprising amongst women.”*

(Margaret Connery, the Irish Citizen December 28th, 1912)

As part of its feminist agenda the Irish Citizen discussed a wide range of issues affecting women and girls. Socialist voices argued that working-class women needed trade unions, better working conditions and to lead themselves and decide their own priorities.

Contributors such as Mrs Priestly McCracken and Marion Duggan regularly wrote articles on the incidence of domestic violence and sexual assaults in Irish society. They argued that the legal profession and the judiciary did not take such offences seriously. The fact that women were barred from practising as lawyers or sitting on juries (until 1919) resulted in male-dominated institutions. Mistrust of the legal system led a number of suffragists to set up a Courts Watch committee to monitor court cases involving girls and women, and their reports appeared regularly in the Irish Citizen. However, the women's presence in court, especially in cases involving "indecent", was not always welcomed. Attempts to eject "ladies" from some Dublin courts prompted the Irish Citizen to ask:

*"When will men realise that women are part of the public, that they are fully entitled to be present at all cases open to the public?"*

(June 19th, 1915)

The articles and letters dealing with domestic violence and sexual assault reveal a hidden aspect of Irish society in the early 20th century, and also provide an insight into the diversity of issues taken up by Irish suffragists.

This was far more than just a "votes for women" movement. Critiques of legal institutions, and the male-defined morality underpinning them, reveal sophisticated feminist analysis of gender power dynamics. The Irish Citizen provides an insight into the courage and audacity of these pioneering feminists who challenged social conventions and powerful institutions in early 20th-century Ireland.

## Margaret Cousins (1878-1954)

*Therese Moriarty*

Margaret (Gretta) Cousins, theosophist and feminist, was born Margaret Gillespie, daughter of a law clerk, in Boyle, Co Roscommon, and lived out her commitments on two continents.

She took a music degree in Dublin in 1902, marrying James Cousins in 1903. She worked as a part-time music teacher, and joined him as a vegetarian, theosophist and medium, among Dublin's literary circles. This activism led her to a women's suffrage conference in Manchester. Back home, she joined the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association in 1906.

In 1908, with Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, she founded the Irish Women's Franchise League, and became its leading speaker. She served two one-month prison terms, in England in 1910, and in Tullamore in 1913, for breaking windows in Government Buildings. War and the winding down of suffrage campaigns probably encouraged Margaret and James Cousins to move to India in 1915, living in Madras (now Chennai) among theosophical communities. She brought Irish experience to Indian women's campaigns for political and social freedom. She founded the Women's Indian Association in 1917, editing its monthly journal. Their campaign developed into demands for women's education and against child marriage, leading to the All-India Women's Conference, 1926, and an All-Asia Women's Conference in 1931, organised by Cousins. In 1932 she served a year in prison for supporting Gandhi's free-speech campaign. She published three books on Indian women's rights.

A series of strokes paralysed her from the 1940s. She was cared for by James and died in March 1954.

## Tooth and Claw

Some Irish Suffragists moved to militancy a little after their English counterparts, but when they did, the stones flew.

*William Murphy*

Women were “considered part of the people” when the government wanted to tax or count them but not when it came to the “parliamentary vote”, wrote Mary Earl of the Irish Women’s Franchise League (IWFL) in the Irish Times on April 1st 1911. The letter was to justify the organisation’s advocacy of a boycott of the census, due to take place the following day. Statistics gathered through the census would be used by a parliament of men, elected by men, to make laws affecting women. Given this situation women were “quite justified” in refusing to be enumerated.

From the 1870s Irish suffrage groups had asserted “the moral right of properly qualified women to some share in the enactment of the laws which they are required to obey”.

Earl’s argument – that women were justified in flouting the law while they had no share in its enactment – flowed directly from that assertion, although it was more radical and, as late as 1911, only a small cohort of militant suffragists, the suffragettes, embraced the position.

In Britain from 1905 militant groups, most importantly the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), sought to “interfere with the peace of mind of the government” and push it toward granting women’s suffrage by a campaign of escalating law-breaking. Disruption of political meetings gave way to breaking windows in public buildings, politicians’ homes and shops. From the beginning, when militant acts remained comparatively mild, the state responded by imprisonment, jailing over 1,000 women in Britain between 1905 and 1914. In Ireland they imprisoned 27 suffragettes on 35 separate occasions between 1912 and 1914.

Imprisonment helped the militant groups to generate publicity and find new ways to trouble the state. From 1909, large numbers of British suffragettes embarked on hunger strike demanding to be treated as political prisoners. Militant suffragism in Ireland followed British militancy and appeared somewhat later.

Gradually, a small group of committed activists emerged and in the summer of 1912 the IWFL began militant activity.

On June 13th, eight women, including Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, threw stones through the windows of various government offices in Dublin. They received prison sentences of varying lengths. Held at Mountjoy, they enjoyed a privileged regime under a new rule introduced as a consequence of the prison conflict in Britain. As a result of these better conditions, and the IWFL’s comparatively cautious approach, these women did not hunger strike.

On July 18th three members of the WSPU intervened in Ireland. They followed the prime minister, Herbert Asquith, to Dublin where he was to address a Home Rule meeting at the Theatre Royal. They threw a hatchet at him and John Redmond MP and attempted to set the

venue ablaze. When they were convicted and given lengthy sentences, they began hunger strikes. This posed a problem for the IWFL prisoners: to strike in solidarity or continue not to strike given their privileged treatment. They split. Four women, due for release within days, joined the strike: two of them with enthusiasm and regardless of their colleagues' views and two (including Sheehy Skeffington) after considerable soul-searching. Four, serving longer sentences, did not: two supported their colleagues' actions in striking but refrained because of poor health; two others disagreed in principle with the decision.

The authorities responded with the controversial strategy of forcible feeding or, as they called it, artificial feeding. Again, they took their lead from developments in Britain. When a hunger striker actively resisted, this process involved restraining her in a padded reclining chair while pumping food into her stomach through a tube inserted either through the mouth or nose. Hoping to avoid some of the inevitable negative publicity, the Irish authorities waited until the expiration of the IWFL strikers' sentences and released Lizzie Baker, the WSPU striker with the shortest sentence, before forcibly feeding Mary Leigh and Gladys Evans. They fed Leigh for a month and Evans for six weeks, releasing them when medical officials became alarmed about their health. Although 24 more suffragettes would be imprisoned in Ireland, and most would hunger strike, the Irish prison authorities did not forcibly feed suffragettes again. They first pursued a twin strategy of isolating them in a provincial prison, Tullamore, and improved their conditions hoping to prevent or end hunger strikes.

This changed in 1913 when most suffragette prisoners in Ireland were members of the WSPU, which had established a branch in Belfast. These women, and radical members of the Belfast-centred Irish Women's Suffrage Society (IWSS) who assisted them, were more aggressive and less amenable to compromise. Their offences became more extreme, reflecting the trend in Britain, and included arson, bombing, and destruction of sports grounds. They also went on hunger strike to protest their actual imprisonment rather than their prison status, a further rejection of the law.

By then the authorities had a new weapon, the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-health) Act, passed in April 1913, and commonly known as the Cat and Mouse Act. This allowed temporary release on condition the hunger striker returned on a specified date to complete her sentence. Suffragettes warned that this would become a form of torture, leading individuals to conduct damaging serial strikes. In Ireland, the authorities rarely insisted on the return of released prisoners, seeking to use the Act to rid themselves of troublesome dissidents. The dissidents, however, consistently re-offended to ensure re-arrest and re-imprisonment, before striking again.

The militant campaign ended with the outbreak of the first World War. It had not by then achieved its goal and it is not clear that it won many converts to suffragism in Ireland. It had, however, drawn attention to the cause and made government's life difficult. Less frequently commented on was the militants' success in weakening a key pillar of the state – the prison system became a less effective means of law enforcement because of the concerted protests, while the prisons became places where the law was consistently and publicly undermined. This had a profound influence on later Irish political dissidents.

## Helena Molony (1883-1967)

*Senia Paseta*

Born into a middle-class Dublin family, Helena Molony became one of Ireland's most committed trade union, republican and feminist activists.

Her first formal political activity took place through Inghinidhe na hÉireann, a radical republican women's group which she joined in 1903. By 1908 she had become its secretary and editor of its feminist-republican newspaper, *Bean na hÉireann*. Molony was unequivocally pro-suffrage but clashed publicly with the feminists who, in her opinion, put gender before nationality.

She was especially critical of the women who looked to the British parliament for reform, but continued to support suffrage societies and campaigns, especially the militant Women's Social and Political Union and the Irish Women's Franchise League. The talented actress and orator worked at the Abbey Theatre and also appeared on platforms and stages in support of suffrage as well as other political campaigns. Molony became Ireland's first woman political prisoner of the modern era after her arrest for throwing stones at portraits of the visiting George V and Mary in 1911.

Increasingly socialist, she became general secretary of the Irish Women Workers' Union in 1915, as well as a very active member of the Irish Citizen Army (ICA).

She was arrested and interned for her role, with the ICA, in the Easter Rising. Molony remained active in republican, feminist and socialist politics after independence, reuniting with her suffragist colleagues in a number of organisations which protested against the social and political conservatism of the new Irish state.

## Suffrage and socialism: links with Labour

Suffrage and trade union aims didn't always tally – some trade unionists supported higher wages for men, for example – but they found common cause fighting against injustice and for equality.

*Therese Moriarty*

By 1912 Irish trades unions had an organisational framework built up over many decades: central offices with full-time paid officials, and trades councils in most cities where different unions met on local issues. The Irish Trade Union Congress met yearly from 1894 and the Labour Party was formally launched at its 1912 conference.

Women workers faced particular difficulties. Many worked in areas such as domestic service where organisation was difficult. Employers generally paid women less than men. Women workers themselves might, and did, contest their pay and working conditions yet, if they married, the prospect of a “family wage” for men could be more attractive.

Labour and suffrage were not obvious allies. Class and gender separated Labour leaders like James Larkin, James Connolly or William Partridge from young, academic, often professional, suffragists. Many male trade unionists supported wage differentials in favour of men, while opposing employers who favoured women as cheaper workers. Some supportive men feared suffragists would settle for a limited franchise, and that property owning women would oppose Labour candidates as strongly as their men.

But there were also unifying factors. In 1880, in the aftermath of the Trade Union Congress in Dublin, two trade unions for women were formed with support from middle-class feminists, including Anna Haslam, the Dublin Tailoresses' Society and the Bookfolders and Sewers' Union. Both were short-lived.

Suffragists and socialists shared territory. Both were urban, with offices in town centres, and called meetings on the streets, as well as in private rooms. Both had weekly newspapers, the *Irish Worker* (1911-1914) and *The Irish Citizen* (1912-1920), and branch activities.

Both women's and workers' organisations had links to global movements. Socialists had formal links through their International association. Women campaigners exchanged information through their press and, from the 1900s, international networks. The *Irish Citizen* reported on women in other countries, especially the English-speaking colonies of the British empire of New Zealand and Australia.

The long association between socialism and feminism had forged a mutual language, traceable to the 1830s, of rights, equality and solidarity. *Women Under Socialism* by the German socialist August Bebel and *Women and Labour* by South African writer Olive Schreiner were the influential socialist texts before 1914. Margaret Connery of the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) based a talk to Dublin socialists and two articles in *The Irish Citizen* on Schreiner's book. In early 20th-century Ireland both socialism and feminism were growing. Many young feminists became socialists. In 1911 Louie Bennett founded both

the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation to link smaller suffrage groups and the Irish Women's Reform League (IWRL) to link suffrage with working women's issues. In the pages of *The Irish Citizen*, middle-class feminists, including Bennett and law graduate Marion Duggan, advocated the organisation of women's trade unions and argued that women workers should decide their own priorities.

Working women themselves were active. In industrial districts, especially in Belfast and Derry, working women of all ages would "pour through the streets" at different times of their long working day in the factories. Linen districts regularly heard the shouts and songs of young women voicing grievances at low pay and the iniquitous system of fines for breaches of industrial discipline like laughing or singing, or bad work.

Women led strikes from the late 1890s. In 1906, just a year before James Larkin's better known 1907 dock strike, a Belfast mill pay dispute for an extra shilling a week shut down the linen industry in the city.

Dublin's workforces also joined this new wave. Strikes at Dublin's biscuit factory, Belfast's York Street linen mill in 1911, and Carroll's Dundalk tobacco factory, and the smaller Dublin workshops that followed, were supported by mediation or strike pay by the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU), founded by Larkin in 1909.

Under the auspices of the ITGWU the Irish Women Workers' Union (IWWU) was founded in Dublin in September 1911 as a general union for all women workers, with Delia Larkin, sister of James, as its first general secretary. Its foundation had the active support of nationalist feminists, both Suffrage-First and Nation-First. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Constance Markievicz were platform speakers with James Larkin at the launch in the Antient Concert Rooms. Speeches and venue both linked the vote and women's industrial struggles.

Many combined suffrage campaigning with commitments to other causes. In Dublin Cissie Cahalan (above left), a founding member of the IWFL, presided over the Irish Drapers Assistants' Association's Ladies Committee.

Francis Sheehy Skeffington and Kathleen Shannon, also founding members of the IWFL, were secretaries of the Socialist Party of Ireland. *The Irish Citizen* reported founding meetings of the Independent Labour Party of Ireland in Dublin and Belfast which highlighted support for votes for women in their programmes. The highest ambition of Tipperary teacher, Catherine Mahon, first woman president of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation in 1912, was "to be a Labour MP in a Nationalist Parliament".

James Connolly, who Louie Bennett remembered as one of the best suffrage speakers she had heard, supported women's suffrage even if they voted against him. When the weekly IWFL meetings in the Phoenix Park came under physical attack, stewards from Liberty Hall, the new headquarters of the ITGWU, came out to protect the speakers. Socialists and trade unionists, including women trade union officials like Mary Galway in Belfast and Delia Larkin, while favouring "adult suffrage", supported women's suffrage.

During the 1913 Lockout, the ITGWU took responsibility for the dependants of thousands of locked-out workers. The kitchens of Liberty Hall provided daily meals, from breakfasts to dinners, produced by out-of-work members, their families and supporters. Dublin feminists joined this work, including Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and IWFL members, Bennett and the IWRL, Markievicz and Molony. Their attendance during the Lockout reads like a roll call of well known names from Dublin's feminist and nationalist movements.

It was many middle-class women's first visit to a trade union office. Bennett "crept like a criminal into Liberty Hall" to avoid being seen by anyone who knew her. Such experiences were vital to many women's later engagements with unions and labour. The Irish Citizen Army, set up by Larkin in 1913 to protect the workers, later enrolled women on equal terms with men. As members of the ICA, Markievicz, Helena Molony and Dr Kathleen Lynn, fought in the 1916 Rising. Links between nationalist feminists and Labour, including Connolly's commitment to women's citizenship, contributed to the endorsement of women's equal citizenship in the 1916 Proclamation. Suffrage-Labour interaction also encouraged debates about adult suffrage as opposed to women's suffrage, and bonds between Labour and feminism, certainly at leadership level. It is not clear what proportion of the general membership of the IWWU or of the female members of other trade unions were active suffragists. As middle-class socialists recognised they could have more immediately pressing priorities.

Undoubtedly, the commitment of many middle-class feminists to the cause of Labour was life-long. In the IWWU itself, Delia Larkin was succeeded as general secretary by Helena Molony in 1915 and in 1917 by Louie Bennett. Both Molony and Bennett devoted their entire working lives to the union. Although, sadly, Catherine Mahon never fulfilled her 1912 dream.

## **Cissie Cahalan (1876-1948)**

*Therese Moriarty*

Cissie Cahalan, trade unionist, feminist, and schoolteacher's daughter, was born in Tipperary or Cork. She earned her living as a shop worker in Dublin, mostly at Arnotts of Henry Street.

She was a member of the Irish Drapers' Assistants' Association (IDAA, now Mandate) from its earliest years, and a campaigner for women's suffrage in the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) from 1908.

The different worlds of her activism came together in 1912. A seasoned speaker on suffrage platforms, she was an IWFL delegate seeking Dublin Trades Council's support for women's suffrage. She headed the IDAA Dublin branch's new Ladies Committee and wrote for the union journal.

Cahalan opposed the first World War, supported inclusive trade unions for all shop workers, women and men, and campaigned for equal pay. In 1918 she headed a strike at Arnott's that won a 30 per cent pay increase. She was on the IWFL executive committee, 1917-18. She attended the Irish Trade Union Congress (ITUC) as an IDAA delegate from 1917, serving on the executive from 1922 to 1923, when she resigned in protest at inaction about internment.

She was elected president of the IDAA in 1922, 1923 and 1924, winning a minimum wage and ending the "living-in" system. Cahalan combined her commitments with a demanding day job until 1932. She wrote for her union journal in the 1930s.

She was a lifelong friend of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington. In 1932 she married John Burns, and was widowed in 1936. She worked part-time at St Ultan's hospital. She died on August 27th, 1948.

## **Kathleen Lynn (1874-1955)**

*Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh*

Kathleen Lynn's main claim to fame is her establishment of St Ultan's Hospital for Infants with her great friend Madeleine Ffrench-Mullen in 1919.

Lynn was the Mayo-born daughter of a Church of Ireland clergyman. In 1899, aged 25, she graduated from the Royal University of Ireland, having studied at the Catholic University Medical School. As a doctor she could commit a man to an asylum, thereby depriving him of the vote, but could not vote herself.

Like many of her class and generation she was politicised by the suffrage movement, joining both the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association and the militant, British-based Women's Social and Political Union. James Connolly's brand of socialism and Helena Molony's trade unionism converted her to republicanism, and she showed her mettle as commander of the City Hall Garrison during the 1916 Rising, and as chief medical officer of the Irish Citizen Army. After imprisonment in Kilmainham Jail, she became vice-president of Sinn Féin, eventually being elected a TD in 1923.

Her greatest work lay in medicine, working on behalf of her patients in her Rathmines practice and at St Ultan's.

As a hospital that favoured female doctors, St Ultan's forged a distinctive ethos and was the first hospital to provide the BCG vaccination, which prevented TB. Lynn's colleague, Dr Dorothy Stopford-Price, pioneered its use. While politically unsuccessful, losing her seat in 1927, Lynn's professional work enabled her to serve others, and she is remembered with affection. Lynn was buried with full military honours in 1955.

## Separate but equal

Although influenced by what was going in Britain, suffragists in Ireland went their own way.

*Maria Luddy*

From 1860s Irish women were strongly influenced by suffrage groups in the rest of the United Kingdom. Irish suffragists copied their campaigning tactics, spoke at suffrage meetings in England and Scotland, and campaigned with their British sisters on women's education, married women's property rights and other women's rights issues. Isabella Tod, who established the first Irish suffrage society, the North of Ireland Society for Women's Suffrage, circa 1872, affiliated it to the London Women's Suffrage Society. Tod travelled throughout Ireland tirelessly, speaking at public meetings to persuade both men and women of the need for the vote, and appeared regularly at suffrage meetings in London, and other British towns. Anna Haslam, who organised the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association from 1876, also worked closely with, and was influenced by, the British suffrage movement.

Irish suffragists read and were influenced by British suffrage newspapers and journals, including *Englishwoman*, later the *Englishwoman's Review*, *Votes for Women*, and *The Suffragette*. Numerous English suffrage journals published regular sections on "Irish affairs". Irish activists attended suffrage meetings in London and elsewhere. Some received training from English groups. Margaret Cousins, for instance, worked for the militant Women's Social and Political Union for three weeks in the summer of 1909. She noted, "it was a helpful apprenticeship for our campaign later in Ireland".

Votes for women was the aim uniting suffragists. However, tensions between and amongst groups, in Ireland and England, were evident throughout. There were splits in the English movement around issues relating to sexual morality, which saw the feminist Josephine Butler campaign against the regulation of prostitution. Many suffragists could not accept association with such a cause, deeming it unfeminine and harmful to the suffrage campaign.

In Ireland individuals such as Anna Haslam and Isabella Tod, strongly unionist and opposed to Home Rule, tended to align their suffrage groups with the more conservative English groups. Millicent Fawcett, the leader of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in England, had contact with Irish suffragists in the 1880s and 1890s and visited Ireland regularly, and was a noted anti-Home Rule advocate. Such groups faced new challenges in Ireland after 1900.

Within Ireland, by the early twentieth century, some frustration was felt at the lack of progress the older groups appeared to be making. In 1908 a new suffrage group, the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), was established by Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington and her husband Frank, and their friends Margaret Cousins and her husband, James. The IWFL was committed to a more aggressive and militant campaign than the earlier suffrage groups and influenced by the tactics of the British-based Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) formed in 1903. The WPSU, centred on the mother-daughter team of Emmeline, Christabel and Sylvia Pankhurst, was the first militant group. They engaged in attacks on property, civil

disobedience, and heckled speakers at meetings. They brought violence and deliberate destruction into public life, gaining notoriety and huge publicity for their actions.

Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Margaret Cousins were typical of the new generation of activists. They were young graduates who married feminists. The IWFL was non-party, meaning that it did not affiliate to any particular political party, aiming to lobby all politicians. Their slogan was “Suffrage before all else”. The formation of the IWFL was a significant development in the Irish suffrage campaign. Its militancy brought the campaign to the attention of a larger audience.

From its inception it was criticised by those who felt that women’s suffrage should not take priority over the nationalist cause. Many nationalist women saw the IWFL as an adjunct of the WSPU. The leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party was also hostile to the suffrage cause. Sinn Féin, rejecting the right of England to rule Ireland, also had difficulties with the campaign. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington noted that women, like Constance Markievicz, “whose natural sympathies should have been with us”, instead adopted an opposing position in terms of priorities and strategies.

The IWFL had the Pankhursts to speak in Ireland on a number of occasions, in well-publicised and crowded public meetings. In the nineteenth century there had been attempts to establish branches of English suffrage societies in Ireland but it was believed that Irish women were best left to organise their own societies. However, in the early twentieth century branches of English suffrage societies were set up in Ireland. These included the Conservative and Unionist Suffrage Association, the Church League for Women’s Suffrage and the Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage, among others. These were generally middle-class, conservative societies with little impact on Irish suffrage groups.

It was clear, especially with the formation of the IWFL, that Irish suffrage societies wished to remain separate and distinct from English organisations. Some of this was due to nationalist feeling. In 1916, a Miss O’Connor of the Irish Catholic Women’s Suffrage Society noted that “Irishwomen are invited to join hands with their English militant sisters and help them in their struggle for freedom. But they are apt to reply that their English sisters gave them no help or sympathy during the famine, or in bad times when they and their children were ejected from their homes”.

The WSPU decided to establish a branch in Belfast in 1912 and another in Dublin. Christabel Pankhurst argued that the Irish Parliamentary Party under John Redmond held such sway in parliament that pressure must be put on them to secure women’s franchise. The WSPU’s target in Ulster was Sir Edward Carson who was also unwilling to include women’s suffrage as Unionist Party policy. Irish suffragists engaged in a militant campaign from June 1912, involving breaking windows in government buildings, and heckling at meetings.

The tactics of the WSPU were more violent. The English prime minister, Herbert Asquith, visited Dublin in 1912 and two English activists threw a hatchet into his carriage and tried to burn down the Theatre Royal.

In Ulster the WSPU activists engaged in arson attacks, damaged a golf course in Belfast, and attacked other property, generally belonging to Unionists. WSPU activists Mary Leigh and Gladys Evans, imprisoned for their militant activities in Dublin, were the only suffragettes forcibly fed in Ireland during imprisonment.

Public opinion was not generally supportive of militant activity; newspapers, in particular, were quick to condemn the women involved. Militancy was seen as anti-home rule, anti-nationalist and unwomanly behaviour. Non-militant Irish groups completely disassociated themselves from the WSPU's actions in Ireland, and even the IWFL were not supportive. Relations between the WSPU and Irish suffrage groups had completely broken down by 1913. On the outbreak of the first World War the WSPU suspended all activities.

The war fractured the international women's movement. In Ireland some suffrage societies, mostly those linked with English groups, suspended activity and engaged in war relief work. Some Irish groups were anti-war or pacifist.

When the war ended, Home Rule for Ireland was on the statute book and in 1918 the British parliament, arguably because of women's war work, granted partial suffrage, confined to those over thirty with a property qualification, to women throughout the United Kingdom.

However, by this time the Irish political scene had completely changed. New political cultures emerged for Irish and English women after the war and many retained or forged new links with their sisters in other countries.

## Jennie Wyse Power (1858-1941)

*Maryann Gialanella Valiulis*

She was born in County Wicklow, and her family subsequently moved to Dublin. She married John Wyse Power and they had four children. Jennie herself ran a restaurant that became a meeting place for prominent Irish nationalist figures. She assumed a leadership role in many of the nationalist/feminist organisations of the time, from the Ladies Land League to Sinn Féin to the new feminist-separatist movement, Inghinidhe na hÉireann (Daughters of Ireland), to various suffrage organisations of the period.

Jennie was the first President of Cumann na mBan, an organisation founded in 1914 to assist the Irish Volunteers.

She was a part of that steady drift to 1916 and the Anglo-Irish war. Civil war followed the signing of the treaty with Great Britain. She supported the treaty and when the Cumann na mBan executive voted overwhelmingly against the treaty, she resigned.

In the Irish Free State, as a member of the new Senate, Jennie continued to be an advocate for women against the gender legislation of the 1920s and 1930s. First as a member of Cumann na nGaedhael, then as an Independent and later as a member of Fianna Fáil, she spoke out against discrimination. She saw it as particularly appalling that these measures were coming from men who had been given so much support from women in their fight for freedom.

## A role in Home Rule

From arson attacks in Belfast to taking up arms in the Rising, Irish women were not afraid to get their hands dirty – whatever side they were on.

*Margaret Ward*

While women throughout Ireland prepared to confront the unionists, the English militant organisation the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) went further. They had already established an "Ulster Centre" in Belfast and in March 1914 they sent over full-time organisers who began an arson campaign.

On March 27th there was an attack on Abbeylands House in Whiteabbey, in the grounds of which the UVF had been drilling. Damage was estimated at £20,000. While the suffragettes were arrested, the UVF ran 24,000 guns into Larne without any arrests. The double standard infuriated women and escalated militancy. The Irish Women's Suffrage Society dissolved as women flocked to the WSPU ranks. However, in Dublin the WSPU was received with hostility and soon closed.

Venues associated with male leisure pursuits and also unionist targets came in for attack. In August, following an explosion at Lisburn Cathedral, more arrests were made. Before the case came to trial the first World War had broken out. The WSPU halted its campaign, and by August 22nd had pulled out of Ireland. Many disagreed strongly with that decision, arguing that the home rule question and women's enfranchisement remained unresolved. Belfast activist Margaret McCoubrey tried to set up a branch of the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) as a feminist and anti-war organisation, but by 1915 this petered out.

The Irish Citizen, the paper of the suffrage movement, edited by Francis Sheehy Skeffington, declared, "Votes for women now – damn your war," and the IWFL refused to engage in any relief work that might prolong the war.

They continued to organise speaking tours and suffrage meetings, but divisions caused by the war had a detrimental effect on the cause. Supporters of the war withdrew subscriptions from The Irish Citizen. The Munster Women's Franchise League raised funds for an ambulance for France and the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association sponsored a bed for wounded soldiers and campaigned for Belgian refugees. Pacifists were in a minority. In 1915 Hanna Sheehy Skeffington of the IWFL and Louie Bennett of the Irish Women's Reform League were among Irish delegates to an International Congress of Women at The Hague, aimed at uniting women to try to negotiate peace.

The British government refused permits to all except Bennett, and a ban on travel prevented her attending. In protesting against this government action, IWFL militants became politically closer to republicans like Thomas MacDonagh, then Director of Training for the Irish Volunteers.

Before the Easter Rising, James Connolly told Hanna Sheehy Skeffington she would be a member of a civil government which the leadership intended would come into existence if the

insurgents managed to hold out. She described the Rising as “the first time in history that men fighting for freedom had voluntarily included women”. The Proclamation of the Republic guaranteed equal opportunities and equal citizenship for women and men. Women in the Irish Citizen Army, commanded by Connolly, were given equal status. Notoriously, Cumann na mBan women were refused entry to Boland’s Mill, commanded by Eamon de Valera, future president of Ireland. Almost 200 women are reckoned to have contributed in some way to the Rising, but numbers are difficult to calculate as many left their outposts before the final surrender.

Seventy seven women are listed as subsequently imprisoned by the British. Members of the IWFL brought supplies to outposts and carried messages. After Francis Sheehy Skeffington was arrested and executed by British troops while attempting to organise a citizen’s militia to stop the wide-scale looting he feared would discredit the ideals of the Rising, Hanna spent months in a crusade to force Prime Minister Asquith to hold an inquiry into the circumstances of his death. After surrender only five women were detained for lengthy periods, all Citizen Army members. Constance Markievicz’s death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment because of her sex.

The execution of 16 leaders and the work of bereaved women relatives in holding memorial masses and supporting released prisoners did much to change public opinion, initially hostile to the Rising. Grace Gifford married her fiancé Joseph Plunkett before his execution in Kilmainham Jail. Kathleen Clarke, whose husband Tom was the first signatory to the Proclamation, distributed relief to bereaved families. A resurgent nationalist Ireland successfully resisted attempts by the British to impose conscription. Women were at the forefront of opposition. In addition, nationalist women from different organisations joined forces to ensure they would be effectively represented in the reorganisation of nationalist forces.

In April 1917 a group of women came together at the home of Countess Plunkett. They included members of Cumann na mBan, widows of the leadership, women from the Irish Citizen Army, from the Irish Women Worker’s Union and others. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington joined on her return from America.

They formed a group, the League of Women Delegates, Cumann na d’Teachtaire, determined that the Proclamation’s promise of equal citizenship would be adhered to.

Their first task was to campaign for increased representation for women within Sinn Féin. However, as only 12 women out of 1,000 were selected as delegates to the October 1917 Sinn Féin Convention, Cumann na d’Teachtaire did well to have four women elected on to the executive, all of whom had some connection with the Rising. They were dismayed at the lack of women candidates in the parliamentary elections of December 1918. The Representation of the People Act had given women over the age of 30 in Ireland and Britain the right to vote and another act allowed women stand for election.

Only two women were selected: Constance Markievicz in Dublin and Winifred Carney in Belfast. Both had been members of the Irish Citizen Army. Kathleen Clarke had hoped to be

a candidate. Hanna Sheehy Skeffington rejected the offer of an unwinnable seat. Members of the IWFL and Cumann na nBan worked hard for a Markievicz victory, criticising Sinn Féin for its lack of support. Anna Haslam, 89, led a victory procession of women in Dublin as she cast her vote for the first time, supporting a Conservative candidate. Markievicz became the first woman to be elected to parliament, although she did not take her seat. Despite jubilation over her victory The Irish Citizen commented, "Under the new dispensation the majority sex in Ireland has secured one representative. This is the measure of our boasted sex equality." The elected Sinn Féin members boycotted the British Parliament in favour of a new Irish assembly, Dáil Éireann. Markievicz became Minister for Labour.

The War of Independence began on January 21st 1919 and continued until a Truce was declared on July 11th 1921. Cumann na d'Teachtaire had planned to press for more women to be nominated as candidates for the local government elections, but by late 1919 all nationalist organisations were declared illegal, meetings forbidden and the dangers in opposing British rule intensified, making it impossible to meet.

Dáil Éireann courts were created and many women served as judges in this underground network. Cumann na mBan developed in strength, with 600 branches throughout Ireland. They provided safe houses, carried food and clothing to men hiding in hillsides, transported weaponry, scouted for targets, undertook intelligence work and formed guards of honour at funeral processions.

In 1920 UK legislation partitioned Ireland into two Home Rule states: six-county Northern Ireland and 26-county Southern Ireland.

In December an American Committee for Relief in Ireland organised fund-raising and the White Cross organisation was formed in Ireland to help the 100,000 people left destitute. Nationalist women formed the backbone of the organisation, headed by Áine Ceannt, widow of one of the 1916 leaders.

Women were elected to local government positions in 1920 and in elections to the second Dáil in 1921, six were returned: Markievicz, Kate O'Callaghan (whose murdered husband had been mayor of Limerick), Mary MacSwiney (sister of Terence, the lord mayor of Cork who died after a lengthy hunger strike), Kathleen Clarke, Margaret Pearse (mother of Patrick Pearse) and Dr Ada English of Cumann na mBan.

Women were invaluable in producing the underground Sinn Féin paper The Irish Bulletin, which defied censorship laws by providing information about the war. Around 50 women were imprisoned during this period, comparatively few compared to the male figure of 4,000. This reflected the nature of their work and difficulties in getting evidence for conviction.

After the July 1921 truce, no women were included among the Dáil delegates chosen to negotiate with the British government, although Lily O'Brennan (sister of Áine Ceannt), former secretary of Cumann na mBan, was a secretary for the Irish delegation. The final terms did not give a republic, requiring members of the Dáil to take an Oath of Allegiance to the British monarchy, and leaving partition in place unless changed later by the Boundary

Commission. Cumann na mBan was the first organisation to declare its opposition. All six female deputies also opposed the Treaty, which was accepted by the Dáil in January 1922.

A motion by Kate O'Callaghan to enfranchise women between the ages of 21 and 30 before the country voted on the issue was defeated. This symbolised the nature of the new "Free State" in some anti-Treaty quarters. Nevertheless, both pro- and anti-Treaty nationalist feminists continued to press for women's full equality in the new state's constitution, calling on the commitment in the 1916 Proclamation and women's contribution to the nationalist struggle. The 1922 Constitution of the Irish Free State gave full citizenship to all women and men over 21.

## **Hanna Sheehy Skeffington (1877-1946)**

*Margaret Ward*

Born Johanna Sheehy, daughter of an Irish Party MP, she was asked while a university student to sign a petition for women's suffrage and "became a conscious suffragist".

She joined the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association, together with Francis Skeffington, who she married in 1903, their shared surnames signifying the equality of their relationship. He resigned as registrar of the National University in protest at its treatment of women. In 1908, "in a hurry with reform", the couple co-founded, with Gretta and James Cousins, the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), as a militant suffrage organisation. Francis and James edited the IWFL's newspaper *The Irish Citizen*. In June 1912 Hanna was among the first group of IWFL members to undertake militant action, receiving two months imprisonment for smashing windows in Dublin Castle. She lost her teaching job and was imprisoned again in 1913 for protesting against Edward Carson.

She supported the ideals of the Easter Rising, delivering food and messages to outposts. Following her husband's murder she toured the US in support of Sinn Féin. Forbidden by the British to return to Ireland, she was arrested and imprisoned in Holloway prison, winning release through hunger strike. She resumed work on *The Irish Citizen* and in 1919 became organising secretary of Sinn Féin. She opposed the Treaty, leafleting Dáil Éireann to extend the franchise to women over 21. She opposed the 1937 Constitution and in 1943 stood unsuccessfully as an independent, hoping a women's party would emerge.

## Passion on both sides

*“Women, in whatever country ye breathe – wherever ye breathe, degraded, awake! Awake to the contemplation of the happiness that awaits you when all your faculties of mind and body shall be fully cultivated and developed; when every path in which ye can exercise those improved faculties shall be laid open and rendered delightful to you, even as to them who now ignorantly enslave and degrade you.”*

- William Thompson and Anna Doyle Wheeler, *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery*, 1825.

*“The sex of a woman, though it may be a misfortune, is not a crime.”*

- Edward Gibson, Dublin, 1863.

*“Allowing woman the right of suffrage is incompatible with the Catholic ideal of the unity of domestic life and would fare ill with the passive virtues of humility, patience, meekness, forbearance and self-repression looked upon by the church as the special prerogative of the female soul.”*

- Fr D Barry, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 1909.

*“The [women’s] movement in Ireland smacks rather of imitation of the English, and we do not regard it as a native and spontaneous growth.”*

- Editorial in the *Leader*, 1910.

*“For Men and Women Equally the Rights of Citizenship; From Men and Women Equally the Duties of Citizenship.”*

- Masthead of the *Irish Citizen*, 1912-1920.

*“Women’s suffrage will I believe, be the ruin of our western civilisation. It will destroy the home, challenging the headship of man, laid down by God. It may come in your time – I hope not in mine.”*

- John Dillon, MP, circa 1912.

*“It would be ludicrous, were it not shameful, to find nationalists, whose history is a record of success gained by the use of violence and lawbreaking and damage to property, condemning the smashing of a few panes of glass as if it were an unheard of and unpardonable outrage, or to find unionists, while vehemently applauding the resolve of Ulster to resist Home Rule by illegal methods and encouraging them to drill for the purpose of armed resistance, at the same time condemning last Thursday’s window smashing in the name of the Irish reputation for sanity and sobriety in the conduct of their social and political affairs.”*

- *The Irish Citizen*, June 1912.

*“Down with the suffragettes”; “We will never forget the hatchet”; “Burn them”; “Throw them in the river.”*

- Calls from a crowd at a suffrage meeting in Beresford Place, after a hatchet was thrown into Prime Minister Asquith’s carriage by a protester, July 1912.

*“Personally I am dead against forcible feeding, which always ends with the release of the prisoner long before her time. I want to keep these ladies under lock and key for five years and I am quite happy to feed them with priests’ champagne and Michaelmas geese all the time, if it can be done . . . but these wretched hags . . . are obdurate to the point of death.”*

- Chief Secretary Augustine Birrell to John Dillon, August 1912.

*“They are not men, they are not women. Woman: the idea comprises dignity, self-respect, refinement, reserve. I don’t find any of these qualities amongst the suffragettes.”*

- Monsignor Keller, Youghal, Co Cork, 1912.

*“Women speakers who could hold their own, who could lift their voices in the Fifteen Acres [in Phoenix Park] , meeting heckling on their own ground, being good-humoured and capable of keeping their temper under bombardments of rotten eggs, over-ripe tomatoes, bags of flour, stinking chemicals, gradually earned respect and due attention: suffs were good sports.”*

- Hanna Sheehy Skeffington quoted in *Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette*, 1975.

*“Damn your war! Votes for women now!*

- Francis Sheehy Skeffington, 1914.

*“I suppose when the necessity of knitting socks is over – the order will be – bear sons. And those of us who can’t will feel we had better get out of the way as quickly as we can.”*

- Pacifist Louie Bennett to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, October 1914.

*“The worker is the slave of capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave. In Ireland the woman’s cause is felt by Labour men and women as their cause; the Labour cause has no more earnest and whole-hearted supporters than the militant women.”*

- James Connolly, *The Reconquest of Ireland*, 1915.

*“We were as keen as men on the freedom of Ireland, but we saw the men clamouring for amendments which suited their own interests, and made no recognition of the existence of women as fellow citizens.”*

- Margaret Cousins, *We Two Together* (with JH Cousins), 1950.

*“Under the new dispensation the majority sex in Ireland has secured one representative. This is the measure of our boasted sex equality. The lesson the election teaches is that reaction*

*has not died out with the Irish Party – and the IWFL, which has been so faithful to feminist ideals, must continue to fight and to expose reaction in the future as in the past.”*

- IWFL report, 1918, reflecting on the 1918 election, which produced only one woman victor, Constance Marcievicz.

## When women won the vote

*Leanne Lane*

From New Zealand to Saudi Arabia: The representation of People Act, 1918, that granted votes to certain Irish and English women came at a relatively early point in the trajectory of the history of female suffrage in Europe and elsewhere in the world.

There were, however, nations that extended that right earlier and other countries, in Europe as well as elsewhere, that did not extend the right until much later into the 20th century.

New Zealand was the first nation to grant female suffrage, in 1893, to all adult women, both Maori and pakehas (of European descent). In 1894 women in South Australia were granted the vote and also the right to stand for parliamentary elections. In 1899 women in Western Australia were enfranchised.

In 1902 the Commonwealth Franchise Act gave all white women in Australia the vote and the right to stand for election to the Australian Federal Parliament. Aboriginal women in Australia, as well as aboriginal men, did not receive the vote until 1962.

In Europe the Nordic countries were pioneers in women's suffrage. The first European nation to give women the vote was Finland in 1906. Women in the Grand Duchy of Finland, then an autonomous part of the Russian Empire, won the right to be elected members of the eduskunta, the Finnish unicameral parliament, in 1907.

Women in Norway received the right in 1913 with Denmark following in 1915. Other Nordic countries, such as Sweden, enfranchised women between 1919 and 1921, women in that country receiving the vote at least a year later than enfranchisement of Irish and English women over the age of 30. The end of the first World War was an important time for the enfranchisement of women in many European nations. Austria, Germany, Poland and Russia granted the vote to women in 1918 with the Netherlands following in 1919. Spanish women received the vote in 1931. However, there were certain countries in Europe in which women did not gain the vote until during or after the second World War. In 1944 French women received the right to vote. In 1945 Italy followed suit. Other European countries were even later to grant women suffrage; Switzerland did not grant the right until 1971 and Portugal not until 1976.

Canadian women, with the exception of Canadian Indians, received the vote in 1917. The latter were not enfranchised until 1960. In the United States women's suffrage was granted on a local and state level from the late 19th century. In 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution stated that the right to vote of all citizens could not be denied by the US or any state within on the basis of sex.

Elsewhere, Mexico, Pakistan, Japan and Argentina granted female suffrage in 1947. China granted the right two years later in 1949 and India in 1950. Examples of countries in which women have only recently been granted the right to vote are South Africa (black women,

1994), Kuwait (2005) and the United Arab Emirates (2006). Women in Saudi Arabia will not have the vote until 2015.

## A new battlefield

The issue of pacifism split the Irish feminist movement during a crucial period in its history.

*Rosemary Cullen Owens*

The outbreak of war in August 1914 had serious repercussions for the women's movement worldwide. Throughout Europe, feminist groups espousing pacifism quickly lost members, especially in countries supporting the war effort.

In 1913 three Irish women attended the seventh congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) in Budapest: Hanna Sheehy Skeffington of the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL), Louie Bennett of the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation (IWSF), and Lady Margaret Dockrell of the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (IWSLGA).

While these societies remained in existence during and after the conflict, there was no unified stance on the war. Suffragists with strong English/unionist connections abandoned or postponed suffrage work, turning to war relief work. Jingoistic references in IWSLGA reports suggesting that "women are helping to save our empire" offended both feminist and nationalist women. An emergency council of suffragists, formed in August 1914 to allow them to engage in remedial work, was firmly opposed by the IWFL, which commented: "The European war has done nothing to alter our condition of slavery". An early decision by the IWSF to support the emergency council was reversed early in 1915, Bennett writing in *The Irish Citizen*: "Women should never have abandoned their struggle for justice, war or no war". *The Irish Citizen* made its anti-war stance clear from the beginning of the war with its poster: "Votes for Women Now! Damn your War".

Initial differences within Irish suffrage societies reflected pro- and anti-war views, either on loyalist or feminist grounds. Hanna's husband Frank Sheehy Skeffington and Louie Bennett were among the leading pacifist voices during this period. The former continuously published anti-war articles in *The Irish Citizen* arguing that war was "necessarily bound up with the destruction of feminism; feminism is necessarily bound up with the abolition of war". Bennett argued that suffragists "of every country must face the fact that militarism is now the most dangerous foe of women's suffrage".

After the cancellation of the 1915 IWSA congress, a Women's Peace Party was formed in the US in January 1915, followed by plans for a women's peace conference at The Hague in April 1915. At a conference to discuss possible Irish participation, fears were expressed that this might imply disloyalty to those fighting at the front. Similar sentiments were expressed throughout Europe. The British press derided intending participants as "pro-Hun peacettes" going to "pow-wow with the fraus".

Hanna Sheehy Skeffington wrote that the IWFL planned to attend the conference, as it regarded war as the negation of the feminist movement. Early in 1915 she wrote to Thomas Haslam that every war was regarded by the countries engaged in it as a sacred and holy war,

arguing: “Women must rid their minds of such cant”. Bennett was the only one of seven Irish delegates granted a travel permit, but could not attend due to an Admiralty ban on travel.

It was at this point that international feminist pacifist ideals came into direct contact with burgeoning domestic militarism. A public meeting was held in Dublin in May 1915 to protest against this government action, with James Connolly and Thomas MacDonagh among the speakers. In a letter of support Pádraig Pearse declared that much good would be done if the incident aligned more women with the national forces. Bennett was troubled at the militarist tone of this meeting, writing that “militarism in the most subtly dangerous form has is hold upon Ireland”. MacDonagh’s address to the meeting was particularly controversial. Stating that, as one of the founders of the Irish Volunteers, he had taught men to kill other men, he also declared himself an advocate of peace, because everyone was “being exploited by the dominant militarism”.

In response, Francis Sheehy Skeffington enunciated clearly the view of pacifist feminism towards militarism: “High ideals undoubtedly animate you. But has not nearly every militarist system started with the same high ideals?” Shortly before the Easter Rising, he and Bennett took part in a public debate with Constance Markievicz on the motion ‘Do we want peace now?’ Of the 500 to 600 attending, only a handful supported Sheehy Skeffington’s view. The murder of Francis Sheehy-Skeffington during the rising was a severe loss for pacifists. Bennett sought to uphold his ideals through her Irish Citizen writings and international work.

At the 1915 Hague Congress, the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace (ICWPP) was formed. Bennett, initially included as part of the British branch, argued that “the peace movement in Ireland must be indigenous and independent to be in any sense successful”. The Irish section took the name Irishwomen’s International League (IIL), and was accepted as an independent organisation in December 1916.

At the second ICWPP Congress in May 1919, Ireland was represented for the first time, with Bennett its delegate. The ICWPP was renamed the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and its headquarters were moved to Geneva. An ‘Appeal on Behalf of Ireland’ issued to the Congress sought support for Ireland’s “legitimate struggle for the rights of self-determination”.

These were tempestuous times for a pacifist organisation. Writing to WILPF’s international secretary in October 1920, Bennett noted “things are very difficult here and we are hard put to keep our little group together”. Acceptance of the Anglo-Irish Treaty by Dáil Éireann and the ensuing Civil War posed difficulties for both the IIL and individual members trying to ally pacifist convictions with political commitment. Bennett told Geneva “the civil strife in the past few months has driven the larger majority of people into one or other political camp: both sides have raised objections to the attitude of the IIL”. A meeting was held to consider Bennett’s resolution that “membership of the Irish section is open to all who hold that, in resisting tyranny or striving for freedom, only such methods may be used as will not involve the taking of life”. After heated discussion the resolution was lost by just one vote.

In July 1926 the fifth International Congress of WILPF was held in Dublin, attended by 150 delegates representing 20 countries. This was the first gathering of an international organisation held in the Irish Free State. A reception to mark its opening was attended by both Éamon de Valera and WT Cosgrave. This first public function attended by both leaders since the Civil War attracted much comment.

During the next four years further dissension developed within the IIL, with the election to its committee of some women with republican sympathies. In 1929 Bennett informed Geneva she believed a split was inevitable due to disagreement between the “really pacifist” group and those who believed the use of force “essential” to achieve national freedom.

A series of stormy meetings, allied to the clash between the strong personalities of Bennett and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, led ultimately to its demise in 1931. The issue of justifiable warfare was divisive in many national sections of WILPF up to and after the second World War. While condemning militarism in its imperialistic mode, some Irish women justified military action to attain national objectives. This the “really pacifist” members of Irish WILPF could not accept. It is ironic that the group foundered on differing emphases on the words “peace” and “freedom” in its title.

## **Louie Bennett (1870-1956)**

*Rosemary Cullen Owens*

Born into a wealthy Dublin Protestant family, Louise Bennett at the age of 41 embarked on a public life that included activity for female suffrage, women workers and pacifism.

In 1911, with Helen Chenevix, she formed the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation to co-ordinate the work of many small societies. She formed the Irish Women's Reform League to examine the economic position of women workers. Her writings in *The Irish Citizen* newspaper reveal her pacifist/feminist and internationalist convictions.

She and Frank Sheehy Skeffington were the most vocal pacifist opponents of the first World War, their ideals put to the test by the increasingly militaristic stance of both loyalists and nationalists. The 1913 strike and lockout were major influences on Bennett's career.

While admiring James Connolly as "a thorough feminist in every respect", she refused his request to help reorganise the Irish Women Workers Union (IWWU), as she could not support any organisation which might threaten to use force. After the Easter Rising she attended her first Trade Union Congress in August 1916. The IWWU was officially registered as a trade union in 1918, with Bennett and Chenevix its honorary secretaries. Over the years it won many reforms in pay and working conditions. In 1932, she was elected the first woman president of the ICTU.

Resisting the 1936 Conditions of Employment Act, which legalised restrictions on women's employment, and organising a 14-week laundry workers' strike in 1945 were just two of the battles she fought on behalf of women workers. She retired from the IWWU executive in 1955 and died in 1956.

## Standing up for women in politics

Anna Haslam, with help from the writings of her husband, Thomas, was a pioneer in persuading women of all political hues to stand for election.

*Carmel Quinlan*

A limestone seat in the centre of St Stephen's Green in Dublin bears an inscription honouring Anna and Thomas Haslam for their "long years of public service chiefly devoted to the enfranchisement of women."

Anna Haslam, a pioneer in every 19th-century Irish feminist campaign, fought for votes for women from 1866 when she was part of the first salvo as a signatory of John Stuart Mill's petition to Parliament. In 1918, a woman of almost ninety, she went to the polls surrounded by flowers and flags, flanked by unionist, Irish Party and Sinn Féin women, united in her honour to celebrate the victory of the vote. This display of unity by activist women from all shades of political opinion acknowledged Anna's pivotal role in the fight for the vote.

Anna and Thomas Haslam were founding members of the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association (DWSA) in 1876. This marked the start of a sustained campaign in Dublin for votes for women. There had been sporadic suffrage activity prior to this, including the publication of a short-lived journal, *The Woman's Advocate*, by Thomas Haslam in 1874. Membership of the DWSA was open to men and women and included many members of Parliament, unionist and nationalist. Many members were Quakers. Although its leadership was unionist, it was non-party and attracted members of all political affiliation. It is difficult now to appreciate the radical nature of the early suffrage movement. Its activities – collecting signatures for petitions to Parliament, writing letters, holding meetings– appear tame when compared with the more flamboyant behaviour of the suffragettes who came after them. The early suffragists challenged the prevailing precepts that citizenship was possible only for male heads of households and that the subjection of women by men was natural. They challenged the ideology that a woman's place was in the home and that it was shocking for her to speak in public. When Millicent Fawcett, the English suffrage leader, addressed a suffrage meeting in 1869, her husband was criticised in parliament for allowing her to speak in such an "advanced" and "unsexing" a manner.

The minute book of the DWSA, held in the National Archives of Ireland, contains a record of 213 meetings, all of which Anna Haslam attended, between 1876 and 1913. Although it was a Dublin-centred association, great efforts were made to involve women all over Ireland. Emphasis was placed on the educational role of the DWSA. It held public and private meetings at which prominent English suffragists were invited to speak and worked to overcome the "prevailing ignorance" of Dubliners regarding votes for women; copies of the *Women's Suffrage Journal* were deposited in reading-rooms and libraries all over the city.

Many members of Parliament who supported women's suffrage brought bills to Parliament, none of which succeeded, despite considerable support. This was because suffrage bills never received government support and it was notoriously difficult for private members' bills to

succeed in parliament. There was huge disappointment when the 1884 Reform Act, which significantly extended the male franchise, did not include a clause giving the vote to women householders.

Anna Haslam, aided by the writings of her husband Thomas, continued the fight, and in 1896 women in Ireland won the right to be elected as Poor Law Guardians, members of the official bodies which administered the Poor Law. Anna then spearheaded a campaign to encourage qualified women to stand for election. In 1898 women won eligibility to vote in local government elections, and to stand for election as rural and urban district councillors. This was a significant breakthrough which made the case for parliamentary suffrage compelling, when one considers the absurdity of being voted onto bodies which administered the law while being precluded from having a voice in the parliament which framed that law. By the end of 1898 there were 85 women Poor Law Guardians, 31 of whom were also rural district councillors. In acknowledgement the DWSA changed its name to Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (IWSLGA).

The 20th century saw the rise of the suffragette movement in England, followed in Ireland by the foundation of the Irish Women's Franchise League (IWFL) by Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and Gretta Cousins, who had been recruited by Anna as members of the IWSLGA. Anna continued her constitutional efforts, although overshadowed by the militant, younger and more flamboyant campaign of the IWFL. In February 1918, over 50 years after the Mill petition was presented to Parliament, the Representation of People Act enfranchised women over 30 in Great Britain and Ireland. In December 1918, she recorded her vote in the midst of "an admiring feminine throng". In 1914 Francis Sheehy Skeffington wrote that the achievements of Thomas and Anna Haslam were too often forgotten by those "who have entered into the harvest of their labours." They deserve to be remembered.

## Divisions run deep

Ethnicity and class were just some of the pressures facing Ulster's suffrage movement.

*Diana Urquhart*

Ulster was home to an array of suffrage organisations. The North of Ireland Women's Suffrage Society was established by pioneering feminist Isabella Tod circa 1873.

By 1914 there were 20 suffrage associations with a collective membership of 1,000, ranging from the militant Belfast-based Irish Women's Suffrage Society (IWSS) to constitutional bodies such as the Church League for Women's Suffrage. A branch of the Men's Political Union was established in Belfast, the only all-male suffrage society ever operative in Ireland. Attempts were made to unify the movement. The Irish Women's Suffrage Federation (IWSF), formed on the suggestion of Miss L A Walkington of Lisburn Suffrage Society, provided some cohesion, but, although an all-Ireland, politically neutral body, it never embraced all the groups, excluding more militant organisations from its ranks. Some organisations aligned to it also flouted its policy of neutrality. Whitehead Suffrage Society, for example, closed meetings with a rendition of the national anthem, vocally identifying with unionism.

In Ulster, as elsewhere, middle-class women formed the kernel of the suffrage movement, though considerable efforts were made to make the vote seem relevant to all classes. Addressing an open-air meeting at Belfast's Ormeau Park in 1913, Mrs Chambers, a particularly vocal Ulster suffragist, emphasised the fallacy of denying women the vote: "The Law . . . says a woman is quite competent to perform a surgical operation, yet not tell the difference between Joe Devlin and Sir Edward Carson . . . if it were women's work to fit the children to go into the world, it was equally important to see that the world was a fit place for their children." Lunchtime suffrage meetings were held outside factories in Belfast and Derry and petitions were signed, but progress was limited. This prompted radical bodies such as the IWSS into militancy, which further divided the movement.

The political climate of the period was challenging for suffragists. Political parties saw women's suffrage as a divisive issue and none would adopt the cause, and, in an Irish context, many focused solely on home rule. The IWSS remarked: "In Belfast, nothing will be entertained but home rule struggling with unionism." Many suffragists were antagonistic towards women who worked either for or against home rule without aligning this to the suffrage cause; this stance deprived the movement of much support.

In 1913, the unionist leader, Sir Edward Carson, himself opposed to suffrage, unexpectedly announced that women's suffrage would be granted under plans for a provisional government in Ulster.

Suffragists claimed a victory, but Carson's pledge was never confirmed or fulfilled. Following the formal constitution of the unionist provisional government in September 1913, no mention was made of women, Carson emphasising "they wanted men who would devote

their time and make great sacrifices". Pessimism concerning unionist sincerity became widespread amongst suffragists and their criticism of unionist women intensified, ridiculing the 115,000 members of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council for "crawling servility" to male unionists.

Reneging on this pledge also prompted the establishment of a branch of the British-based Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded by the Pankhursts, in Belfast, placing the city in what contemporaries called a "genuine revolution". Militant tactics in Ulster such as window-breaking, cutting telephone wires, destroying mail and heckling politicians predated the arrival of the WSPU.

From late 1912 the IWSS had turned to militancy, arguing that "if legalised protection of little children could be brought a week nearer by our vote, [they] defied . . . women . . . to say that we would not be right to burn down every public building". The level of militancy increased dramatically with the WSPU's arrival; the IWSS was absorbed into its ranks by April 1914.

Dorothy Evans, the WSPU's Ulster organiser, wrote a series of letters to Carson, and members of the Belfast WSPU held a four-and-a-half-day vigil at his London home. Carson eventually received this deputation, but blamed his party's disunity on the question for not pushing for suffrage. Evans, at a meeting in Belfast's Ulster Hall, "declared war" on Carson. Carson became the keynote of a campaign, culminating in a bomb attack on Lisburn's Church of Ireland Cathedral on July 31st, 1914. Such acts provoked widespread hostility; the four women arrested for this attack needed police protection from angry crowds. Thirteen women were arrested for militancy in Ulster from March to August 1914, using thirst and hunger strikes of up to six days duration to secure their release.

Suffragettes called a truce on the outbreak of the first World War, though a minority continued campaigning. Some, like Belfast militant Margaret McCoubrey, combined suffrage with pacifism; others, like the northern committee of the IWSF, conjoined war work with suffrage. The dynamism of the pre-war suffrage campaign was never regained; political differences always divisive to the movement only intensified after women's partial enfranchisement and the war's end in 1918.

## Opponents of the cause

Educated women were among those arguing that female suffrage would damage society.

*Leeann Lane*

In 1867 the all-male House of Commons at Westminster rejected John Stuart Mill's amendment to the Franchise Reform Bill to allow women the vote on the same property terms as men. This anti-women's suffrage statement at the highest level of the establishment was repeated over the next five decades. The same anti-female suffrage tone was reflected in the dominant discourse of the period. The churches, medical profession and the legal profession all promoted an understanding of woman's role in society as wife and mother with a limited, if any, public role. However, it would be a mistake to see the anti-suffrage voice as solely male. Both men and women wrote and organised against female suffrage in the period between 1866-1918.

The rejection of Mill's amendment led to the establishment of formal suffrage societies in England and Ireland. In turn, a strong anti-suffrage voice crystallised, and found expression in both prescriptive literature, and at certain flashpoints, most notably with the growth of militant suffragism in the early twentieth century, in formal anti-suffrage societies. Humour was frequently used to ridicule and minimise the demands of suffrage activists; they were depicted as mannish, hysterical, unhinged, the polar opposite of the domesticated woman in the home who was central to the correct ordering of society on gender lines.

Anti-suffragists upheld the ideology of separate spheres and the notion of complementarity rather than equality. Men and women had different roles in the world and different traits to enable them to fulfil these. Men operated in the public sphere of work and politics; women's role was as wife and mother within the domestic sphere, although even there male authority was pre-eminent.

Society, Rev Gregg said in 1856 in a sermon in Trinity Church in Dublin, "does best when each sex performs the duties for which it is especially ordained". Opponents of female suffrage emphasised women's role as guardians of moral values and transmitters of these values to the next generation as wives and mothers. Every mother, The Nun of Kenmare wrote in 1874, "is forming the future generation". Mothers were the "regenerators of the world". She feared this vital role would be damaged by exposure to the political world, and the circulating "liberal opinions", a reference to the suffrage campaign.

In the Irish Monthly in 1913 journalist Nora Tynan O'Mahony ringingly declared against the vote; it could never compensate women for the loss "of the love and reverence of men and the clinging trustful confidence of little children".

She wrote of the "degenerate days of militant suffragettism and similar foolishness if not actual wickedness". The harshness of political life was not compatible with the essentialist meekness, humility and self-sacrifice accorded to women under the ideology of separate spheres. A "true mother", O'Mahony wrote, "has no thought of self". For anti-suffragists,

involvement in political life would tarnish women and consequently threaten the ordering of a stable society.

In Ireland, as elsewhere, there was a strong ecclesiastical voice in opposition to women's suffrage. The churches, Catholic and Protestant, supported the image of the morally and spiritually superior woman located within the home but bound by patriarchal authority.

The common law concept that a married woman's legal existence merged into that of her husband was being steadily dismantled by the married women's property acts, but it was still influential and underpinned a central anti-suffragist argument that a wife did not need the vote as her husband's vote expressed her political view.

There was widespread fear within society at the prospect of the female vote. Political parties feared how women would cast their vote. Another fear was that the vote would in turn bring demand for further equality. The spectre of shifting gender roles, and consequently society turned upside down, can be seen in many of the writings and pronouncements against votes for women. If women received the vote they would be entitled to sit in parliament, bringing further unwelcome and fear-provoking change.

Moreover, the female vote would strike at the heart of the family, damaging the relationship between husband and wife and putting the future of children, and consequently society, at risk. Crucially it might subvert the patriarchal order. Rev David Barry, writing in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* in 1909, addressed the possibility of a woman "casting her vote for the candidate that is opposed . . . to her father and husband". A woman was, Barry wrote, supposed to be "shielded by her male relatives from most of the hardships and disabilities of citizenship".

In the domestic sphere the final word was that of the husband. Why then, he wrote, should she "be accorded an autonomy in outside affairs that is denied her in the home?" Barry's picture of a husband and wife with opposing political views makes clear his patriarchal view of marriage. A wife who disrespects her husband's authority threatens the unity of the "domestic kingdom" and in that way "children are disedified".

"But how much worse," he continued, "would these evils be intensified if the bickering and contentions became public; if they appeared on opposing platforms and denounced each other."

The anti-suffrage position was more complex than total opposition to women's role in the public sphere, and it is important to recognise the variety of voices and arguments advanced. In July 1908 the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League was founded in England, and an Irish branch was formed the following year in Dublin. Many of the league's principal organisers, while opposed to the parliamentary vote for women, did see them having a role in the public sphere more in keeping with their nurturing, caring traits. In England, Mrs Humphry Ward, despite insisting on defining herself and being defined by others by her status as her husband's wife, cannot be dismissed as a mere reactionary in terms of women's rights. She kept her family financially afloat through her earning power as a novelist, and in

early life had been to the forefront in establishing the first women's college in Oxford, Somerville College. Mrs Maud Bernard saw nothing incompatible between her membership of the Irish branch of the Women's Anti-Suffrage League and the fact that her daughter would be recorded in the 1911 census as an undergraduate at Trinity College Dublin.

Members of the league argued for women's distinctive role in public life, an argument used by suffragists themselves throughout the campaign from 1866. According to this argument women should bring their nurturing, caring qualities into public life and civilise politics.

For anti-suffrage activists this was best done at local political level. In 1898 Irish women had won the vote for all local government bodies although they could not sit on county councils until 1911. However, while arguing that women had a role in local politics, league members adamantly opposed their attaining the parliamentary vote. Like all anti-suffragists, they argued that women and men had different roles in society and did not need equal political rights. In the words of Angela Dickens, grand-daughter of Charles Dickens, speaking in Dublin on April 21st, 1909: "What was called the irresponsible vote – the vote of the man who does not know and does not care – was already sufficiently large. Woman, if she devotes her time to domestic work – what time had she for the study of Imperial politics?"

## Margaret McCoubrey (1880-1955)

*Diane Urquhart*

Scottish-born Margaret McCoubrey's interests spanned socialism and feminism. Marriage to an Irish trade unionist brought her to Belfast in 1905, where she joined the militant Irish Women's Suffrage Society which was absorbed into the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1914.

An active suffragette, McCoubrey was under police surveillance by 1914. She believed militancy continued a long Irish tradition of protest. Her commitment to suffrage led her to reject the WSPU truce called on the outbreak of the first World War.

Also a pacifist, she ran a lone month-long peace and suffrage campaign in Belfast in August 1917, believing that "a woman looking down on a battlefield would not see dead Germans or dead Englishmen but so many mothers' sons". Post-war socialism and feminism combined in her work as general secretary to the Co-operative Guild and secretary to its women's wing.

A contributor to socialist press, and a member of the Independent Labour Party, she was elected to Belfast Corporation as a labour councillor for Dock Ward in 1920. She was defeated by six votes in March 1929. The Irish Times depicted her as "a notable Belfast woman" and "one of the most energetic and best-informed public women in the city . . . prominent in all social and political reform movements". However, she brought a successful petition for unionist personation and in May was declared elected by one vote. From 1933 she ran a non-profit-making holiday home for Belfast working girls in Carnlough, Co Antrim.

## Denial of citizenship

The Irish Free State said it would ensure equality for women, but it turned out to be a false promise.

*Maryann Gialanella Valiulis*

One of the questions facing the Cosgrave government in 1922 with the establishment of the Irish Free State was the role of women in the new State. Despite the bitterness of the Civil War there were reasons to believe that women would be treated as full citizens. The 1916 Proclamation of the Republic had claimed the “allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman” and guaranteed “equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens”. There was women’s active and important contribution to the Anglo-Irish war. Both pro-Treaty and anti-Treaty feminist women had maintained pressure for full equality in the 1922 Constitution, and Article 3 stated: “Every person, without distinction of sex . . . shall enjoy . . . the privileges and be subject to the obligations of . . . citizenship.” Despite anti-Treatyites’ low expectations of the new government, all nationalist feminists could enter the Free State with expectations of full citizenship.

All had their hopes dashed. Both Cumann na nGaedheal governments led by Cosgrave in the 1920s and Fianna Fáil governments led by de Valera in the 1930s enacted legislation depriving women of a number of rights. Both governments appeared determined to confine women to a domestic role. Though women could now vote for and sit in both Dáil and Seanad, few women were elected to the Dáil until the 1980s. There were five women TDs in 1923 and three in 1943. All were elected on party lines and none openly supported feminist issues. In the Seanad a few committed women senators did, notably Jennie Wyse Power.

Outside the Oireachtas, however, feminists were active. During the 1920s, a number of women’s groups resurfaced, some recasting themselves after suffrage had been won. The Irish Women Citizens and Local Government Association had changed the original “suffrage” in its title to “citizen”, and worked to encourage women’s citizenship. Both the National University and the Dublin University women graduate associations were active. There was also the Irish Women’s Equality League, formed to protect women’s interests, and the Irish branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. In 1924, an umbrella organisation, the National Council of Women of Ireland, was established “to promote joint action among women’s organisations in Ireland and to stimulate thought and cooperation on all questions of social interest”. Depending on the issue, other women’s organisations came forward.

The issue of jury service first galvanised feminists into action. In 1924, the government proposed to exempt all women from jury service. Feminist opposition succeeded in having the 1924 Juries Act retain women on the jurors’ list while allowing any woman to choose to opt out. The government did not deem this a success. In 1927 it again introduced a bill removing women from jury service. Feminist opposition again modified it to some extent, but

when passed the 1927 Act exempted women from jury service while allowing a woman to opt in if she so chose.

While the bills were going through the Oireachtas, feminists argued that removing women from jury service violated the Constitution's equality clause. It was not a question of women wanting to sit on juries but of women fulfilling their responsibilities as citizens. Further, women jurors would benefit the legal system, especially in cases where the accused were women and children. Feminists reminded the government that women had run Dáil courts during the Anglo-Irish war, had served on county councils, and were qualified and ready for jury service.

Women were also restricted in terms of jobs and careers. Three pieces of legislation stand out. In 1925 the Cosgrave government introduced the Civil Service Regulation Bill which limited the right of women to sit for competitive examinations in the Civil Service. The 1932 marriage bar required women National School teachers to retire on marriage, a bar eventually extended to the entire Civil Service. In 1935 the de Valera government piloted the Conditions of Employment Bill that gave the Minister for Industry and Commerce authority to limit the number of women employed in any given industry and limit the type of industries that could employ women.

Women's paid employment outside the home was a contentious issue. Debates on the Conditions of Employment Bill revealed a growing sentiment that women needed to be returned to the home, the bastion of domesticity. For many participants employment was a man's right that needed protection from the upsurge of women workers. Little thought was given to single women and married women who had to support their families.

In the Dáil the Labour Party supported the government's provisions, but in the Seanad Jennie Wyse Power argued that women had earned inclusion in the public sphere, whether Civil Service, jury box or factory floor, through their participation in the revolutionary struggle. No men, she claimed, ever had such loyal, devoted and competent comrades. These same men telling them they were not competent seemed much like betrayal.

Outside the Oireachtas Louie Bennett led the fight for the Irish Women Workers' Union (IWWU), calling for equal wages for men and women and for letting merit prevail. But it seemed meritocracy was not to be. As Helena Molony of the IWWU remarked, there was no standing shoulder to shoulder on this issue. The government, feminists claimed, were driving women, especially young women, out of the factories, telling them where they could work and restricting their numbers in other industries. To some this smacked of fascism.

Women's organisations contested all these measures. They wrote letters to Dáil deputies, to senators, to the major newspapers. They met ministers. They held public meetings. They argued that the core issue at stake was the equality guaranteed in the Constitution. They proposed a society based on merit rather than on patriarchal principles. For example, those with the highest scores in Civil Service examinations should be appointed. Women should not be excluded because they were married and they pointed out that many women never married and they too were denied job prospects.

Despite feminists' best efforts, despite the fact that the Civil Service Amendment Bill was defeated in the Seanad and narrowly escaped defeat in the Dáil, despite the efforts of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation to fight the marriage bar and the IWWU to protest the Conditions of Employment Bill, the measures all came into effect. Nevertheless, throughout the 1920s and 1930s feminists continually contested anti-women legislation. While failing to stop the onslaught, feminists exposed it and challenged the curtain of respectability that the Free State drew over its legislation of inequality.

Feminist activism continued through the 1930s and succeeding decades. The Joint Committee of Women's Societies and Social Workers was formed in 1935 to monitor – and oppose if necessary – social legislation affecting women and girls. Feminists contested various provisions in the draft 1937 constitution. They succeeded in getting some amended, and set up the Women's Social and Progressive League to develop active participation by women in politics.

As well as opposing retrograde legislation, feminists worked for advancement in areas such as female education, employment opportunities, equal pay and promotion prospects, and support for widows and unmarried mothers. In 1970, just as second-wave feminism was emerging in Ireland, the established groups succeeded in getting the first Commission on the Status of Women set up. The torch was passed on.

## Mary Hayden (1862-1942)

*Joyce Padbury*

“*A flagrant and crying injustice, which should not be tolerated another instant,*” was how Mary Hayden, addressing the Irish Women’s Franchise League (May 14th, 1912), described the denial of votes for women.

Hayden, whose background was Catholic middle-class Dublin, was one of the earliest women graduates of the Royal University of Ireland, BA (1885), MA (1887), one of the first two women to win the Junior Fellowship of the University (1895), and a founder of the Irish Association of Women Graduates and Candidate Graduates (1902).

As a past pupil of Alexandra College, Hayden participated in debates on woman’s suffrage, and became an admirer and close associate of Anna Haslam, founder of the Irish Women’s Suffrage and Local Government Association, which Hayden joined. Convinced that women should be responsible citizens, she advocated, in her article *Training of Irish Girls for Citizenship* (1908), a wide-ranging curriculum, to cultivate a sense of public duty.

Hayden became the first professor of modern Irish history at UCD (1911-38). Presiding at a mass meeting of suffrage groups (June 1st, 1912), Hayden called “*in a perfectly constitutional manner for the redress of a great wrong*”. Though opposing militant protests as counterproductive, she sought justice in the treatment of protesters.

Involved in various suffrage groups, in 1915 she and Mary Gwynn established another, the Irish Catholic Women’s Suffrage Association, to attract more Catholic women to the movement. Throughout her life she publicly advocated women’s rights, including demands for full citizenship in both the 1922 and 1937 constitutions.

## Feminism now

Many women are unwilling to call themselves feminists but would be appalled to give up the rights won by their predecessors.

*Susan Mckay*

Feminism is a “*deeply subversive vision*” said poet Catherine Phil MacCarthy, who had been invited, in an imaginative move, by the Irish Feminist Network to open its 2012 conference on Feminist Activism in Ireland, Past Present and Future. As MacCarthy spoke the simmering among angry young women in the room was wonderful.

Linda Kelly, co-founder of Cork Feminista, has described the fury with which she and other young Irish feminists hear older feminists lamenting that young women nowadays are just not interested in feminism, and don’t appreciate the battles it took to win them freedoms they take for granted. This despite what Kelly sees as a significant resurgence of activity, particularly among students. “*The result is devastating,*” she writes. “*A generation of excited and passionate activists is slowly being made to feel invisible.*”

Kelly says that “*our generation is simply figuring out our own way of doing things*” with “*online connections with well-thought-out branding*” as the tool of choice to engage young audiences. Groups “command popular support across new media sites like Facebook, Twitter and their own blogs that get tens of thousands of hits.” They are contending with the flourishing of online pornography, while a kind of retro-sexism has become ubiquitous in mainstream advertising.

Aisling O’Connor of conference organiser Sibéal (a network of postgraduate students working on gender studies) says that young feminists have also taken part in, and initiated protests over, issues like cuts to social welfare support for lone parents (the vast majority of whom are women) and for changes to abortion law. She notes, interestingly, that many of these young people are unwilling to call themselves feminists. It may take more than branding to solve that dilemma.

“*So many people think that the women’s movement was born on some mystical date in 1970, like Aphrodite rising from the waves,*” wrote Hilda Tweedy, explaining why she wrote the story of the Irish Housewives Association, which she helped set up in the 1940s. In reality, she continued: “*It has been a long continuous battle in which many women have struggled to gain equality, each generation adding something to the achievements of the past.*”

The fine essays in this supplement will help us rise to what Mary Cullen has identified as the challenge to incorporate feminist history in the mainstream, We must learn from our history. There is much to celebrate, because feminist campaigns from the late 19th to the early 21st centuries have led to, and continue to bring about, huge advances in women’s rights in this country. Make no mistake, we would not have the right to vote, to get a divorce, to obtain contraception or demand redress for discrimination in the workplace, without feminists having struggled.

We would not know of the horrific extent of male violence against women and children. We would not have this year's Electoral Amendment Bill. Feminists have confronted the shame which was used to oppress earlier generations of women, in, for example, Magdalene laundries. They have played a central role in the modernising of Irish society.

However, feminism has never become popular. Many women in Ireland who assert their rights and show solidarity with, and compassion for, other women, insist they are not feminists. The Irish women's movement has been riven by quarrels and splits, notably over the national question. There has been a dearth of new ideas on questions of class, an intolerance of dissent.

The contribution men can make remains uneasily undefined. Having, in Michael D Higgins, a male president who is avowedly a feminist, and has a record of activism to prove it, should help.

Structures have been problematic. Feminist organisations have struggled with tensions between respectability and the radical, subversive nature of their political analysis. The withdrawal of state funding has been used to silence protest.

Irish feminism has often seemed strangely uncomfortable with powerful women, and has a troubled tradition of only begrudgingly handing over the mantle to the next generation. The late June Levine described feminists of the mid 1970s as "*young, brilliant, bursting with energy and commitment*". They were ready to toss the old guard of feminism aside to make way for the new. One of the most brilliant of that generation, journalist Nell McCafferty, went on to chart the fierce "wars of the womb" of the 1980s, when feminists were pitted against the "unborn".

In 2011 McCafferty said on radio that Irish feminism had gone. It hadn't survived that onslaught. It might rise again some time in the future, but for now, it had disappeared.

It hadn't, of course. It had just changed. Flamboyant gestures like the Contraceptive Train had yielded to the hard graft of running services, raising funds, lobbying European and international bodies. A new generation was rising – as Ivana Bacik has pointed out, it was student feminists (among whom she was prominent), who went on to lead the struggle for abortion rights in the aftermath of the X rape case in 1992. That campaign continues, with the Irish Family Planning Association working alongside feminist activists including Choice Ireland and the new Action X group, as well as supporting women who took cases to the European Court of Human Rights.

Those who fought so hard and selflessly for our suffrage would be appalled by the current gender balance in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Just 15 per cent of TDs are women. Bacik, in her role as a Senator, has made a huge contribution to our understanding of why this democratic deficit persists. The new law, which penalises parties which do not apply candidate selection quotas, will certainly bring some degree of change. However, it does not apply to local elections, where many politicians cut their teeth, and currently just 17 per cent of councillors are women.

Candidate selection is also, of course, just one of five key barriers to female progress. A serious and radical programme of actions to make public life in Ireland family friendly will be needed and there is no sign that investment in this is contemplated. Significant numbers of the women who have made it into the male bastion of Irish politics have done so as part of political dynasties, while others toe conservative party lines and make no effort to bring about change for other women.

Some of our relatively powerless senators have been the strongest advocates of feminism – as well as Bacik, Senator Susan O’Keeffe has promoted the 50/50 campaign with its clear goal of having half of Irish politicians female by 2020. Katherine Zappone has campaigned for gay rights, including marriage.

The new generation of feminists has to deal with a government (like the one before it) which has ignored international warnings that women’s equality is central to economic growth and should not be compromised during hard times.

Women still earn less than men, and are rare in Irish boardrooms. Irish women still overwhelmingly have responsibility for childcare, elder care and housework, trapping many, particularly among the poor, in the domestic sphere.

Sexism has deep and tangled roots in our Irish culture, and there is also a strong sense today of feminist responsibility in a global context.

Migrant women in Ireland are part of today’s womens movement and have particular needs. As Mary Robinson highlights elsewhere in this supplement, climate change is impoverishing and displacing millions of women.

There are horrific levels of domestic and sexual violence here and around the world. We should be glad that there are young feminists biting at the heels of their more established sisters. All of their energy is needed, all of their passion, their necessary willingness to be subversive.

## Contributors

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