

midday, to address the all-male City Club which had 'to suspend temporarily its most stringent rule² to allow Sylvia to speak there.⁵⁵ Her speech, lasting 55 minutes, attracted the largest audience in the club's history: 'The club was crowded. Men climbed on chairs and tables to hear the little woman speak, and they applauded her frequently.' By mid-afternoon, Sylvia was debating Isaac H. Lionberger, described by the local press as a 'lawyer, capitalist and one time Assistant Attorney General of the United States', in front of an audience of over 800 at the Mary Institute Hall, a school for local privileged girls, one of whom was Lionberger's daughter.⁵⁶ According to all reports, Sylvia was wittier, quicker and cleverer than the prominent lawyer nearly thirty years her senior. When Lionberger tried to justify an exclusively male franchise on the grounds that women were not able to fight for their country, Sylvia told him he did not understand politics – which received applause – and asked 'Do your presidents settle their campaigns for office by prize fights?'⁵⁷ 'Worse still,' commented an amused reporter, 'a few of the men hissed when Mr Lionberger derided the right of women to vote.'⁵⁸ It was said that the first to congratulate Sylvia on her victory was Lionberger's daughter who thanked her for 'taking father down.'⁵⁹

The successes of Sylvia's tours, in which she commanded respect as a speaker, were achieved despite significant challenges which constantly threatened to undermine her. The professional lecturing agencies presented the suffragette lecturer as a novelty attraction which focused attention on her image and thus reproduced many of the barriers that the suffragettes were seeking to overcome. Sylvia was frequently infantilised by the press. Although she was 28 years old when she arrived on her first tour, the *New York Times* asserted: 'The youngest suffragette, as she is called, Miss Pankhurst, is 20, looks younger, and might belong to any group of schoolgirls to be seen in New York.'⁶⁰ The *Boston Globe*, reporting on her meeting in the Ford Hall, stated she looked no older than 20 and had 'a soft, pathetic voice that would be quite in keeping with a girl of 12,' which seems implausible alongside the claim that her speech held 1,000 people in 'rapt attention'.⁶¹ In Ottawa, she was reported as being 'a typical English girl of twenty-one' and 'very girlish in appearance', while the *Los Angeles Herald* stated she was 23 years old, before adding 'she looks no more than 18.'⁶² The effect was to undermine Sylvia as a serious political activist and intellect. Under a subtitle declaring her 'Small as a Schoolgirl', the *Times* described the audience at her first lecture in the Lyceum laughing at her discussion of unequal

pay 'as one would laugh at one's own child talking seriously of the differences between husbands and wives and the care of children.'⁶³ At the same time, the known chronology of Sylvia's life led to the outlandish claim that her first imprisonment in October 1906 must have taken place 'when she was only sixteen.'⁶⁴ Sylvia was evidently irritated by the misreporting of her age, as she told a journalist in Detroit: 'No, it's not true that I'm only 20 years of age. I'm a good bit over that, and I don't know what makes them say it unless they're rather fond of telling lies.'⁶⁵

By contrast, Sylvia, the experienced political activist, regarded the press reporters she first met on arrival as rather immature themselves – '[t]hey were exceedingly young, almost like schoolboys, I thought' – and, shocked that none of them were taking notes, ordered notebooks and pencils so that they could quote her more accurately.⁶⁶

Despite Sylvia's efforts to control her representation, her own agent, Feakins, was colluding in her infantilisation. The promotional brochure he produced for her 1912 tour carried quotations from three newspapers, the first of which was from the *New York Times* report of her Lyceum lecture, beginning with the words 'a little rosy-cheeked slip of an English girl', while the second described her 'child face.'⁶⁷ It seems likely that Feakins pandered to sexist stereotypes, judging that a girlish suffragette would be a more marketable product than an unmarried, educated woman in her late twenties.

Sylvia found herself a product in high demand with a sensationalist press eager for scoops that promised to reveal what a militant suffragette was really like. Sections of the press assumed Sylvia's total compliance and were prepared to ensure that any objections on her part were met with unpleasant consequences, as she soon found out. Arriving at the Congress Hotel in Chicago at midnight on 18 January 1911, after a journey from Oberlin, Ohio, Sylvia told the assembled reporters that she would 'talk later'. With *The Suffragette* still to complete, she informed them 'I have to do a lot of writing for two days and until I have finished that I will do little talking.'⁶⁸ The reporters did not receive this announcement well, as Sylvia later recalled:

Some battered persistently on my door, others invented the most atrocious interviews, which were published with faked photographs in which I appeared an appalling hooligan. A newspaper containing one such caricature was flung over the head of the chambermaid as she