

Why did women get the vote in 1918?

Introduction

In 1916 the government was thinking about changing the law so that soldiers fighting in the war would be able to vote in the General Election after the war. Under the old law, voters had to live in the same place for 12 months, which would mean that many soldiers would have lost their right to vote. Women's groups decided to try to persuade the government to include them at the same time. This time they did succeed. In 1918 parliament finally passed a law which gave all women over the age of thirty the right to vote.

Questions

- 1) Why did the government need to change the law about voting rights?
- 2) Were women successful in changing the law? Give evidence to support your answer.

Task

Look at the following sources. Each source gives you a reason why women got the vote in 1918.

- a) Explain, **in your own words** what the reason was.
- b) Give a mark out of 10 to each source to show how important you think each reason was in helping women to get the vote. Which was the most important reason? Explain your choice.

Votes for Heroines as well as heroes



Source 1
A cartoon from the cover of Votes for Women magazine, 26 November 1915

Source 2 ES Montague, Minister of Munitions (weapons), 1916

Women have proved themselves able to do work that before the war was seen as only the work of men ... Where is the man now who would deny to women the rights which she has earned by her hard work?

Source 3 A school textbook, written in 1996

In 1916 and 1917 there were no demonstrations, but there were many meetings between women's leaders and politicians, and a flood of telegrams and letters were sent to MPs.

Source 4 Sylvia Pankhurst, written in 1931

People's memory of militancy (attacks on property, hunger strikes), and the certainty that it would return if the claims of women were ignored, was a much stronger factor in overcoming the reluctance of those who would again have postponed giving women the vote.

Source Skills

- i) Give one example of a Primary source and one example of a Secondary source. Explain why you have chosen each source.
- ii) Explain why source 1 could be described as propaganda.
- iii) Explain why source 4 could be described as biased.