

## HOMWORK HELPSHEET / REVISION FILE

### BACKGROUND

Before the war women had been treated as second-class citizens in Britain. There were many jobs that only men could apply for and women were paid less than men even when they did the same work. Most important of all women did not have the right to vote. Since 1903 the Women's Social and Political Union had been campaigning to get votes for women. The government was opposed to this. At first suffragettes campaigned peacefully. They held meetings and sent out petitions and pamphlets. They questioned M.Ps at public meetings. They put up posters, sent letters to newspapers and published their own newspapers. Marches and rallies were held to get publicity. When this did not work they began to use militant tactics. In Scotland the militant suffragettes took the following action:-

- They firebombed public buildings and burned down the stand at Ayr racecourse
  - They slashed the Kings portrait in the National gallery.
  - The Wallace sword was stolen by suffragettes.
  - They assaulted police officers.
  - Suffragettes assaulted the Prime Minister when he visited Scotland.
  - They smashed windows disrupted political meetings and set fire to post boxes.
  - They protested by chaining themselves to railings and interrupting political meetings.
  - Suffragettes who were arrested and sent to prison went on hunger strikes.
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- When war broke out Mrs Pankhurst the suffragette leader ended the campaign and urged all suffragettes to help in the war effort. Thousands of women took over jobs of all kinds, as more and more men were needed on the western front.
  - The government used propaganda to persuade women to volunteer for work. They were told they would be helping their sons, brothers or fathers at the front.
  - Women worked in almost every type of job -drivers, delivering milk and mail, managing businesses, engineering and all other work done by men.
  - Women made up the workforce in munitions factories making the millions of shells needed for the war. This was very skilled and extremely dangerous work.
  - Many women volunteered to serve as nurses. This often meant working close to the fighting and dealing with men who had suffered horrific wounds.
  - Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADS) were formed. They provided support to the army as nurses, drivers, cooks, clerks, and mechanics and often worked overseas.
  - The food shortages caused by the German U-Boats led to the setting up of the Women's Land Army - many women worked on farms producing vital food supplies.
  - Women's branches of the armed services were formed during the war. Women did not actually fight but they did carry out important work to assist the fighting troops.
  - Many women's organizations such as the WRVS organized collections of food and tobacco to send to troops at the front. Often they would knit gloves and scarves.
  - For many women the war was a liberating experience. For the first time they were able to get out of the house and learn new skills and earn good wages.
  - In 1918 the contribution that women had made to the war effort was recognized and women over thirty were given the right to vote. In 1928 this was extended to all women over 21 years.