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No Taxation without Representation

Abstract: Magna Carta barons wanted representation and rights to fairer taxes. Women want the same. Scutt traverses US, UK, Canadian, Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australian women’s campaigns for voting rights and fair taxation based on equal pay. Australia’s Vida Goldstein, Canada’s Nellie McClung, in the US Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the UK’s Barbara Bodichon, Emily Wilding Davison, Dora Montefiore, Annie Kenney and the Pankhursts campaigned for women’s rights. Some voting rights campaigners were prosecuted and tortured by forced-feeding. Some refused to be counted in the 1911 Census. Some refused to pay taxes. Spurred on by injustice, US women of Pawtucket mills, Aotearoa/New Zealand’s Harriet Morison, Canadians, Australians and British women campaigned for industrial rights and equal pay – this a just cause not yet won.

Keywords: equal pay campaigns; women and 1911 Census; women and equal pay; women and the vote; women’s campaign against taxation; women’s taxation rights; women’s vote campaign; women’s voting rights


No scutage nor aid shall be imposed on our kingdom, unless by common counsel of our kingdom...

*Magna Carta, cap. 12*

**Taxation and Magna Carta**

On 2 April 1911, Emily Wilding Davison hid in a cupboard in the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft in the House of Commons. It was Census night. Her form was completed, her family name appearing as ‘Davidson’. Clearly, she did not write it. The space for her postal address says: ‘Found hiding in crypt of Westminster Hall’. A pencilled note on the bottom left-hand corner advises ‘3/4/11 Since Saturday’.

Why was Davison there? Who found her? What, ‘since Saturday’, did she eat and drink?

Resistance to government demands has a long history, as does the assertion that government has a right to make demands only through the people’s collective consent. Predating Davison by almost 900 years and Magna Carta by at least 150 years, the legendary Lady Godiva’s ride is recounted in Ranulf Higden’s (c.1280–1364) *Polychronicon* and by Roger of Wendover (d. 1236) in his *Chronicles*. Protesting at heavy taxes imposed on Coventry’s citizens by her husband, Leofric, Earl of Mercer, Godiva won them a reprieve by accepting her husband’s challenge to parade naked on horseback through the streets.

The cry ‘no taxation without representation’ resounds from Magna Carta down the centuries. The campaign for US independence from King George III and his government, when rebels used Magna Carta to win freedom from a colonial master, is not unique. Women consistently objected, for women in the colonies and under the colonial master were denied the vote, equal pay and access to equally paying trades, professions and public office, yet were taxed. Wives suffered the indignity of being denied property and income ownership rights, while bearing the inequities heaped upon their single sisters. Their income was owned by their husbands, and taxed, too. Whether there was joint taxation or individual taxation, earned income and property were calculated ‘in’ to revenue and women’s earnings were subject to tax laws, without representation.