

***Pygmalion* – The Rise of Women and the Working Class**

During the decade which produced *Pygmalion*, the political power of the working class increased greatly, through massive increases in trade union membership. Bitter class divisions gave rise to waves of strikes and disturbances, including a major railway strike in 1911, a national miners' strike in 1912, and the "Triple Alliance" of miners, railway, and transport workers in 1914. A new political party, Labour, came into existence in 1893, advancing an eight-hour work day and other workplace reforms. Meanwhile, reforms to laws concerning suffrage, the right to vote, further brought men (and later, women) of the working class into Britain's ever-more participatory democracy. Suffrage (the right to vote) had in Britain always been based on requirements of property ownership, reflecting the contemporary idea that only landowners were considered reasoned and informed enough to vote but also that they would do so in the best interest of those in the classes below them. These property requirements were gradually relaxed throughout the nineteenth century, gradually increasing the size of the male electorate.

Only after many years of political struggle by organizations of women known as "suffragettes" did women achieve the right to vote: first in 1918 for women over 30 who also met a requirement of property ownership, then extended in 1928 to all women over the age of 21 (as was already the case for men). Increased political participation further prompted a shift in sex roles: British society had already noted the phenomenon of "the new woman," and was to see further changes such as increasing numbers of women in the work force, as well as reforms to divorce laws and other impacts upon domestic life.