

## SYLVIA PANKHURST STATUE

# Voices raised for Sylvia

THE fight for our chosen site for the memorial to Sylvia Pankhurst opposite the Palace of Westminster on College Green goes on!

*"Sylvia Pankhurst had no connection with the Lords which could justify such a prominent site"* House of Lords Administration and Works Committee

*"If Pankhurst can't have a statue on College Green, why not take up the spirit of the suffragettes and chain one to the railings outside parliament?"* Baroness Betty Boothroyd

The Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee won planning permission for the site from Westminster Council, but because the land is owned by Parliament, permission has to be gained from committees in both the Commons and the Lords. Last year the Lords Committee refused us permission, but then the Commons Committee approved our request and referred the matter back to the Lords. They refused again.

This has meant that for the last months our total focus has been on changing the minds of the Lords Committee. In March, both Houses put on International Women's Day debates – and from those it's clear what the women think!

In the Commons, Vera Baird MP (Lab., Redcar) called on all Members to lobby for the site, and Cheryl Gillan MP (Con., Chesham and Amersham) said "it's about time that Sylvia Pankhurst was recognised. It is appalling that we have hit the buffers on this issue, so if there is any cross-party action that I can take with my sisters – I cannot believe that I said that – on the other side of the House, I am willing to join in, in the spirit of us against the rest of them..."

In the Lords Baroness Brenda Dean commented: "I am ashamed to say that the Committee has refused to agree". She was supported by Baroness Scotland who said: "Sylvia Pankhurst was one of the most prominent suffragettes and clearly deserves this recognition, which is long overdue."

One of the comments made by Vera Baird was that the House of Lords Committee had claimed that the statue

doesn't have artistic merit. This led to a great initiative by Brenda Dean who organised (just before Parliament rose for the summer recess) a viewing of the maquette (an early model for the statue) in the House of Lords.

This was a very successful and encouraging afternoon. Visiting peers had the opportunity not only to see the bronze maquette but also to discuss the project with Barbara Switzer from the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee and



**Professor Richard Pankhurst with the maquette of his mother's statue**

Ian Walters, the statue's sculptor. A diverse range of peers attended and the comments book reflects our view of the statue – "lovely and fitting", "superb, permission should be granted", "great, must be on College Green", "powerful and well worth a place on College Green".

When parliament returns Brenda Dean and her colleagues will be assessing the situation and we will decide the next move. However, have no doubt – we will win!

**Megan Dobney**

**Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee**

## NOT JUST ABOUT THE VOTE

Sylvia Pankhurst's entire adult life was devoted to the cause of improving the lot of working people. Initially this was manifest in the campaign she led for the vote in the East End of London.

She was aware that the Women's Social and Political Union had become a predominantly middle class organisation and that

its hostility to the Labour Party was deeply resented in working class areas.

The rift between herself and the WSPU, the organisation controlled by her better known mother and elder sister, widened as a result of Sylvia's steadfast opposition to World War One during which, alone of all the women's suffrage organisations, her East London Federation maintained the fight for the vote.

After the vote was won, Sylvia maintained her fight for working women by taking up issues such as maternity pay and equal pay and by campaigning for improved child bearing and rearing facilities. When Mussolini's army invaded Ethiopia, she dedicated herself for the next 20 years to work for that country's liberation.

She campaigned tirelessly before and during World War II for an allied victory and was active in lending practical assistance to Jewish refugees fleeing from fascist persecution.

## FAMILY CAMPAIGN

Professor Richard Pankhurst, Sylvia's son and patron of the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, has been awarded the OBE "for services to Ethiopian studies". He has written to the Queen urging the return to Ethiopia of six Ethiopian manuscripts looted by British troops from Emperor Theodore's fortress of Magdala in Ethiopia in 1868. They are currently held in the Royal Library in Windsor Castle.

## MEMORIAL LECTURE

The second SPML will take place on Friday 17 September 2004, 7-8.30pm at Wortley Hall near Sheffield. Richard Pankhurst, Professor of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, will speak on "Sylvia Pankhurst – Abyssinia and Spain". The lecture is sponsored by the National Assembly of Women, the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, and Wortley Hall, and will be followed by light refreshments.