

## ***Deeds Not Words: The Story of Women's Rights, Then and Now, by Helen Pankhurst. Didactics, education, fight.***

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### **ABSTRACT**

As stated in the first chapters of this book, *politics and money*, men were entitled to leisure and entertainment while women were treated as mere objects as they focused on doing housework and caring for their children and husbands, the latter being the head of the family, since women could not be in contact with any political or economic dealings. Nevertheless, gradually, this began to change.

**Keywords:** Anthropology, Didactics, Education, Politics and government, Rights and privileges, Sociology, Women's Liberation Movement.

## **Hechos, no palabras: la historia de los derechos de las mujeres, antes y ahora, por Helen Pankhurst. Didáctica, educación, lucha.**

### **RESUMEN**

Como se decía en los primeros capítulos de este libro, *política y dinero*, los hombres tenían derecho al ocio y al entretenimiento, mientras que las mujeres eran tratadas como meros objetos, ya que se centraban en hacer las tareas del hogar y cuidar de sus hijos y maridos, siendo estos últimos quienes ejercían de cabeza de familia, ya que las mujeres no podían estar en contacto con ninguna cuestión política o económica. Sin embargo, poco a poco esto empezó a cambiar.

**Palabras clave:** Antropología, Didáctica, Educación, Política y gobierno, Derechos y privilegios, Sociología, Movimiento de Liberación de la Mujer.

## **Ações, não palavras: a história dos direitos das mulheres, antes e agora, por Helen Pankhurst. Didática, educação, luta.**

### **RESUMO**

Como dito nos primeiros capítulos deste livro, *política e dinheiro*, os homens tinham direito ao lazer e ao entretenimento, enquanto as mulheres eram tratadas como meros objetos, pois se concentravam nas tarefas domésticas e no cuidado dos filhos e dos maridos. Os que atuavam como chefes de família, uma vez que as mulheres não podiam ter contato com quaisquer questões políticas ou econômicas. Porém, aos poucos isso começou a mudar.

**Palavras-chave:** Antropologia, Didática, Educação, Política e governo, Direitos e privilégios, Sociologia, Movimento de Libertação das Mulheres.

Analysing in more detail one of the most important movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, known as the Women's Liberation Movement, it is worth mentioning the book written by Helen Pankhurst, *Deeds Not Words: The Story of Women's Rights, Then and Now*. Thanks to the great-granddaughter of Emmeline Pankhurst and granddaughter of Sylvia Pankhurst, we can get an insight into this movement since the author, Helen, provides us first-hand information, because, in a few words, she has been a participant in the stories that these important leaders of the suffragette movement, Emmeline Pankhurst and Sylvia Pankhurst, have told her (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 19).

As detailed in the title of her book, the motto of the suffragette campaign led by the Pankhurst family, Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), "Deeds, Not Words", not only shows us a historical perspective of what happened during those years but also a contemporary approach, emphasising that they had to take to violent struggle to be heard. However, this violence continues nowadays because there is still no complete equality in the different spheres, be it political, social or economic, so that these sexist norms often define the lives of citizens, our lives (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 1). For this reason, the main aim of Helen Pankhurst is not only to make known the different experiences and deals that women have had to suffer in this harsh society, but also for the men who read it to put themselves in their shoes and reflect on how women have lived these situations (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 5).

Nowadays, "the Pankhurst family name and legacy continue". Helen's father, Richard, defends Ethiopia's cultural heritage with her mother Sylvia and Helen's mother, Rita, is "involved in ensuring the existence of the women's library and has written a book about Ethiopian women in history", including her brother (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 21). Besides, her "personal life, academic background and career have had international feminism at their core" (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 22). As she highlights:

I have never identified myself as a feminist; to me, it was a niche group of women who represented something that I felt alienated from, especially as I have never seen my

gender hold me back – thank you mum and dad. But joining the suffragettes at the London Olympics, and indeed on our ventures since, I have learnt that my privilege stems from others fighting for my rights and saying this is not right. I wear the feminist badge with honour now and I would encourage others to do the same.

There was much talk around the Olympics about legacy and for me this legacy -our legacy- has been most unexpected. It's been about new and continuing friendships and an awareness of the issues that still affect women today and knowing that collectively - continuing the work of the suffragettes- change can happen (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 22).

In fact, the most representative figures of the suffragette campaign of this feminist movement, WSPU, have been represented in the well-known British 2015 film, *Suffragette*: Emmeline Pankhurst (played by Meryl Streep), Maud Watts (Carey Mulligan), Emily Davison (Natalie Press), Edith Ellyn (Helena Bonham) and Violet Miller (Anne-Marie Duff), among others. Directed by Sarah Gavron, this film vindicates women' rights through violent actions and hunger strikes in prisons in order to achieve a law with equal conditions for men and women, not only in the workplace but also in the social sphere, thus focusing on one of the protagonists, Watts. She evolves through it since, at the beginning, she is a mere worker in a laundry, but then she becomes a suffragette activist when she realises the many injustices she was suffering at the time; such as the economic inequality experienced by women despite working more than men, or the sexual violence she had to suffer at the hands of her boss, which was also consented by her husband (Morgan, 2015).

As stated in the first chapters of this book, *politics and money*, men were entitled to leisure and entertainment while women were treated as mere objects as they focused on doing housework and caring for their children and husbands, the latter being the head of the family, since women could not be in contact with any political or economic dealings. Nevertheless, gradually, this began to change. As the journalist Emma Barnett details: "In a world still dominated by men at the upper echelons of the society, there has been something comforting and bloody brilliant about having a female monarch at the helm of our country – year in, year out" (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 26).

Many years of conflict were experienced not only by women but also by the different parties, and then, the 1918 Act was passed giving some women the right to vote (Rosen, 2013, pp. 255-256). Thanks to this ongoing struggle for their rights:

In 1918, 8.5 million women in UK, just under 40 per cent of the electorate, were added to the 13 million male electorate; then in 1929, the first election where all women over

twenty-one could vote, for the first time there were more women voters, 15 million, compared with 13.5 million men. (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 29)

Another of the important issues addressed throughout the women's suffrage and one of the chapters in this book is politics because, as I have mentioned above, "even before women entered Parliament, they were involved in party-political organisations" since they were able to hold parties to account on gender issues, although they were not as successful in forming alliances with other parties (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 37). Moreover, in agreement with Justine Greening's opinion:

Less than 100 years ago women were absent from our polling stations. A century later, as a woman working in politics and as Minister for Women and Equalities, I couldn't be prouder to see more women than ever before elected to Parliament. This progress is to be applauded – and we are going in the right direction, but this is no time to let up the pressure. (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 47).

In a few words, the determination of the pioneers of the Women's Liberation Movement were crucial not only to be accepted in politics but also in other environments and institutions. According to Ursula's experience:

My husband's parting shot when we separated was that I was a bad wife because I couldn't even cook properly. But I didn't want to be domesticated like my mother who was unhappy, asking what do you want for dinner, always stirring the pot, standing there, always in the kitchen, every day. I didn't cook because I wanted to be free – consciously not tied like she was. I still cannot cook the dishes my mother cooked, and I think it's because I associate them with a limited life, with my mother's life. (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 119).

Nevertheless, nowadays, some men are beginning to put themselves in women's shoes, helping them with household chores, for example. In fact, it can be said that we find more women participating in political parties and that the working environment has improved, although there is still not complete equality.

On the other hand, imprisonments and hunger strikes were also vital to achieve their main goal, especially the Cat and Mouse Act. While the authorities represented the figure of the "cat", the suffragettes were the "mouse" (Bartley, 2002, pp. 155-156), since they were forced to eat in prisons, something very detailed in a scene from the film *Suffragette*. In particular, when Maud Watts was arrested and fed with a tube through her nose when she refused to eat (Morgan, 2015).

To conclude, the last chapter of *Deeds Not Words: The Story of Women's Rights, Then and Now*, power, is based on the analysis of all the factors explained above: politics, money, identity and violence, since they drive women's empowerment and shape their own future and society in general, thus examining case studies of change. In addition, women's experiences have played a key role, regardless of their health, age, family structure, sexuality, education, relative economic position and ethnicity (Pankhurst, 2019, pp. 259-260).

Moreover, I would like to point out that, in my humble opinion, the story of Helen Pankhurst has been very influential because of her family involvement, which has colored all aspects of her personal life (Pankhurst, 2019, pp. 267-268). That is why it is essential to make the invisible visible, as the motto of the WSPU represents and each of the members of this suffragette campaign did, thus being a feminist in deeds and words (Pankhurst, 2019, pp. 278-279). As Emmeline Pankhurst highlights in her speech in the British film *Suffragette*, "never give up" (Morgan, 2015), since "hope looks forward, but it draws its energies from the past, from knowing histories, including our victories, and their complexities and imperfections" (Pankhurst, 2019, p. 281).

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