

WILPF and The Clapham Film Unit present

These Dangerous Women

A Heritage Lottery Funded project

Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence

1867-1954

By Rasa Goštautaitė

“arrested for attempting to make a speech in the lobby of the House of Commons”

Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence was born on 21 October 1867 in a small town of Clifton, near to Bristol. She was the second of 13 children in a prosperous middle class family. At the age of eight, Emmeline was sent to boarding school, where she was seen by her teachers, as a rebellious child. She was later moved to a Quaker school, where she was accused of corrupting the other children.

In the 1890s Emmeline became interested in socialists ideas, those later played a huge role in her life. At the same time she became a voluntary social worker at the West London Methodist Mission. She also helped to organise a club for young working-class girls, as Emmeline believed that it was important that girls see an example of socialism in action. She was an active participant of the suffragette movement.

In 1901, Emmeline married Frederick Lawrence, who was involved in women movements and the fight for equality. After the wedding, Emmeline spent her time helping the Independent Labour Party. Then, in 1907, Emmeline and Frederick began publishing the *Votes for Women* journal whilst their London home became to be suffragettes' refuge. The husband and wife even went on a hunger strike together.

After reading of Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney's arrest in 1905, Emmeline became friends with the two women and joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). A couple of months later, she was arrested for attempting to make a speech in the lobby of House of Commons. Her arrest led to the first of six prison sentences that Emmeline ended up serving.

Eventually, Emmeline's and Christabel Pankhurst's friendship broke up over the arson campaign which Pankhurst encouraged, and with which Emmeline and Frederick strongly disagreed. As a result of their disagreement, Christabel Pankhurst expelled Emmeline and Frederick from the WSPU, an action that was to have a profound effect on Emmeline.



It did not deter her however, and she continued to work for the suffrage cause and spent a lot of time writing for her journal, *Votes for Women*. She joined the Women's Freedom League and was a prominent member of the Women's International League for Peace during World War 1.

Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence was one of the three British women who succeeded in reaching The Hague in 1915. She travelled with the American delegation as she had been on a speaking tour in America. They were delayed on government orders in the English Channel and reached The Hague just as the Congress was due to open.

From 1926 to 1935 she was president of the Women's Freedom League.

Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence was a prominent suffragette, who did an immense amount of work and contributed a lot towards the fight for universal suffrage. She died of a heart attack on 11 March 1954 and her mourning husband wrote to his friend: "I feel a bit dazed. It is as though I was at a violin concerto with the violinist absent."

