

Votes for Women– Part One

FX: A crowd of marching women in a London Street chanting “DEEDS NOT WORDS! DEEDS NOT WORDS! DEEDS NOT WORDS!”

1. Constance: **“Deeds, not words.” That was our cry. That day in 1909 we suffragettes were marching to Parliament to demand the vote for women; that women as well as men should be allowed to vote in electing our government. Our Prime Minister, Mr Asquith, had *promised* it should be so, but now he’d had second thoughts: he feared that too many women might vote against his party, and bring his government down! So he *did* precisely nothing!**

FX: Cries of “DEEDS NOT WORDS!” ring out loudly again

2. Constance: **That cry of ours meant *two* things: instead of mere *promises* that the vote would be given to women, we wanted the government to *do* as they’d said; and if they wouldn’t, then we were willing to *act* as well as *speak* in protest –**

We’d come from our meeting in a nearby hall

FX: Fades to sounds of crowded but echoing hall.

3. Constance: **...and the words we’d heard from our movement’s leader, Mrs Pankhurst, were still ringing in my ears.**

4. Pankhurst: We shall be marching to Parliament not as *law-breakers*, but because women should be *law-makers*!

FX: Loud cheering.

5. Constance: **My name is Constance Lytton. My *full* name is *Lady* Constance *Bulwer*-Lytton. Some people thought it strange that I, from a family of the ruling class, should ever have been a part of such a crowd. But Mrs Pankhurst was a well-born lady too, and listen to what she said next:**

6. Pankhurst: A society that allows women no part in decision-making, cannot flourish. Beyond the home, what lives are we permitted?

Important posts are barred to us in all professions. Posts in government are just for men. Yet all their decisions affect women.

They must either do us justice, by giving us the vote, or do us violence!

FX: Cheers in the hall. Fades back to the street with the sound of the protesters clashing with the police outside of Parliament. Loud cries of "Votes for Women!" mixed in with police whistles.

7. Constance: **When we reached the Houses of Parliament, lines of policemen barred our march. Some women broke through, and chained themselves to the railings by the entrance. Meanwhile I was still outside, wedged by the crowd behind me, nose to nose with a policeman.**

8. Policeman: Back! Back! Keep back! I'm only doing my duty!

9. Constance: Yes, and we are doing ours!

10. Policeman: You should be ashamed of yourselves! Go home, the lot of you, and behave like women!

11. Constance: Like women?

12. Policeman: Yeah, get home and do the washing!

13. Constance: I must see Mr Asquith, I mean to see the Prime Minister!

14. Policeman: I don't think so, you're coming with me!

15. Constance: *(is grabbed by officer)* Ah!

16. Constance: **And I was marched to the nearest police station, and from there to court, where I was sentenced to a month's imprisonment.**

FX: The clanging of a prison door.

17. Constance: **And it was there, in Holloway Prison, that I truly realised why our cause was so important, why women *had* to be allowed to vote to change things.**

For now I was mixing with women whose lives we could improve: women without money for their children's food and even if they found work, their pay was half that of a man's!

FX: Cell door opens.

18. Constance: **I remember on my very first night, the prison chaplain came to my cell...**
19. Chaplain: I'm surprised that a lady of your class feels the need to interfere in politics.
20. Constance: I am a woman. What women face in life is not understood by men, yet men are the only law-makers!
21. Chaplain: So they are, and –
22. Constance: So women's concerns are always put to one side, forgotten.
23. Chaplain: I didn't come here to discuss your views. Here, I'm told you may have these.
- FX: The rustle of paper.
24. Constance: What? Letters, from my family?
25. Chaplain: Indeed.
26. Constance: But prisoners are not allowed to have them.
27. Chaplain: Oh, I think we can make an exception in your case, my lady.
28. Constance: I want no privilege!
29. Chaplain: You prefer to stay in all this stink?
30. Constance: Stink! Yes, that is the right word!
31. Chaplain: There's no air in here.
32. Constance: Indeed there isn't.
33. Chaplain: How will you bear it, my lady?
34. Constance: *(upset)* I am not sure I will.
35. Constance: *(with resolve)* And we're condemned to this merely for demanding the vote!
- FX: She bangs the tin mug against the bars on her door and shouts:
36. Constance: Votes for women! Votes for women!
- FX: The cry is taken up along the wing, and more inmates bang their mugs against the bars.

37. Constance: **But I have a confession. Because I have a heart condition, I gave in. I finally accepted the offer, and spent most of my month out of the stink and in the prison hospital. I was ashamed of myself. I decided that, as soon as I was released, I'd be marching with the suffragettes again. And if it landed me in prison a second time, I'd make sure I was offered no special treatment: I would suffer whatever the others suffered – for I would go not as Lady Lytton but as an ordinary working woman. My treatment so far had been bad enough but worse, much worse was to come...**

Credits

Cast:

Constance Lytton (Narrator).....Rebecca Saire

Mrs Pankhurst/Emily Davison.....Jane Whittenshaw

Policeman/Prison Chaplain and all male parts.....Daniel Weyman

Suffragettes to be played by staff from the Houses of Parliament.

Other parts to be played by members of the cast.

Sound technician: Mark Oliver, The Soundhouse Studios

Music by: Dave Cooke

Studio Director: Jeff Capel

Written by: Nigel Bryant