

“Develop a Great Imperial Race”: Emmeline Pankhurst, Emily Murphy, and Their Promotion of “Race Betterment” in Western Canada in the 1920s

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Emmeline Pankhurst visited Canada for the fifth time in 1919, initially for a lecture tour, but in the summer of 1920 she decided to stay permanently, settling first in Victoria, British Columbia. She stayed for only four years, but during the time Pankhurst made Canada her home, she tirelessly criss-crossed the country, lecturing in major cities and remote locations at theatres, Chautauquas, factories, colleges, churches, and private homes. Her main topic was the virtue and supremacy of the British Empire; and the duties and responsibilities of the British women of the Empire as the “guardians of the race.”¹ She emphasized how enfranchised women ought to turn their attention toward “race betterment.”² The “disease” of Bolshevism was another central theme of her speaking engagements, but increasingly the perils of venereal disease, the “feeble minded,” and the “foreigner,” combined with her dedication to the British Empire, took centre stage, particularly after she found employment with the Canadian National Council for Combating Venereal Disease (CNCCVD). In Canada, Pankhurst’s belief in eugenics came to fruition and crystallized.³

Pankhurst was particularly active in Western Canada. In the summer of 1922, for example, she spoke in sixty-three different western towns, beginning her tour at Admiral, Saskatchewan, and ending at The Pas, Manitoba.⁴ In one month alone she spoke at Fort William, Saltcoats, Regina, Prince Albert, North Battleford, Saskatoon, Swift Current, Weyburn, Wynyard, Yorkton, Calgary, Lethbridge, and Medicine Hat.⁵ She often shared the podium with prominent Alberta reformer, writer, and magistrate Emily Murphy, with whom she became well acquainted. They influenced each other; their convictions about the virtues of the British Empire and “racial” purity gained strength together. Murphy’s ideas provided support for Pankhurst’s work with the CNCCVD, and Pankhurst’s endorsement of these ideas added credibility and legitimacy to Murphy’s views, fully articulated by the mid-1920s, that the “feeble-minded” should be sterilized. Their ideas and causes intertwined, and increasingly focused on paths to “racial” betterment within Canada and the British Empire. In their articulations of who belonged and who did not in the Canadian nation, they helped to frame and bolster the “grammars of difference” that distinguished the powerful and privileged from the inferior.⁶ Pankhurst and Murphy helped to craft a Canadian manifestation of “Britishness” and “Otherness,” of inclusion and exclusion, as the vision for the nation.⁷

Over 2,800 people were sterilized in Alberta between 1929 and 1972 under the authority of the province’s 1928 Sexual Sterilization Act.⁸ Alberta and British Columbia were the only two Canadian provinces who enacted such legislation, and Alberta was much more devoted to the cause, sterilizing about ten times as many people as in BC. In seeking answers why the eugenics movement was institutionalized and pursued so rigorously in Alberta, the support of highly influential women reformers Emily Murphy and Nellie McClung is often mentioned, although Murphy is seen as much more prominent and instrumental.⁹ As legal historian John McLaren wrote, Murphy “played an important role in creating a climate of opinion in which this eugenicist initiative became possible.”¹⁰ That Murphy’s eugenicist ideas began to seriously take root in Alberta during Pankhurst’s Canadian interlude, when the latter lectured with Murphy throughout the province, strikes me as significant. Another goal of this chapter is to bring the extent of Pankhurst’s engagement with Canada and the ideas that she espoused from 1920 to 1924 to the attention of historians of feminism.¹¹

Pankhurst appears fleetingly in many books and articles about the first wave of feminism in Canada, and photographs of her with Nellie McClung, Emily Murphy, and other prominent Canadian women activists are often included, but with little commentary or analysis. References to Pankhurst in Canada tend to disappear completely in the post-World War I era.¹² But I suggest that it was in the early 1920s that Pankhurst had an even greater impact on the Canadian scene that has not been appreciated or comprehended, and not because of her stand on suffrage.

Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928) was sixty-two when she arrived in Canada in 1920, and she needed money to support her three adopted “war” daughters. Originally from Manchester (born Emmeline Goulden), she and her husband, lawyer Richard Pankhurst (who died in 1898), were socialists, supporters of women’s suffrage, and of the far-left Independent Labour Party (ILP). Their daughters Christabel, Sylvia, and Adela also became prominent activists. Impatient with the slow pace of progress on the issue of women’s suffrage in the ILP, in 1903 the Pankhursts founded the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), which grew rapidly, having 3,000 branches by 1907. Mass marches, demonstrations, and poster campaigns were the initial strategies.¹³ There was a gradual shift toward more direct and militant action with acts of violence and arson. The height of the militancy was 1913–14. When suffragettes were arrested, they protested with hunger, thirst, and sleep strikes. Emmeline Pankhurst was imprisoned in London’s Holloway jail a dozen times and was severely weakened by hunger strikes.

When war broke out in 1914, however, Emmeline Pankhurst, recuperating from her tenth hunger strike, embraced patriotism and suspended all suffrage activities. She declared support for the government that had denied women the vote. She reasoned that the defeat of Germany trumped all other causes, and there was no point in continuing the campaign for the vote as there might be no country to vote in if Germany won the war.¹⁴ Her daughter Christabel agreed with her, but Sylvia opposed the war, and many other former allies and associates were horrified with Emmeline’s militarism and imperialism.¹⁵ During the war Emmeline became an ardent, passionate imperialist.

Both her recent biographers June Purvis and Paula Bartley argue that her wartime jingoism was in keeping with her firmly held beliefs from childhood – her allegiance to Britain was combined with a love of France,

where she had lived as a young woman. To her the war was fought for humanity and in defence of democracy, liberty, and civilization. One of her wartime activities was leading a campaign to adopt babies born to single women whose partners were in the armed forces. She adopted three “war babies” herself. Pankhurst also travelled to Russia in 1917, a journey sponsored by the British government as it was hoped she could persuade the country to stay in the war. She was there for several months including during the October Revolution. Her horror of communism and Bolshevism was then firmly established.

Pankhurst lectured in Canada during the war in 1916 and 1918, drawing capacity audiences; she was an electrifying, dramatic public speaker. In 1916 Pankhurst asked Alberta feminist and writer Nellie McClung to arrange two public appearances in Edmonton. It was there that Pankhurst met Emily Murphy (1868–1933), also known as the author “Janey Canuck.” Pankhurst’s first Edmonton lecture, to an immense crowd at McDougall Methodist Church, was the same day that Murphy’s appointment as a police magistrate was announced, and they shared the front page of the *Evening Bulletin*.¹⁶ Murphy, the first female magistrate in Canada and in the British Empire, presided over a court where female offenders were tried by a woman in the presence of other women.

Murphy, née Ferguson, was from a prosperous Ontario family prominent in the legal community and with strong ties to the Conservative party. She moved west with her husband, an Anglican cleric, first to Winnipeg, then rural Manitoba and in 1907, to Edmonton. Although Murphy was not a lawyer herself, she was devoted to women’s rights, and in particular the legal protection of women and children. She believed that magistrates could improve the lives of the people who came before them, and referred to her role as that of “magistrate-physician,” a person who would not only diagnose the patient and prescribe a course of treatment but would also follow up to ensure that the prescription was working and the cure achieved.¹⁷ John McLaren has argued that as a magistrate Murphy could demonstrate compassion and empathy, but that there were limits to her understanding and patience. McLaren found in Murphy’s magistrate’s notebooks that “references to the ethnic origins of some of those whom she sentenced suggest an association in her mind between delinquency and insanity and certain minority and immigrant groups.”¹⁸ She increasingly came to believe that a high proportion of offenders were “feeble-minded

or mentally defective.”¹⁹ By the mid-1920s Murphy became an outspoken advocate of sterilization of the “unfit.”

Murphy and Pankhurst had much in common by 1916, but Murphy had been a devoted and outspoken British imperialist for more years.²⁰ In a 1914 lecture on “citizenship” in Victoria, BC, Murphy told the members of the Canadian Women’s Club and Alexandra Club that “not only should we be loyal citizens to Canada, but to the United Empire.”²¹ She was also concerned with the assimilation of the “foreigner” in Canada and told the Victoria club women that “one of the chief duties of Canadians as patriots was the work of educating into useful and loyal citizens the foreign people who come to this Western country in such great numbers. The task of welding this rude conglomerate mass into a disciplined and coherent whole seemed a well-nigh titanic one. To neglect these people was a dangerous error.” Murphy believed in the superiority of the northern, Nordic “race.” In her view, the solution to the “problem” of the “foreigner” was “that Canada was a northern country. The climatic discipline of the north was bound to produce qualities of dominance, just as its productivity made for opulence.” Murphy was convinced that “the best peoples of the world have come out of the north, and the longer they are away from the boreal regions in such proportion do they degenerate.”²²

There is a photograph of Pankhurst’s 1916 meeting with Murphy, McClung, and members of the Edmonton Equal Franchise League, fresh from their victory with the provincial vote two months earlier. It was an exuberant moment for supporters of women’s suffrage in Alberta, and the presence of Pankhurst added great prestige to the occasion. It was not until 1918 in Britain that women over the age of thirty, and subject to property qualifications, acquired the vote, and it was not until 1928 that British women received the vote on the same terms as men. As “Janey Canuck,” Murphy wrote an article, “Emmeline Pankhurst in the North,” an account of the 1916 visit to Edmonton in which she expressed her adulation, writing that “in the years to come, some keen-eyed, well-balanced historian ... will say ‘To this City, from all parts of the world, came many notable authors, artists, actors and workers in sociology, but, among them all, none stood out with such exceeding luster of [*sic*] that woman whose flaming spirit has touched to the quick the civilized world ... Emmeline Pankhurst.”²³ Murphy admired Pankhurst’s “indomitable [*sic*] will,”



6.1 The 13 June 1916 meeting of the Edmonton Equal Franchise League at Nellie McClung's Edmonton home included a reception in honour of Emmeline Pankhurst. Pankhurst gave two lectures in the city to overflowing crowds. Emily Murphy's appointment as police magistrate was announced the same day. Pankhurst is seen in the front row wearing a white blouse, with flowers. She wears her "Holloway Brooch," presented to suffragettes who had undergone imprisonment. On her left is Emily Murphy, and on her right is Nellie McClung. The child is Mark McClung. Image B-06786. Courtesy of the Royal British Columbia Museum and Archives.

and her "unconquerable spirit," yet was "amazed" to find a "soft-voiced, gentle-mannered, reposeful little lady."

There were only subtle hints in 1916 of the "out and out imperialist" Pankhurst had become by the time of her second wartime lecture tour to Canada in 1918, when she praised the British Empire as an equalizer that would promote gender equality in all countries, freeing women who "were in subjection of the most abject kind, without rights of any kind."²⁴ In 1919 Pankhurst went to North America again, speaking on the dangers of Bolshevism to declining audiences in the United States. But in Canada

in November 1919 she was much more appreciated, and here her imperialistic fervour took flight. In Vancouver she talked to a packed theatre on the virtues of the British Empire, its “duty and responsibility to the rest of the world.”²⁵ She called for co-operation among the people of the British Empire against the monster of Bolshevism. Pankhurst concluded: “The danger is a real one and the enemy insidious and we must all guard against it. As members of a great and mighty Empire we have a great trust, and our duty and responsibility to the Empire is all the greater.”²⁶

In the summer of 1920 Pankhurst completed a lucrative Chautauqua tour of Western Canada, where it was estimated that she addressed 70,000 people.²⁷ Pankhurst claimed in August of that year that she had seen “more of Western Canada ... than many Western Canadians themselves and state[d] that she [was] very interested to have met representatives of practically every type which goes to make up Canada.”²⁸ Her visits were recalled as major highlights in the local histories of small prairie towns.²⁹ As her biographer June Purvis writes, the warm reception Pankhurst received in Canada seemed to revitalize her, and as biographer Paula Bartley notes of the same time period, although Pankhurst was a “political embarrassment” in postwar Britain, she commanded enormous respect and admiration in Canada.³⁰ Her themes in her lectures at this point were the need for loyal support of the Empire and how women should use their newly won citizenship to advance “the feeling of loyalty and faithfulness to the Mother Country.”³¹ Women, meaning white women of British ancestry, had to make sacrifices for the salvation of the British Empire.³²

After her exhausting summer, she decided to stay in Canada. Pankhurst found Victoria particularly welcoming and to her taste. She first settled in the James Bay Hotel in August 1920 with her three adopted daughters. She told Ethel M. Chapman, for *Maclean's Magazine*, that she chose Victoria as “it is the nearest thing we have to a bit of old England – with its cluster of gardened, tennis-courted, restful English-looking homes set close to the sea.” Chapman wrote that Pankhurst wanted Canada to be her home because “she believes that it offers a future for her children.”³³

It was in Victoria, in the fall of 1920, that Pankhurst met Dr. Gordon Bates, who had formed the Canadian National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases, an organization devoted to a public campaign of education and treatment. The organization was about more than venereal disease, as it also served as a metaphor for other ills of society – it was

linked to racial and national health and to the vitality and strength of the Empire. But the organization lacked a speaker who could “appeal to the people’s conscience and breathe life and the ardour of a moral crusade into a collection of statistics.”³⁴ Pankhurst needed the income, and venereal disease was a subject “dear to her heart,” as she had experience with the tragic effects of the disease through her work as a registrar of births and deaths in Manchester. In 1913 her daughter Christabel had published a book called *The Great Scourge and How to End It*, in which she urged all women to refuse marriage and motherhood until men gave up the licentiousness that was the root cause of venereal disease. Biographer Paula Bartley argues that Pankhurst had long been interested in issues of “feeble-mindedness, race and venereal disease” and the relationship between these and white slavery and prostitution.³⁵ Bartley notes that as a poor law guardian in Manchester, Pankhurst had worked closely with Mary Dendy, a noted eugenicist, and that by the late 1890s she was advocating increased powers of detention for “feeble-minded” children. Neither biographer considers Pankhurst’s friendship with Murphy as an important influence on her eugenic thought.

Eugenics, the “science” of selective human breeding, sought to combat “race deterioration” and improve the fabric of the nation and Empire by encouraging the best stock to reproduce. Eugenics was supported and promoted by scientists, legislators, judges, and feminist reformers in the early decades of the twentieth century.³⁶ Eugenics played a formative role in feminist movements in Britain, Canada, and the United States³⁷ Some British feminists were particularly enthusiastic proponents of eugenics. As Ann Taylor Allen has argued, “eugenic theory was a basic and formative, not an incidental, part of feminist positions on the vitally important themes of motherhood, reproduction, and the state.”³⁸ Feminists “did not simply manipulate eugenic theory, but critiqued, expanded and promoted it.”³⁹ In the interwar period, British feminists renounced the “anti-male” militancy of the prewar era, and called for co-operation between men and women in the task of “enlightened” reproduction.⁴⁰ A “eugenic feminism” also emerged in the United States whose supporters argued that “the eugenic decline of the race could be prevented only if women were granted greater political, social, sexual, and economic equality.”⁴¹

In the most comprehensive study of “eugenic feminism” in Canada, Cecily Devereux focuses on Nellie McClung. Although McClung was

never as outspoken an advocate of eugenics as Murphy, Devereux argues that “eugenical thinking informs every aspect of her [McClung’s] feminism and social reform, her fiction, and her vision ‘of a better world.’”⁴² Devereux found that eugenics ideas were widely shared, that feminists of that time were concerned about the family and the mother as the centre of that unit, and that they advocated the control of reproduction to strengthen the family and better the nation and the “race.” Devereux argues that for McClung, controlling reproduction – the basis of eugenics – was crucial to

liberating women, improving social conditions, protecting what seemed to her to be weaker or needier members of society, and maintaining national economic strength in what was imagined, if never actually realized, as a community organized around principles of ‘common good.’ Eugenics was not for her and her contemporaries a ‘bad’ measure adopted for a ‘good’ end but a spectrum of ‘solutions’ to perceived problems in the national community. It would ultimately include sexual sterilization in Alberta and British Columbia. Its central premises were birth control, sexual education for men and women, instruction and support for mothers, and the empowerment of women to implement these premises.⁴³

McClung’s feminism, like Murphy’s, was “a discourse of imperialism and a technology of empire.”⁴⁴ Little of this was new to Emmeline Pankhurst when she arrived in post-World War I Canada, but these themes did not as yet dominate her public addresses. It was Emmeline’s Canadian interlude, and particularly her association with Emily Murphy, that transformed Pankhurst into an avid supporter of eugenics, and I argue that Pankhurst gave credibility and legitimacy to eugenic thought in Western Canada. For both women their imperialism intersected with their belief in eugenics; Britain led the world and could only continue to do so if the “race” remained pure and proliferated in the face of threats from Asians and others.

During her first Canadian tour for the CNCCVD in 1921, Pankhurst spoke all across the West, including Winnipeg, Portage la Prairie, Brandon, Regina, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Calgary, and Edmonton.⁴⁵ In Alberta she toured with Emily Murphy.⁴⁶ They travelled by train, conversing for many hours. Murphy learned to play solitaire from Pankhurst.⁴⁷ They

shared the podium and the headlines in the newspapers, and they echoed each other's thoughts and points. Their arrival was eagerly anticipated. In the Medicine Hat newspaper, it was declared that their town would "have the pleasure of hearing two world class speakers."⁴⁸ But Pankhurst was the main attraction, as "there is little doubt that Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst was the greatest single personal influence in the achievement of the vote of women in England." It was noted, however, that the once "militant suffragette" had done "quiet, persistent, earnest work for the nation during the war."

The title of Pankhurst's lecture throughout Alberta was "Social Hygiene and the World's Unrest," and there was great admiration for the "delicate yet forceful manner" with which this "earnest little woman ... handled a difficult subject."⁴⁹ At Lethbridge on 11 May Pankhurst and Murphy were interviewed together and they both emphasized the dangers of unrestricted immigration to the future of Canada, pointing out the supposed link between venereal disease, the Russians, and Bolshevism. Pankhurst told the Lethbridge newspaper reporter that in Russia, where, she claimed, venereal diseases were rampant, there was the most Bolshevism: "It was their unbalanced minds that led to their destructive tendencies."⁵⁰ Murphy echoed this during her lecture that evening at the Majestic Theatre in Lethbridge, saying that "whole villages in Russia are infected. Yet these people are coming in ship loads to our shore. It is time Canada woke up." At Calgary two days later, Murphy said that in Canada "we are threatened with universal infection through immigration from Russia, which country is today seething with disease."⁵¹ Murphy stressed that Canadians needed to "wake up" and "clean house." She spoke of her court, where a young girl was brought before her "whose mother sat there while the charges were being made against her child with a face that was about as intelligent as a dill pickle. I never saw such callousness or such stupidity. It wasn't that girl's fault that she had gone wrong. It was the fault of the ignorant mother." Murphy welcomed Alberta's planned "home for the feeble-minded" and added that "feeble-minded women composed one of the most difficult problems [with] which the government has to deal in stamping out venereal disease."⁵² Pankhurst spoke in Calgary on what a "wonderful race we should have" if people were educated about social hygiene.

Adding further credibility to eugenics just at this time was the visit to Canada, including Alberta, of Caleb Saleeby, obstetrician, and sociologist.

He spoke in Toronto in May 1921 and the event received wide coverage. It was noted in the *Medicine Hat News* on the first page, under the headline “Racial Poisons Gain Grip Upon English Races,” that Saleeby feared that venereal disease was “eating away at the virility of the English race.”⁵³ Saleeby spoke in Calgary and Edmonton in June 1921 on the dangers of venereal disease and alcohol. Saleeby was concerned about the “physical degeneration” of the people of the British Isles, and saw great potential to avoid this in Canada, a theme that Pankhurst emphasized in her lectures. “Germs of precious stock to save the race are here,” Saleeby told his Edmonton audience.⁵⁴ These were precisely the ideas that Pankhurst and Murphy had lectured on just a few weeks earlier. It is not known whether they met with Saleeby during his tour. Murphy was familiar with Saleeby’s work, as she cited him in her 1922 book *The Black Candle*.⁵⁵

When Pankhurst and Murphy lectured together in 1921, Murphy was working on *The Black Candle*, an exposé of the drug trade. Much of the book concerned the dangers posed by the “Chinaman” in Western Canada, their opium dens, and their alleged luring of young white women to the drug trade. If white women visited Chinese “chop-suey houses” they invariably found themselves peddling drugs, Murphy warned.⁵⁶ At the end of her chapter on opium, Murphy contended that “prolific Germans, with the equally prolific Russians, and the still more fertile yellow races, will wrest the leadership of the world from the British. Wise folk ought to think about these things for awhile.”⁵⁷

It was after the 1921 Alberta tour with Murphy that Pankhurst became more strident in her condemnation of Western Canada’s diverse population, and she increasingly focused on the dangers of Chinese immigration. Anxieties and fears about the “foreigner” in Western Canada reached new heights during and just after the war. In this corner of the British Empire, “whiteness” alone could not be a marker of privilege. Rather, a unique brand of Canadian Britishness took shape, first in opposition to French Canada and the United States, and in the West it was shaped in opposition first to the Indigenous people and then the “foreigners” from eastern and southern Europe.⁵⁸ “Foreign” or “alien” women were particularly singled out for criticism. Winnipeg cleric Wellington Bridgman condemned “alien” women in his 1920 book, asking how women “of such low character and breeding should have been inflicted on this fair Dominion. . . . There is not a cog of their primeval being that fits into the machinery of Canadian

civilization.”⁵⁹ Their children fell even lower into “vice and looseness of morals.” Murphy’s views, combined with the prevailing attitudes in Western Canada, which in BC in particular were characterized by hostility toward the Chinese, emboldened Pankhurst to speak more pointedly against non-British immigrants.

In September 1921, fresh from her prairie tour, Pankhurst lectured in BC, calling on Canadians to “think imperiously and work industriously,” and saying that “immigrants of the British race are the best for the Dominion’s development.”⁶⁰ She said that excluding the “Oriental would mean that the white man would have to work harder and undertake uncongenial tasks,” but from her own experience “the Southern States suffered by having an inferior race to work for the whites.” Pankhurst emphasized that “unity of race” was necessary to the progress of a nation. Canada’s highest development, she suggested, “would best be secured by bringing in men and women of the British race.” To prolonged applause Pankhurst concluded that “how to build up Canada, make the people worthy of the country in which they lived, and develop a great imperial race, was a problem and a task requiring the brightest intellects and the highest energies of Canadians. To carry on the traditions of a race the first and the most splendid ever seen, was the task now committed to the Canadian people.”

Pankhurst moved to Toronto in 1922 as she was appointed to the national staff of the CNCCVD as chief lecturer, but she continued to tirelessly lecture throughout the country for this organization, which changed its name to the Canadian Social Hygiene Council that year. In 1922 Pankhurst was once again in the West on the Chautauqua circuit, with her daughter Christabel, speaking at sixty-three towns and cities.⁶¹ On this trip she began to articulate Murphy’s ideas about the superiority of the northern “races,” lecturing that the Scandinavians, the Icelanders, and Norwegians “among the Europeans ... make the best Canadian citizens, assimilating much more readily than some of the other races one finds on the prairies.”⁶² In 1923 Pankhurst spoke in over thirty towns, resorts, and lumber camps in northern Ontario.⁶³ Large crowds continued to gather.⁶⁴ In 1924 she toured the Maritimes. She increasingly emphasized the importance of marriage between healthy individuals as the prerequisite to a healthy race of children, again echoing the views of her friend Emily Murphy, and she complained that there was too much “sneering” at marriage.⁶⁵ She urged parents to “teach your children reverence for the marriage vow of men

and women. Instill into their minds the belief in purity of body, mind and soul.”⁶⁶

By March 1924 Pankhurst was showing signs of physical and mental exhaustion. As biographer of the Pankhursts David Mitchell wrote, “For four and a half years she had imposed upon a frame already weakened by incredible exertions and ordeals a schedule calculated to sap the stamina of a woman half her age.”⁶⁷ That same month the federal government and the Ontario government announced cuts to their grants to the Social Hygiene Council. Pankhurst was granted a leave of absence and the funds were never found to rehire her.⁶⁸

Pankhurst’s Canadian interlude was over. She first went on holiday to Bermuda, returning to England in 1925, after an absence of six years. She joined the Conservative Party and let her name stand as a parliamentary candidate for Whitechapel. Scholars have various explanations for why this former socialist became so conservative. Bartley wrote that “in effect, Emmeline was in an ideological vacuum,” as she had left Liberalism and socialism far behind.⁶⁹ There was only one viable party left. Her friendships with prominent Conservatives Stanley Baldwin and Nancy Astor are also considered to have been important. June Purvis has provided the most comprehensive account of Pankhurst’s post-World War I years to her death, arguing that her transformation into a Tory was not sudden, that even before the war she had become disenchanted with the Labour Party and trade unions who did not support women workers. Purvis argues that suffrage remained her goal even during the war; it was in abeyance but not abandoned. At the outbreak of war Pankhurst agreed to support Lloyd George, who had thwarted her suffrage campaigns, with the tacit understanding that the price would be postwar support for enfranchising women. According to one of Pankhurst’s loyal supporters, their slogan during the war was “We have buried the hatchet, but we know where to find it.”⁷⁰

Pankhurst’s friendship with Emily Murphy has not been included in any of the analysis thus far. Pankhurst emerged from Canada closely allied with Murphy’s causes, opinions, and politics. While the seeds of many of these may have been planted much earlier, they began to take root and grow during Pankhurst’s Canadian interlude when she was associated with Murphy. Murphy supported the Conservatives, and had always objected to a separate women’s party.⁷¹ As Pankhurst herself explained, “My

war experience and my experience on the other side of the Atlantic have changed my views considerably. I am now an imperialist.”⁷² On 14 June 1928, Pankhurst died of septicemia in London at the age of sixty-nine, before she was able to run for the Whitechapel seat. She died before the great triumph of her friend Emily Murphy, who in 1929, along with Nellie McClung and three other Alberta women (The Famous Five), successfully challenged the exclusion of women from Canada’s Senate, winning the “Persons” case, a pivotal moment in the struggle for women’s rights. Murphy helped to raise funds from Canada for the Pankhurst Memorial in Westminster.

In Alberta, support for the involuntary sterilization of the “feeble-minded” grew following the Pankhurst and Murphy lectures. In 1922 at the convention of the United Farmers of Alberta (the UFA, then in power in Alberta), resolutions were passed urging the government to bring in legislation allowing the segregation of “feeble-minded” adults during their reproductive years, and calling for a study of the merits of forced sterilization.⁷³ At their 1925 convention, the UFA passed a resolution recommending the sterilization of mentally deficient people. The United Farm Women of Alberta joined the chorus and encouraged the government to pursue a policy of “racial betterment through the weeding out of undesirable strains.”⁷⁴ In her public lectures and newspaper articles after Pankhurst left Canada, Murphy continued the crusade, warning that the “feeble-minded” reproduced at an alarming rate, urging the sterilization of all patients of marriageable age who were to be discharged from the Ponoka Asylum, and continuing to stress that the majority of the patients were foreign-born.⁷⁵ Alberta’s UFA government passed the Sexual Sterilization Act in 1928.⁷⁶ Murphy continued to publish articles on sterilization until just before her death in 1933. For example, in 1932 as “Janey Canuck,” she published “Should the Unfit Wed?,” in which the answer was yes, but only if they agreed to “confine their unfitness to themselves” and were sterilized.⁷⁷

Criticized and discredited in Britain following World War I, Pankhurst found herself adored, praised, and acclaimed, particularly in Western Canada. She spoke to capacity audiences and was warmly received in countless cities and towns across the nation during her Canadian interlude. While she arrived with beliefs about the virtues of the British Empire and the need for “racial” betterment, these flourished and proliferated in

the Canadian setting because of her warm reception, her work with the CNCCVD, and her association with Emily Murphy. Together, Pankhurst and Murphy helped to articulate and bring important credibility to the unique brand of Britishness taking shape in Western Canada, while drawing stark dichotomies between inclusions and exclusions that justified the sterilization legislation aimed at creating an imperial “race.”

Notes

- 1 June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2002), 319. Purvis quotes from a *Victoria Daily Times* article describing Pankhurst’s 27 November 1920 lecture, where she “brought all the oratorical [sic] fire and enthusiasm with which she gained the admiration of both supporter and opponent during her long and strenuous campaign for women’s suffrage ... the gospel of Imperialism could have no better disciple than this clever woman.”
- 2 Paula Bartley, *Emmeline Pankhurst* (London: Routledge, 2002), 216.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 217.
- 4 *Victoria Daily Times*, 31 August 1922, 6.
- 5 Bartley, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, 214.
- 6 Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 3–4.
- 7 Sarah Carter, “Britishness, ‘Foreignness,’ Women and Land in Western Canada, 1890s–1920s,” *Humanities Research* 13, no. 1 (2006): 43–60. See also the other articles in that journal issue from the conference “Britishness and Otherness: Locating Marginal White Identities in the Empire,” Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, July 2004. See also Katie Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).
- 8 Jana Grekul, Harvey Krahn, and Dave Odynak, “Sterilizing the ‘Feeble-minded’: Eugenics in Alberta, Canada, 1929–1972,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 17, no. 4 (December 2004): 358. See also Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada 1885–1945* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990); Karen Stote, “An Act of Genocide: Eugenics, Indian Policy and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women in Canada” (PhD diss., University of New Brunswick, April 2012).
- 9 Grekul, Krahn, and Odynak, “Sterilizing the ‘Feeble-minded,’” 378.
- 10 John McLaren, “Maternal Feminism in Action – Emily Murphy, Police Magistrate,” *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 8 (1988): 245.
- 11 Cecily Devereaux, *Growing a Race: Nellie L. McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005); Erika Dyck, *Facing Eugenics: Reproduction, Sterilization and the Politics of Choice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Amy Samson, “Eugenics in the Community: The United Farm Women of Alberta. Public Health Nursing, Teaching, Social Work, and Sexual Sterilization in

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