

# Women's rights run in my veins, so I'll be joining a new march on parliament

Austerity is further damaging women's economic independence, and our right to live free from violence. It's time to act



**Helen Pankhurst**

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The Pankhursts – Christabel, Emmeline and Sylvia – lead a suffragette parade through London in 1911. Photograph: Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis

As the great grand-daughter of [Emmeline Pankhurst](#), and grand-daughter of [Sylvia Pankhurst](#), it is no surprise that a passion for women's rights runs in my veins.

A few weeks ago, I stood alongside my daughter Laura Pankhurst, and the 50 women dressed as suffragettes at Danny Boyle's beautifully choreographed Olympics opening ceremony. The re-enactment was one way of paying homage to the sacrifices of countless women in the fight for their right to vote. Yet the suffragette campaign was just one aspect of the wider struggle for equality. It continues to this day, which is why many of the women who "acted" as feminist agitators at the opening ceremony will be campaigning on 24 October, joining [UK Feminista's lobby of parliament](#).

The event will give women and men from across the UK the opportunity to speak truth to power by lobbying their MPs en masse. Parliament will be treated to a chorus of voices calling for an end to the attacks on women's rights and greater commitment to equality.

The pace of progress was pretty slow even before the recession started to bite. Eighty-four years on from all women gaining the vote, we are still outnumbered four to one in parliament, and 42 years after winning the legal right to equal pay, women still face a full-time pay gap of 15%, while 40% of women of ethnic minorities live in poverty. In addition, up to three million women and girls in the UK experience rape, domestic violence, stalking or other violence each year.

Women are being hit disproportionately by austerity: 31% of the funding to violence

against women services from local authorities was cut between 2011 and 2012, and last year, on a typical day, 230 women seeking refuge were turned away by Women's Aid due to lack of space. Over the past couple of years, women's right to seek a safe, legal abortion has also been undermined. The result of all this is a shredding of women's economic independence, and erosion of the fundamental right to live free from violence.

But there is cause for hope. A recent resurgence in feminist activism has brought these issues back on to the streets and into the headlines. It's time this commitment was mirrored in parliament. That's why a broad coalition of women's organisations have joined forces to stage a feminist lobby of parliament. There are urgent changes that need to take place in this parliamentary term.

These include reversing the cuts to childcare, supporting and ringfencing Sure Start centres; ensuring schools tackle violence against women and girls through the curriculum and in school policies; modernising abortion regulations and extending them to Northern Ireland. Underlying these specific demands, the lobby will urge MPs to draw on the decades of research by women's organisations on the policies and practices that will help us build an equal future for women and men. The problem is not a lack of proposed solutions – it is a lack of political will.

That's why my daughter Laura and I will be reunited with the "Olympic suffragettes" on 24 October, joining UK Feminista to lobby for an end to the backsliding on women's rights. A future the suffragettes would have been proud of is possible – it's time parliament stepped up to help build it.

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**MrGLDavis**

21 August 2012 11:56AM

Austerity is further damaging women's economic independence

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Straight away, the very first line of the sub-heading, we get an oxymoron.