

Alice Paul (1885 –1977)

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Alice Stokes Paul was born into a Quaker family at Paulsdale, her family farm in Mount Laurel, New Jersey. Alice was the oldest of three children. As Hixsite Quakers, the family believed in gender equality, education for women, and working for the betterment of society. Her mother, Tacie often brought Alice to her women's suffrage meetings.

In 1912, Alice Paul joined the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and was appointed Chairman of their Congressional Committee in Washington, DC.

In 1913, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns formed the Congressional Union for Women Suffrage. Their focus was lobbying for a constitutional amendment to secure the right to vote for women. Such an amendment had originally been sought by suffragists Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1878. However, by the early 20th century, the focus of the suffrage movement had turned to securing the vote on a state-by-state basis.

Paul and her colleagues formed the National Woman's Party (NWP) in 1916 and began introducing some of the methods used by the suffrage movement in Britain. Tactics included demonstrations, parades, mass meetings, picketing, suffrage watch, fires, and hunger strikes. These actions were accompanied by press coverage and the publication of the weekly *Suffragist*.

In the election of 1916, Paul and the NWP campaigned against the continuing refusal of President Woodrow Wilson and other incumbent Democrats to actively support the Suffrage Amendment. In January 1917, the NWP staged the first political protest ever to picket the White House. The picketers, known as "Silent Sentinels," held banners demanding the right to vote. This was an example of a non-violent civil disobedience campaign.

In July 1917, picketers were arrested on charges of "obstructing traffic." Many, including Paul, were convicted and incarcerated at the Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia. In protest of the conditions in Occoquan, Paul commenced a hunger strike. This led to her being moved to the prison's psychiatric ward and force-fed. Other women joined the strike, which combined with the continuing demonstrations and attendant press coverage, kept the pressure on the Wilson administration. In January, 1918, the president announced that women's suffrage was urgently needed as a "war measure."

Paul was the original author of a proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution in 1923.