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## **Educating and Mobilizing the New Voter: Interwar Handbooks and Female Citizenship in Great-Britain, 1918-1931**

By Véronique Molinari<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

British women's access to the electorate in 1918 and 1928 triggered off a series of efforts to reach out to the new voters both on the part of political parties and of women's groups. New organisations were created, the role of women's sections within political parties was reassessed and a wealth of propaganda material was published at election times that specifically targeted women. While some of these efforts were avowedly aimed at mobilizing the female vote in favour of a political party or around an ideological (feminist) agenda, others were seemingly simply intended to arouse women's interest in politics and educate them in their new citizenship. This was the case, in particular, of a number of handbooks that were published in the years that followed each electoral reform and that have so far been neglected by historians. This paper will seek to determine what representations of female citizenship these offered as well as what they really aimed at. Were these handbooks meant to advise women voters in their choices so as to obtain reforms advocated by the main women's groups (whether feminist or not), direct their electoral choice under the pretence of educating them in citizenship or, indeed, simply encourage them to vote and act as responsible citizens? In this respect, differences between the first and the second electoral reforms will be observed and the difficulty of putting forward a clear-cut vision of female citizenship underlined. While contributing to the understanding of attitudes and action on the question of female citizenship, this will also provide additional insight into the nature of British feminism in the post-suffrage era and into how existing divisions between its different strands could occasionally be bridged.

*Keywords:* women, citizenship, handbooks, interwar Britain

### **Introduction**

The women's movement of the interwar period in Britain was, until the mid-1990s, often presented as a declining movement, divided over its goals and the means to achieve them.<sup>2</sup> These views have since then been challenged by a number of scholars, such as Catriona Beaumont, Samantha Clements or Maggie Andrews.<sup>3</sup> Arguing that the term "women's movement" could not

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<sup>2</sup> Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace 1914-1918* (Basingstoke, 1989); Olive Banks, *The Politics of British Feminism, 1918-1970* (Aldershot, 1993); Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (London, 1992); Harold Smith, *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Catriona Beaumont, "Citizens not Feminists: the boundary negotiated between citizenship and feminism by mainstream women's organisations in England, 1928-39", *Women's History Review*, vol. 9, n°2 (2000); Samantha Clements, "Feminism, citizenship and social activity: The role and importance of local women's organisations, Nottingham 1918-1969", PhD (University of Nottingham, 2008); Maggie Andrews (1997), *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: the Women's Institutes as a Social Movement*, London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd.

restrictively be applied to organisations that publicly identified themselves as feminist only but should be broadened to include “all groups which promoted the social political and economic rights of women, regardless of whether or not they identified themselves as feminist,”<sup>4</sup> Beaumont, in particular, showed in her study of British women’s organisations in the 1930s that, although the feminist movement did indeed decline after the 1918 Representation of the People Act, the women’s movement as a whole managed to attract a growing number of members.

A stimulus to these developments was the new citizenship of women, around which both old and new organisations now revolved. The 1918 electoral reform, by enfranchising some eight million women aged over the age of thirty, had made it essential to many that the new citizens should be taught about their rights and responsibilities. New organizations were formed as part of the National Women Citizens’ Association network<sup>5</sup>, and the main suffrage organisations reorganised<sup>6</sup> and re-focused on what was to be their two main aims in the next twenty years: the education of the new voter and the fight for further reforms<sup>7</sup> (which involved the mobilization of the women’s vote in favour of one particular party or candidate likely to support them). The women’s sections of the Conservative and Labour Parties, as shown by Pamela Graves, Beatrix Campbell, Martin Pugh or Pat Thane,<sup>8</sup> similarly engaged into the promotion of active citizenship—a process that also often went hand in hand with the mobilization of the new voters. The two political parties, fearing that some should turn away from mainstream politics to form their own (women’s) party<sup>9</sup> and eager to mobilize an electorate that was yet free of any allegiance, rapidly undertook massive propaganda efforts and restructured themselves to encompass existing women’s groups. The Women’s Unionist Organisation and the Women’s Labour League, in particular, became efficient recruiting agents for their respective parties through their initiatives to organize women voters and interest them to public affairs.<sup>10</sup>

While everyone in these organizations agreed on the importance to be now given to women’s citizenship, questions arose, however, as to how this citizenship was to be defined and

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<sup>4</sup> Catriona Beaumont, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

<sup>5</sup> The name “Women Citizens’ Associations” had already been used by local associations formed in 1913 in the North of England under the initiative of Eleanor Rathbone

<sup>6</sup> Some renamed themselves on this occasion. The *National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies*, the main suffrage organization, thus became the *National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC)* and the *International Women’s Suffrage Alliance* the *International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC)*.

<sup>7</sup> NUWSS minutes, 30/10/1917.

<sup>8</sup> Pamela Graves, *Labour Women, Women in British Working-Class Politics 1918-1939*, (Cambridge, 1994); Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why do Women Vote Tory ?* (London, 1987); Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (London, 1987); David Jarvis, “Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s”, *Twentieth Century British History* (1994), 5(2): 129-152; Pat Thane, “The Women of the British Labour Party and Feminism, 1906-1945”, in Harold Smith, *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (1990), 125–143.

<sup>9</sup> At a special conference summoned by the Conservative Party in 1917, Herbert Williams warned: “I dread more than anything else the possibility of there arising in this country a Women’s Party and a Men’s Party. That this danger is not an unreal one is to be seen from the fact that those ladies who used to indulge in the destruction of property have now taken the step of forming a Women’s Party”. (Report of Proceedings at a Special Conference of the National Association of Liberal Unionist organisations held at Kingsway Hall, London, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1917, p.40). Arthur Henderson wrote the following year: “It is generally acknowledged that the old party system has irretrievably broken down. Evidence of this is afforded by the claimant call for new parties. The appearance upon the horizon of a National Party and a Women’s Party, the probability of separate groups forming in Parliament around the personality of political leaders who have lost or are losing their grip upon the more or less coherent and strongly organized parties of pre-war days are symptoms of this disintegration” (Arthur Henderson, *The Aims of Labour* (London, 1918), p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Home and Politics*, May 1921; WUO, *Handbook for Women Organizers and Workers*, p. 1.

are closely linked to the diverging directions then taken by the feminist movement. Whether these divisions could not occasionally be bridged, however, is debatable. Indeed, while the existence of a conflict between what the protagonists themselves named at the time “old” (equalitarian) and “new” (social) feminism cannot be disputed, its origins and nature have more recently been challenged: thus, for Barbara Caine, trying to define it as “classic division between ‘equality’ and ‘difference’” is bound to fail as the debate, in addition to reflecting class-divisions among the movement, “went far beyond this in questioning what equality itself might mean for women and in its discussions of the relationship between feminist goals and the overall economic, domestic, and social situation of women”.<sup>11</sup> Maggie Andrew and Sue Innes, in their respective studies of the Women’s Institutes and the Edinburgh Women’s Citizens Association, have also contributed to show that divisions between old and new feminism were not necessarily a cause for tension for women’s organizations at local level,<sup>12</sup> Innes arguing that citizenship was “a primary organizing concept within a discourse of women’s changed role as political actors and one that enabled a synthesis of equality and social feminism.”<sup>13</sup>

As this paper will show, these observations may apply to some of the educational material that was directed to the new voter as part of the efforts previously mentioned and in which overlaps between these two strands of feminism can also be noted. Of particular interest here will be the handbooks that were published in the years that followed each electoral reform and which have, to this day, been neglected by historians.<sup>14</sup> The scarcity of copies to be found<sup>15</sup> and the fact that nearly none of them was reprinted after their first year of publication,<sup>16</sup> suggest that these handbooks only had a limited readership and, as a consequence, a limited impact<sup>17</sup>. However, these documents do present an interest for those working on the question of female citizenship insofar as they testify to the efforts made to educate and mobilize the new voters and add to our understanding of contemporary expectations and questionings relative to the meaning of citizenship. Studying their contents will thus help define to what extent these various guides and manuals offered gendered representations of female citizenship as well as what they really aimed at. Were these handbooks meant to advise women voters in their choices so as to obtain reforms advocated by the main women’s groups (whether feminist or not), direct their electoral choice under the pretence of educating them in citizenship or simply encourage them to vote and act as

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara Caine, *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford, 1997), p. 189.

<sup>12</sup> Maggie Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 8; Sue Innes, “Constructing Women’s citizenship in the Interwar Period: the Edinburgh Women Citizens’ Association”, *Women’s History Review* (2004), vol. 13, N°4, p. 633.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 639.

<sup>14</sup> In 1999, Patrick Brindle and Madeleine Arnot studied the gendering of citizenship textbooks in the years 1940-1966 to try and highlight the different definitions of citizenship present in the school textbooks of the period (Patrick Brindle and Madeleine Arnot, “‘England Expects Every Man to Do His Duty’: The Gendering of the Citizenship Textbook 1940-1966”, *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 24, n° 1 & 2 (London, 1999). Yet, no study has, to my knowledge, attempted to examine the years that immediately followed the enfranchisement women.

<sup>15</sup> I came across some of these handbooks by chance some years ago, while doing research on the reaction of British political parties to the enfranchisement of women and the electoral force that women voters might then have represented (*Citoyennes, et après? Le droit de vote des femmes et ses conséquences en Grande-Bretagne*, 1918-1939, Bern: Peter Lang, 2008; « Du « vote des flappers » au « vote à talons hauts »: évolutions et constantes dans la mobilisation de l’électorat féminin par les partis politiques britanniques entre les années vingt et aujourd’hui », *Recherches Féministes*, revue interdisciplinaire francophone d’études féministes, GREMF, Université Laval, Québec, Canada, vol. 20 n°1 2007, pp. 167-190). I did not explore them then for lack of time even though they immediately appeared as a valuable.

<sup>16</sup> One exception is George Bernard Shaw’s *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, which went through several editions and was translated into several languages.

<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, I was not able to lay hands on figures relative to the number of copies published or sold.

responsible citizens? In deciding whether this process was mainly one of education or mobilization, differences between the first and the second electoral reforms will be looked into and the difficulty of putting forward a clear-cut vision of female citizenship underlined.

This work follows on from a number of investigations into the concept of citizenship for women in the interwar period. While providing additional insight into the nature of British feminism in the post-suffrage era and into how existing divisions between its different strands could occasionally be bridged, it also aims to contribute, in a more general way, to the understanding of attitudes and actions on the – still very much relevant – question of female citizenship and women’s representation in politics.

### **Difficulties in defining female citizenship**

In 1994, underlining the limits of Marshall’s work on citizenship,<sup>18</sup> Sylvia Walby asked whether citizenship was “gendered” or “beyond such particularism” and “successfully universalist”.<sup>19</sup> The answer, Ruth Lister confirmed, a couple of years later, was “a resounding” “yes” for the former.<sup>20</sup> Both scholars, as well as a number of others (including Richardson and Arnot<sup>21</sup>) following in the steps of Carole Pateman’s vision of a “sexually-differentiated” citizenship,<sup>22</sup> questioned the notion of a single model of citizenship and pointed to the fact that women’s admission to citizenship had actually been achieved on male terms – a problem whose implications were identified quite early in the women’s movement.

The 1918 parliamentary elections were not women’s first experience of politics. The 1869 Municipal Corporation Act had already granted rate-paying single women and widows the right to vote for municipal councils, thus setting a precedent for parish, district and vestry council (1894) and, later, eligibility to Borough and County Councils (1907). While participation in local politics appeared as an extension of the home and, as such, did not seem to threaten the established order, parliamentary suffrage however was generally decried by its opponents as incompatible with a woman’s domestic role. This had raised for suffragists at the turn of the century the question of the strategy to be used to reach their goal: Should suffragist claims rest on a common identity with men or on the specific contribution women could make to public life? In other words, should differences be played down so as to claim integration to citizenship on the basis of equality (which would however entail to keep quiet on some particular concerns) or, on the contrary, should the existence of differences between men and women be acknowledged and integration to citizenship claimed in the name of specific experiences, needs and qualities—with the risk that women would eventually have to content themselves with what Jane Jenson has called “second-zone citizenship”?<sup>23</sup> As the two claims appeared irreconcilable, feminists were faced with what Carole Pateman has called “Wollstonecraft’s dilemma” and attributed to the

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<sup>18</sup> Marshall, Thomas Humphrey, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Walby, Sylvia, “Is citizenship gendered?”, *Sociology*(1994) , vol. 28 no. 2, 379-395, p. 379.

<sup>20</sup> Lister, Ruth, “Citizenship and Gender”, in K. Nash and A. Scott (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology* (Oxford, 2001), p. 323.

<sup>21</sup> Arnot, Madeleine, *Educating the Gendered Citizen, Sociological Engagements with National and Global Agendas* (New York: 2009); Richardson, Diane. “Sexuality and Citizenship”, *Sociology* (1998), vol. 32, no. 1, 83-100.

<sup>22</sup> Pateman, Carole, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> Jane Jenson , « La citoyenneté à part entière. Peut-elle exister? », in Alisa Del Re & Jacqueline Heinen (eds.), *Quelle citoyenneté pour les femmes? La crise des états-providence et de la représentation politique en Europe* (Paris, 2000), p. 28.

incompatibility of these two visions of citizenship “within the confines of the patriarchal welfare-state”.<sup>24</sup>

The difficulty of having to choose between a differentialist and an equalitarian strategy, far from disappearing once the right to vote had been won, became particularly relevant following the 1918 reform and led to intense debate within the movement. Because the vote had not only represented a symbol of equality but, most of all, a tool to fight for further improvements in women’s condition, the question of its use was therefore essential to many feminists and the debate over the strategies to be used now evolved into a debate over the aims to be achieved: equal rights with men or an improvement of women’s condition as wives and mothers (an approach known as “welfare” or “social” feminism). Few, however, despite indisputable divisions between “old” (equalitarian) feminism and “new” (social) feminism,<sup>25</sup> were able to adopt a clear-cut position for the very reasons that have just been mentioned. The Edinburgh Women Citizens’ Association, among others, repeatedly crossed the boundaries, campaigning both for welfare and equality issues.<sup>26</sup> “Potentially divisive questions”, Innes explains, “could be addressed within a conception of citizenship that saw – indeed did not question – women’s citizenship as gendered and women as having a special role in public life”.<sup>27</sup>

This view seems to be corroborated by the articles published in the national organs of the main women’s organization following the 1918 electoral reform when questions such as, “Is there such a thing as a woman’s vote?” were raised. Thus, in February 1920, the *Woman’s Leader* started a new section entitled “The Home in Parliament” with the following introductory paragraph:

Because the home-loving woman so often thinks that Parliament is no concern of hers and because as a matter of fact Parliament has a great deal more to do with the home than you imagine and because during the coming parliamentary session in particular Parliament will be discussing and deciding a number of questions which every good housekeeper must understand; for these reasons you will find every week on this page, during the session, an article on home questions with which Parliament is concerned, showing just how the home comes into Parliament’s discussions and debates.<sup>28</sup>

Less than three months later, *Time and Tide*, the organ of the Six Point Group, launched its own section called “Kitchen politics”, also aimed at awakening the interest of the housewife in parliamentary affairs:

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<sup>24</sup> Carole Pateman, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-97.

<sup>25</sup> See Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage : Feminists in War and Peace 1914-1918* (Basingstoke, 1989); D. Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women between the wars 1918-39* (London, 1989); Olive Banks, *The Politics of British Feminism, 1918-1970* (Aldershot, 1993); Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain 1914-1959* (London, 1992); Harold Smith, *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, 1990). The concept of “new feminism” was introduced in 1925 by Eleanor Rathbone in her presidential address to NUSEC: “Now the legal barriers are down [...] women are virtually free. At last we have done with the boring business of measuring everything that women want, or is offered them by men’s standards [...] At last we can stop looking at all our problems through men’s eyes and discussing them in men’s phraseology. We can demand what we want for women, not because it is what men have got, but because it is what women need...” (Eleanor Rathbone, “The Old and the New Feminism”, presidential address, 11 March 1925, *Milestones*, p. 28).

<sup>26</sup> Sue Innes, *op. cit.*, p. 633.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 639.

<sup>28</sup> *The Woman’s Leader*, 06/02/1920, p. 10.

Parliament is bound to give a great deal of its attention to the kitchen, but the kitchen is not giving nearly enough of its attention to Parliament. While kitchen politics are to the fore, the opinion of the kitchen expert, the woman in the home, has a special value. But this opinion must be based on knowledge and consideration, not on rumour and popular catchwords.<sup>29</sup>

The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies at that time had just changed its name to that of National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship and undergone a change of leadership with Eleanor Rathbone replacing Millicent Garrett Fawcett but had not adopted yet what was to become known as "New Feminism." As for the Six Point Group, led by Lady Rhondda, it defended an equalitarian vision of citizenship and was to remain throughout the interwar period one of the few organisations to do so. Yet, as illustrated by the two examples above, both occasionally offered in their organs what appeared to be a gendered vision of citizenship and a predominantly domestic representation of women voters. Similarly, while Lady Rhondda regretted the extensive press coverage of the "woman voter" that led up to the 1924 election, arguing that much of it reflected the false assumption "that women voters all belong to a peculiar and slightly sub-human class which can be trusted to exhibit the same characteristics as all others", she nonetheless admitted that "women voters, like all newly enfranchised classes, have their special demands."<sup>30</sup>

Barbara Caine has underlined the "paradoxes for feminism inherent in the very notion of a 'woman's vote', whereby women become entrapped in the gender categories from which feminism has always sought to escape".<sup>31</sup> Feminists in the 1920s were certainly divided over whether the "woman voter" was any different from her male counterpart. Many, including egalitarians, were aware that some issues affected women more particularly and that these issues (those most commonly referred to being peace, children, homes, temperance and equality), until they were no longer ignored by political parties, would have to be dealt with by the new women citizens. Besides, as the new voters were all over thirty, many were likely to be married and have children and just as likely, as a consequence, to feel more concerned by these issues than by national or international affairs. Defending a gendered vision of citizenship, it seems from the various points of view expressed in the columns of the main feminist publications, was acceptable insofar as it was temporary and dependent on the progress made. The fact that *The Woman's Leader* felt it necessary to ask, in February 1921, "Is there a Woman's Point of View?" and the confusion that is contained in the answer, testifies to the difficulties that nevertheless confronted them:

Women have a common measure of something –if only a common experience – by which they do build up their scale of value, and their emphasis is not quite the same as the emphasis of men. We are convinced that it is not as much as a point of view, and yet there is something in it [...] It is a commonplace among politicians that the party which first learns how to attract the woman's vote will be in power for half a century –but no one yet knows how it is to be done. For our part, we are inclined to believe that it cannot be done because the woman voter is

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<sup>29</sup> *Time and Tide*, 30/04/1920, p. 298.

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Caine, *op. cit.*, p. 199. See also "The Woman Voter", *Time and Tide*, 30/11/1923.

<sup>31</sup> Barbara Caine, *Ibid.*, p. 197.

infinitely various, yet, of course, there is something in this notion too [...] It is impossible to ignore the fact that, the world still being what it is, there actually are such things as women's interests, and upon them there actually is a tendency for women to think one way and men another, and the party which throws in its lot with the women may [...] get a considerable start.<sup>32</sup>

This extract, in addition to a strong reluctance to use any term that might betray an essentialist point of view, shows that if differentialism was indeed occasionally used in otherwise equalitarian discourse, it was not essentialist but of a mostly "cultural/contextual" kind (i.e. believing not in "essential" or "natural" differences but in differences that exist at a given time, will not necessarily last, and will, in fact, hopefully, disappear).

These overlaps between different visions of female citizenship were also to appear in the handbooks that were published after the 1928 electoral reform. They are less obvious, however, in the first series of handbooks, which followed very closely the vote of the Representation of the People Act and were to a large extent concentrated between the reform and the December 1918 elections.

### **Education and information**

The first guide to have been published to the attention of the new voters was a short document written by Crystal MacMillan for the NUWSS and published in March 1918, one month only after the Representation of the People Act had reached the Statute Book. The priority was then to decode the text of the reform (which could prove quite complex) and explain who was qualified to vote so that women would not fail to get registered for the forthcoming December election by lack of information (*And Shall I Have a Parliamentary Vote? Being a description of the Qualifications for the Women's Parliamentary and Local Government Vote in England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland, with Particulars as to How to Get on the Register*).<sup>33</sup> This purely informative work was completed in 1922 by *A list of Books for Women Citizens*, a longer publication that aimed at providing women with a list of titles on subjects likely to be of concern to them (all the books mentioned were contained in the Oxford Street offices of the organisation).<sup>34</sup> In 1918 again, *Woman: A Citizen* was published by Agnes Edith Metcalfe to explain the workings of both parliamentary and local governments. The book was not commissioned by one of the former suffrage associations but Metcalfe herself was, like Macmillan, a former suffragist and was undoubtedly motivated by feminist concerns. Although the book itself was mainly informative, the foreword by Beatrice Webb strongly encouraged

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<sup>32</sup> "Is There a Woman's Point of View?", *The Woman's Leader*, 25/2/1921, p. 52.

<sup>33</sup> Chrystal MacMillan, *And Shall I have a Parliamentary Vote?* (London, March 1918).

<sup>34</sup> "This Bibliography is intended for the use of women citizens who wish a convenient, up-to-date and carefully selected list of the most important books, pamphlets and reports on subjects of special interest to women". NUSEC (1922) "A list of Books for Women Citizens", (London: P.S. King & Son). Subjects covered included: Administration of Justice, Adolescence and Juvenile Employment, Central and Local Government, Citizenship, Economics and Finance, Education and Adult Education, Eugenics, Heredity and Population, Family Endowment, Housing, Industrial Organisation and Social Conditions, Industrial and Social History, International Relations and Foreign Countries, League of Nations, Marriage, Maternity and Child Welfare, Political History, Political Science, Poor Law, Public Health, Rural Conditions, Sex Problems, Temperance Reform, Trade Unionism, Women in Industry and in the Professions, Woman and the Law, The Women's Movement, Wealth.

women to vote, warning them against the dangers of abstention.<sup>35</sup> Shortly afterwards, in June 1918, the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society<sup>36</sup> published its own manual, *Why I Should Vote* to point to the new voters how important it was that they should exercise their right to vote. The latter, it explained, was "a handle, a key, a crowbar in the last extreme, which will open many doors: not alone and of itself of course, but side by side with the vote of thousands of other men and women."<sup>37</sup> Women citizens had to understand that, as voters, they now had the power to secure "good and capable representation" in Parliament and to obtain reforms concerning women's wages or infant welfare. "All these surely need a woman's point of view. And that is what her vote can help her to express", the author (D.M. Hughes) explained. Likewise, laws affecting institutions of all kinds that included women and children (hospitals, schools, orphanages, workhouses, asylums) had been passed "by men from a man's point of view" and had left room for improvements."<sup>38</sup>

These first handbooks (which each ran through three or four editions), unlike those that were to follow the 1928 reform, were either published on behalf of suffragist societies or by former members. They were also mainly informative and did not offer a gendered representation of women's citizenship—except if we consider that the fact that some issues are presented as likely to be of special interest to women is in itself an acknowledgement of a special gender dimension. Only the last one both supported the idea of a specific female contribution to politics and aimed at the mobilization of women more than at its education. This does not mean however that women's organisations were not then involved in a process of mobilization, quite the opposite. Mobilizing the new voters actually appears to have been one of their main concerns in the years that followed the first electoral reform, whether the aim was to get them to contribute through their vote to reform women's condition or simply to exercise their newly-won right. Throughout the decade, the national organs of NUSEC, of the Six Point Group and of the Women's Freedom League never stopped reminding women of the power the vote now conferred them and advising them on the best way to use it. "Women have yet fully to learn that however insignificant they may think themselves, in the great world of politics, the possession of the vote endows them with a real significance in the eyes of their representatives or would-be representatives in Parliament," the *Woman's Leader* insisted.<sup>39</sup> At each parliamentary or local election, the organs of the main organizations also tried to fight against the apathy of the electorate, bringing to the voters' attention what was at stake and explaining how women could make themselves heard thanks to their vote.<sup>40</sup>

As, for many suffragists, allegiance to a political party was incompatible with the power the vote was expected to wield, the fact that none of the four textbooks supported one particular party does not come as a surprise<sup>41</sup>. Many suffrage campaigners had been disillusioned by

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<sup>35</sup> Metcalfe, Agnes Edith, *Woman: A Citizen* (London, 1918), p. v.

<sup>36</sup> The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society had been founded in 1911 to bring Catholic women actively into the suffrage movement but also break down prejudices against Catholics within the non-Catholic world.

<sup>37</sup> D. M. Hughes, *Why I Should Vote*, (London, June 1918), p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> *The Woman's Leader*, 23/11/1923, p. 341.

<sup>40</sup> "Women, Use your Votes!", *The Vote*, 10/11/1922, p. 153.

<sup>41</sup> Women's contribution to politics, for Eleanor Rathbone, "must bubble freshly out of the mother earth of women's own personalities and be impregnated with the salt of their own experience. It must not be a bottled vintage bought at the party wine-shop. That is why we value our non-party women's organisations, where women can meet together to discuss both sides of contentious political questions and to hammer out the truth for ourselves." *Milestones*, "Equal Citizenship", 9 March 1920, p. 3.

political parties in their fight for the vote before the war and wished to work broadly along the same lines as before, i.e. independently from them. The authors of the articles published in the national organs of feminist associations thus claimed they refused to direct the political choice of women voters and only wanted to provide them with information that would help them make a choice. Some, such as *The Woman's Leader*, even opened their columns to the main political parties, inviting them to give their point of view and explain their programme so that their readers could forge their own opinion.<sup>42</sup> This does not mean that these magazines never sided with or against one of the political parties but that, when they did, their position was generally motivated by the actions or – more frequently – the inaction of some politicians rather than by political allegiance. Independence from political parties was also a key principle of the National Women Citizens' Association (NWCA), which was created in 1918 to “foster a sense of citizenship in women” and “encourage the study of political, social and economic questions.”<sup>43</sup> The Association considered that women's suffrage would prove a “regenerative force” in the reconstruction of the country and in politics and believed that this influence could only be exerted if women voters were free of party ties. “We do not wish to see the women's vote merely an intensification of Party machinery”, Maria Olgivie Gordon, who chaired the first meeting, insisted. “Let the women voters create their own ideals and methods”.<sup>44</sup>

*Wife, Mother, Voter, Her Vote – What will she do with it?*, written by R. M. Wilson and published on the eve of the December 1918 elections, therefore stands in sharp contrast with the other publications in that it both offered a highly gendered vision of citizenship and explicitly supported the Liberal Party. Both in the title and throughout the book the new voter was presented as a wife and a mother (“motherhood, after all, is woman's greatest function, it is her greatest glory”), with a feminine point of view, and was encouraged to ask for reforms such as the extension of old-age pensions, family allowances, wages for expectant mothers or infant welfare reform. Explicitly, a majority of the fourteen chapters had titles such as “through the eyes of a woman”, “mothers of men”, “independent wifhood”, “wages of motherhood”....<sup>45</sup> In a last chapter entitled “The Coming Opportunity”, the author strongly encouraged the new voter to return former Prime Minister David Lloyd George to power as leader of a Coalition government, warning her against politicians who now proclaimed themselves the friends of women out of mere political interest:

All political parties are sure to give that policy (the lightening of the burdens of womanhood) a foremost place in their programmes, because the woman's vote is likely to prove a decisive factor in the election. It is for the women to decide which statesmen are most likely to afford them real assistance –the statesmen who are now discovering for the first time that there is such a thing as the burden of womanhood, or those who have already, during long years, when there was no woman's vote to win, laboured to lighten the burden –those who saw life through woman's eyes; In this connection Mr. Lloyd George's record is indeed a wonderful one [...] He, more than any other, espoused their cause in the days

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<sup>42</sup> *The Woman's Leader*, 30/1/1925, 13/2/1925, 27/2/1925.

<sup>43</sup> *WCA and What They Are*, Leaflet n°1, 1918.

<sup>44</sup> *The Citizenship of Women*, Reprint of Report of NWCA Inaugural Meeting (April 1918), NWCA Leaflet n°6, 1933, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Wilson, R.M, *Wife, Mother, Voter, Her Vote – What will she do with it?*, (London, December 1918). See for example pages 16 and 32.

when it was well-nigh friendless. He, most of all, is able to win for them such benefits as the further endowment of motherhood and the further assertion of the right to happiness.<sup>46</sup>

No one knows how the new voters voted on that occasion. Even though George Bernard Shaw later accused them of having “voted for hanging the Kaiser [and] rallied hysterically round the worst male candidates,”<sup>47</sup> no opinion poll or study was in fact undertaken before the late 1930s and the electoral behaviour of women remained a matter for speculation throughout the interwar period. When, after another ten years of suffragist campaign, the 1928 Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act extended the franchise to all British women over the age of twenty-one<sup>48</sup>, propaganda efforts were therefore renewed – fuelled by the fact that, with 5.24 million new voters, women now outnumbered men in the electorate. The fact that the female membership of political parties had grown extremely rapidly since 1918 (it reached 250,000-300,000 between 1927-1939 for Labour and 1 million in 1928 for the Conservatives’ Women’s Unionist Organisation<sup>49</sup>) also means that, this time, party politics played a greater part in the campaign and the mobilization of women.

### **Mobilizing women voters**

The extension of suffrage to women over the age of 21, ten years later, happened in a different political context: the Labour party had grown in importance and was about to overtake the Liberals as the country’s second party, the major organisations that had fought for the right to vote before the war were fast losing ground and were being replaced by women’s groups which refused to be identified to feminism (see Catriona Beaumont<sup>50</sup>); finally, the new generation of women that had gained access to the electorate was one whose idea of emancipation had so far mainly been displayed – or so it seemed to the older generation of feminists – through new work opportunities, access to higher education and physical changes more than involvement in a feminist group or a political party. Once again, however, – or maybe for that very reason – and to a larger extent than the first time, the reform triggered off massive efforts in their direction. Slightly more handbooks were published in the three years that followed the 1928 electoral reform than had been the case ten years before and these tended to be longer, more politicized and mostly aimed this time at the mobilization of women voters. They also benefitted from more publicity in the national and international press.

St Joan’s Social & Political Alliance, into which the Catholic Women’s Suffrage Society had transformed, was the first – and only – organization this time to publish its own handbook:

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-92.

<sup>47</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide To Socialism And Capitalism*, (London, 1929), p. 452.

<sup>48</sup> Most of the new voters were under 30 but there also was a great number of women over the age of 30 who had been excluded from the right to vote in 1918: single women who rented furnished accommodation or lived with their parents and therefore did not meet the property qualification (which was the case of many professional women), or again shop-assistants and domestics servants who lived at their employers’.

<sup>49</sup> Source: annual reports of the WUOs. Unlike the Conservative and Labour parties, the Liberal Party did not choose to integrate the Women’s National Liberal Federation to its structure until 1927 and the Women’s National Liberal Federation did not experience the same growth as its rival organizations. After a fall in the early 1920s (from 95,217 in 1920 to 66,200 in 1924), its membership figures were actually lower in 1926 (88,000) than what they had been before the War (source: *The Liberal Women’s News*).

<sup>50</sup> Catriona Beaumont, *op. cit.*

*Towards Citizenship: A Handbook Of Women's Emancipation* (with a foreword by Millicent Garrett Fawcett). The authors – Phyllis C. Challoner and Vera Laughton – emphasised in it the part played by women throughout history, from Ancient civilisations to the beginning of suffrage militancy and the final stages of the struggle for equal franchise, while insisting on the progressive position defended by the Roman Catholic Church. At a time when many former suffragists lamented the young generation's lack of interest in the feminist movement<sup>51</sup>, their aim was to explain to young women that their rights should not be taken for granted and that they owed what they had to the fight other women had led before them –hence the necessity to go voting so that this fight had not been fought in vain:

Women of to-day, who enjoy the privileges of citizenship! Remember that that citizenship has been bought at a great price; remember that through long ages women have looked forward to this time as to the dawn of a new world, and that if you fail to give a just account of your stewardship, you fail those who have place their faith and their hope in you. The winning of the vote is but the opening of a door – go forth and salute the day to come.<sup>52</sup>

*Women of To-day*, published by Mrs. Dighton Pollock (a founder member of the North Kensington Women Welfare Centre in 1924) the following year, was also aimed at the mobilization of the new voter, not only encouraging her to use her vote but explicitly urging readers interested in legislation directly affecting them to join a feminist organisation (NUSEC in this case). “Women in this country have achieved a freedom they never had before,” one could read on the cover. “What use should be made of this freedom is the question to which an answer is here attempted”.<sup>53</sup> The priority was to get women voters –and younger voters in particular– to the polls as well as help them forge an opinion on the issues on which their contribution was needed. Much was to be done, the author explained, both in society at large and on issues concerning more particularly women's conditions –including peace, education, equal work opportunities, birth control information, family allowances or nursery provisions.<sup>54</sup>

*Why Should I Vote?*, which was also published in 1929 by Amabel Williams-Ellis & Plummer L.A., was not particularly directed to women voters but was simply meant as “A Handbook for Electors”, dealing with issues such as “Britain's plight”, “The causes of trade depression”, “War or Peace” or again “Where is the money to come from?”. Yet, the picture that was chosen to illustrate the cover was –purposefully– that of a young woman in a short skirt and fashionable cloche-hat being courted by the three leaders (Baldwin, MacDonald and Lloyd George) while the answer to the question asked in the title (“Why should I vote?”) was that voting was necessary if women wanted to ask for reforms to improve social conditions–in particular concerning the welfare of children. Denouncing the apathy and boredom of a large part

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<sup>51</sup> “Modern young women know amazingly little of what life was like before the war, and show a strong hostility to the word ‘feminism’, and all which they imagine it to connote”, Ray Strachey, former secretary of the NUWSS and editor of the *Woman's Leader*, was later to write (in R. Strachey (ed.), *Our Freedom and Its Results* (London, 1936), p. 10). See among others Winifred Holtby, *Women and a Changing Civilisation* (London, 1934), p.96; Mary Agnes Hamilton, “Changes in social life”, in R. Strachey (ed.), *Our Freedom and Its Results*, p. 236.

<sup>52</sup> P. C. Challoner and V. Laughton, *Towards Citizenship, Towards Citizenship, A Handbook of Women's Emancipation* (London, 1928), p. 87

<sup>53</sup> Mrs Dighton Pollock, *Women of To-day*, Routledge introduction to Modern Knowledge (London, 1929), vol. 14.

<sup>54</sup> “The use of the Vote [...] is of vital importance for it not merely secures the passage of particular laws; it affects our relations with other countries and ultimately determines the whole framework of our social life”. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

of the population regarding party politics, the two authors strove to show in the first two chapters that “politics are everybody’s business” and “affect us” all and encouraged women voters in particular to learn more about their political environment, reflect about current matters and look beyond their domestic sphere:

It is strange that women particularly, who know, in the Bible’s phrase, ‘how to give good gifts unto their children’, are not able or not willing to look outside their own circle, not realising that what is good for their own children is really pretty much what all children need... many women do not seem able to extend their good sense beyond the circle of their immediate family, or see that if we want England to be great, then it is this sort of sense that we must apply to our national affairs.<sup>55</sup>

Ellis was founder-editor of the left-wing journal *The Left Review* and it therefore comes as no surprise that her handbook supported the Labour Party and concluded in a last chapter entitled “Eve of the Poll”: “it is the Labour Party which is most deeply pledged to carry through reforms to which all three parties pay lip service, and undoubtedly the Labour Party which has most at heart the two prime political issues, peace and the raising of the national standard of life”.<sup>56</sup>

*The Girl Voter — Talks on her Inheritance, her Responsibilities and her Opportunities*, published in 1930 by Ebe Minerva White, was directed both to young voters and to future voters, whose interest in politics the author wanted to stimulate as early as possible. White, herself a lecturer in civics and the author of *A Philosophy of Citizenship, An Introduction to Civics for Adults*, hoped to encourage teachers to train young girls for citizenship. As Leah Manning, President of the National Union of Teachers and future Labour MP wrote in the Introduction: “There is only one way in which the hopes born of this great reform can be matured and that is by the complete education of our adolescent girls for the responsibilities of their citizenship.”<sup>57</sup> Throughout the chapters, the reader, whether a girl or a woman, was encouraged to do something in connection with her district and take as a model the activities proposed by the Women’s Village Institutes—women meeting once a month and bringing samples of work they have done at home (clothing, needlework, jam...)<sup>58</sup> Although the book rejected Communism as a viable option, it presented the three other major parties in a roughly equivalent manner, concluding: “Which one shall be hers, each girl voter must decide for herself!”<sup>59</sup> White’s book looked like a school textbook and was built on the same model as the previous one, with chapters dealing with the workings of local, national and imperial institutions as well as with current issues followed by recommended reading and, in this case, exercises and questions:

1. Consider the district in which you live, and write out how you would arrange a museum for it.
2. Make out that list of things and places that are public, which is mentioned in this chapter.

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<sup>55</sup> *Why Should I Vote?*, pp. 120-1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56-59, 69-70, 119.

<sup>57</sup> E. M. White, *The Girl Voter — Talks on her Inheritance, her Responsibilities and her Opportunities*, (London, 1930), p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

3. Draw a diagram of an imaginary administrative county, putting in the places that have a Council. Make a key to it.
4. Cut out accounts from newspapers telling about any town or city that has a pageant or celebration to illustrate pride in its history.
5. If you were a member of a Women's Institute in a remote village, what subjects would you suggest for lectures?<sup>60</sup>

To the exception of, *Why Should I Vote*, none of these books supported a political party. That was not the case, however, of a couple of others, including George Bernard Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, published in 1929 as a piece of socialist propaganda, and two Conservative rejoinders that were published shortly afterwards: *The Socialist Woman's Guide to Intelligence; A Reply to Mr. Shaw*, written by Lillian Le Mesurier that same year and *Women and Politics*, written in 1931 by the Duchess of Atholl.

Shaw's choice of a title was somewhat ironic as what the playwright and member of the Fabian Society defended in it was a neutral vision of citizenship and nothing in the book actually indicates that it was particularly meant for women. Yet, Shaw regularly used women as examples and referred more particularly to the exploitation of women workers by capitalism; he also paid particular attention throughout the book not to use the pronoun "he" as a generic and used "he or she" when both sexes are concerned (as well as "person" rather than man).<sup>61</sup> For the playwright, who had taken part in the formation of the Labour Party, women voters had so far proved a disappointment and needed to fully understand the ins and outs of Socialism. Provocatively, he thus wrote:

Only the other day the admission of women to the electorate, for which women fought and died, was expected to raise politics to a nobler plane and purify public life. But at the election which followed, the women voted for hanging the Kaiser; rallied hysterically round the worst male candidates; threw out all the women candidates of tried ability, integrity and devotion; and elected just one titled lady of great wealth and singular demagogic fascination, who... was then a beginner. In short, the notion that the female voter is more politically intelligent or gentler than the male voter proved a great a delusion as the earlier delusions that the business man was any wiser politically than the country gentlemen or the manual worker than the middle class man.<sup>62</sup>

Shaw's *Guide* was much longer than the handbooks that had so far been published for women voters (it is nearly 500 pages long) and more ambitious too. In a thorough manner, its author undertook to provide his readers with both facts and "food for thought", not only aiming, he insisted, at informing but also at stimulating reflection (as to "How wealth should be distributed in a respectable civilized country" for instance). Within ten years, the book ran through several editions and sparked off immediate reactions from the opposite side, including two guides, both

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>61</sup> In some instances, the feminine pronoun even included the masculine. Eg: "A plan which has often been proposed, and which seems very plausible to the working-classes, is to let every person have that part of the wealth of the country which she has herself produced by her work". George Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* (London, 1929), p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 452-3.

written by women for women: *The Socialist Woman's Guide to Intelligence; A Reply to Mr. Shaw*, published by Mrs. Le Mesurier that same year and *Women and Politics*, published in 1931 by Katherine Atholl.

Le Mesurier's own *Guide*, despite its title, chosen as a provocative answer to that of Shaw's, did not claim to be a handbook, but a corrective, motivated by the desire to expose "some of the flaws, fallacies and inconsistencies" of the previous book.<sup>63</sup> Like Shaw's *Guide*, it was explicitly addressed to a female readership: Le Mesurier addressed her readers as "My sisters" or "My dear sisters", occasionally referred to what "the ignorant woman may say"<sup>64</sup> and almost exclusively picked up her example among women.<sup>65</sup> At no point, however, did she make any reference to women as voters or citizens, nor to the exercise of the vote.

The Duchess of Atholl, who was at that time a Conservative MP for Perth and Kinross and had served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education under the previous government, also introduced her book as an answer to Shaw's *Guide* and what she denounced as the fallacies contained in it. Particularly necessary in her opinion was the defence of the capitalist system and of private property against the attacks of socialism.<sup>66</sup> Yet, while the first chapters ("The structure of Government – in the Empire as a whole", "The structure of Government – at Home", "Conflicting Views – How to Get at the Facts", "Aims which Appear to Conflict"... ) were meant to tackle some of the difficulties and complexities surrounding political discussion, the book then proceeded to discuss women's contribution – both past and future – to politics ("How Women can Help – Protecting the Woman Worker", "Safeguarding Marriage and Parental Responsibility", "Protecting Health and Child"... ). In this respect, Atholl pointed out to her readers that "the simple day to day lessons of the home" and the "principles on which [they] usually endeavour to act in ordinary life" could guide them in national affairs and "bring a reality into political discussion which too often is absent".<sup>67</sup>

Interestingly, although these chapters referred to some specific insight and competences due to "woman's instincts and home life" that rendered women's political participation all the more important, the very last pages were a reaction to press articles, speeches and propaganda material that portrayed women citizens in a gendered way and implied that women had specific preoccupations and voting behaviour. Atholl strongly opposed the idea of a woman's party. While acknowledging that women had so far been reluctant to join political parties by dislike of party cleavages, she refused that political questions should be approached "solely from a woman's point of view" and encouraged her readers to join a political organisation (if only to then work against these cleavages and promote co-operation between the different parties):<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Le Mesurier, *The Socialist Woman's Guide to Intelligence; A Reply to Mr. Shaw* (London, 1929), p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>65</sup> "If any young women who have read Mr. Shaw's book, and therefore (he hopes) know more about baking than the average banker, should hire a nice office..."; "If the young ladies are worth more than ten pounds a week, they certainly ought to be paid more"; "If the wife of a good fellow, out of work by no fault of his own, sees her children hungry or ill, while she is unable to give them what they need, she will, inevitably, take up with Socialism, or Communism, or Bolshevism, or any other 'ism' placed before her, that seems to offer a chance of providing for their necessities". *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 160.

<sup>66</sup> "These are days of much speech and some wild statements, and no man or woman is likely to avoid falling into error unless he or she is on the look-out to distinguish assertion from fact, and is prepared to take a little trouble in order to do so. In this connection I have felt obliged to reply to some very serious allegations made by Mr Bernard Shaw in a recent book specially addressed to women". Duchess of Atholl, *Women and Politics* (London, 1931), p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

The grant of women's franchise has brought to the front questions concerning women's status and other questions of special interest to our sex. However great our concern may be in these questions, it is essential that we should not confine ourselves to them, that we should see them in relation to other subjects [...] do we wish to appear only or mainly interested in such political problems as might be regarded as "women's questions"? It is true that when women were first enfranchised there were questions affecting their status that called for consideration and received it. It is also true that there may well be some subjects more than others to the discussion of which we can make a special contribution. But so it is with men.<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, even though the Duchess acknowledged the fact that the women's vote had influenced legislation<sup>70</sup> and encouraged her readers to exercise their right so that they could continue to exercise this influence, she was adamant that the latter should not only concern domestic matters. "Just as every woman knows that the security of her home depends on the income coming into it", she explained, "so we cannot realise too clearly that, however keen our interest may be in questions such as health, education and housing, the nation depends for its existence on its trade and industry, just as surely as the vast majority of homes depend for their security on the employment of the breadwinner."<sup>71</sup> One particular responsibility was presented as resting on the women voter's shoulders: That of helping "women of the backward races of the Empire" (sic) improve their conditions and fight for their rights. In that respect, making an effective contribution to the problems of government in the Mother Country could help raise the status of women throughout the Empire ("No greater end could be sought or achieved than this –that women, by the effective discharge of new responsibilities here, should help to win a new dignity and a new freedom for their less fortunate sisters elsewhere").<sup>72</sup>

Of all these books published for women voters following the 1928 Representation of the People Act, only *Towards Citizenship*, published by St Joan's Social & Political Alliance, and *Women of Today* can be said to have defended an explicitly feminist stance, presenting the vote as the result of a long fight for political emancipation and urging women voters to mobilize so as to support women candidates and policies considered as benefitting them (including by joining a feminist organisation). The others rather seem to have stemmed from a concern for participatory citizenship, whether gendered (principally addressing the woman voter as mother and housewife), as in the case of *Why Should I Vote* and *The Girl Voter*, or more neutral, as with the politically-oriented publications, but they similarly aimed at the mobilization of women –for a political party this time. The latter proved particularly popular, with Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide* and Le Mesurier's *The Socialist Woman's Guide* running through no less than eight editions in the following years (against two editions for *Towards Citizenship*, *Women of To-day* and *The Girl Voter*, three for *Why Should I Vote?* and four for Atholl's *Women and Politics*).

The fact is that the educational efforts that were undertaken after 1928 had somewhat different goals and means from those of 1918. What had mattered then had been to introduce middle-aged women with little or no knowledge of it to politics. This time, the young women

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

who were granted the right to vote had had the opportunity, for the last ten years, to watch their elders exercise their political rights (including that of sitting in Parliament) but might not be very much interested in politics themselves. They were also less likely, in everyday life, to have the opportunity of discussing politics than young men: Thousands of them under the age of twenty-five were registered as “without occupation” and lived either with their parents or with a husband, which means they were cut off from the outside world and from the labour world in particular; as for those who worked, they were mostly concentrated in weakly-unionised occupations or in domesticity—to a large extent equivalent to living at home. The political and social backgrounds were also different: Europe had been witnessing the rise of fascism and Britain had experienced in the space of a couple of years several political changes, including a first Labour government, a general strike and a succession of minority governments. In that context, participatory citizenship came to be seen as a barrier to totalitarianism and civic education as essential to form a well-informed electorate.

No more handbooks were specifically addressed to women voters after 1931 though. Some were published by the new Association for Education in Citizenship (AEC) that was co-founded only a couple of years later by Eva Hubback & Sir Ernest Simon with the support of a number of Fabian and liberal intellectuals (including G.D.H. Cole, Harold Laski, William Beveridge and Barbara Wootton). Yet, despite Hubback’s former involvement in the suffragist movement and her recent part in the foundation of the National Union of Townswomen’s Guilds, when she and Ernest Simon published *Education for Citizenship* to suggest how pupils might be more effectively educated for citizenship in primary and secondary schools, the book contained absolutely no reference to women or girls.

## Conclusion

The various aims behind the initiatives directed to women voters, and more particularly the handbooks published after the two electoral reforms, make it difficult to distinguish a monolithic vision of women’s citizenship. These, as we have seen, could indeed roughly be divided into four categories: those of a purely/mainly informative kind, containing descriptions and explanations regarding the working of local and parliamentary government; those mobilizing for active citizenship, encouraging women to vote and be politically active; those serving a propaganda aim and inviting their readers to vote for one politician in particular or more generally support a political party; finally, those aiming at mobilizing women voters around an ideological agenda established by politically active women in the continuity of women’s political goals from the pre-suffrage era. In this respect, as was the case within the Women Citizens’ Associations and in the national organs, difficulty arose as to how far mobilization could go without involving a gendering of citizenship.

The use of handbooks as tools in the mobilization process, however, did not really take place until the second electoral reform. Mobilization, in 1918, was mainly undertaken through the national organs of the main women’s groups with articles which could, when necessary (generally on the eve of elections), call women voters to the polls, remind them of their duty and urge them to vote for supporters of reforms likely to benefit them. Handbooks, which were almost exclusively published by suffrage organizations or former members and were concentrated between the vote of the Representation of the People Act and the December 1918 elections, came as an additional tool, meant to inform and educate. In contrast, the publications that followed the 1928 reform offered a more gendered representation of the woman voter – even

though overlaps make it difficult to make out a clear representation of female citizenship: as was the case for women's organisations and national organs, many drew both on the tradition of egalitarian feminism and that of social feminism, asking for both political participation and equal opportunities and improvements of women's domestic status. They were also, and above all, clearly aimed at mobilization, a phenomenon that can be explained by the concern for the lack of interest of the new voter for politics, the political context and the fact that this task could no longer be efficiently performed by the national organs of the women's associations, which had declined both in number and circulation.

The questions raised in the material under scrutiny as to the acceptability and desirability of defending a gendered vision of citizenship as well as the answers attempted by some feminists at the time do not only offer insight into the early twentieth century women's movement but are relevant to today's debates regarding gender representation in politics. As recurrent efforts by British and American politicians to attract what is still often referred to as the "female vote" illustrate<sup>73</sup>, the stakes represented by women voters and questions surrounding the existence of a possibly gendered voting behaviour also remain topical issues.

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<sup>73</sup> On the mobilization of women voters by British and American political parties, see among others the works of Rosie Campbell, Susan Carrol, Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris.

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