



3. 'I capitulated immediately, but the Press men and women did not entirely relent.' Sylvia Pankhurst gave an extensive interview to the Chicago suffragist *Belle Squire*, published in the *Tribune* on 22 January 1911. The publication did not entirely forgive her initial attempt to avoid the press: below the interview it printed a hostile column deriding Sylvia's comments on sleeper trains. Both of Sylvia's tours attracted extensive press coverage. (Courtesy of the *Chicago Tribune* and newspapers.com)

with no door to lock against lurking foes or gentlemen who forget their berth numbers – alas, despair, O agony and grief!<sup>74</sup> The malevolent jest ridiculed the threats a single, female traveller could experience. (In fact, Sylvia did find herself vulnerable on at least one occasion. On board ship to America ahead of the 1912 lecture tour, she attracted the attention of the ship's doctor. In her memoirs, Sylvia claimed that he proposed marriage to 'save' her from the suffragette movement.<sup>75</sup> A letter she wrote shortly afterwards to Hardie suggests she feared being assaulted. Admonishing herself for being 'silly', she told Hardie that she had agreed to go to the doctor's cabin as this was where he saw patients but had not realised 'how very much of a sleeping place a doctor's cabin is and how even a silly old buffer of a doctor may be quite a dangerous person.' She left unnerved but also relieved: 'I was quite lucky that that incident wasn't more unpleasant than it was.'<sup>76</sup>

Much of the time, Sylvia played along with the press – after all, the militants were adept at using press interest to their advantage. She gave numerous interviews and posed for photographs, and even publicly revised her opinion of the sleeper trains. Returning to Philadelphia towards the end of the 1911 tour, she explained to reporters: 'When I first came to the United States ... I thought it was a barbarian country. I was not used to riding in sleeping cars where a curtain was the only partition from other sleepers. Now I am used to all the customs, and I think the United States is delightful.'<sup>77</sup>

Sylvia was, however, less tolerant of press interest in her personal life. Asked if she had any romantic admirers, she did not divulge any detail of the complications of her relationship with Hardie; instead she responded that she was 'too busy to get married.'<sup>78</sup> That she visited in 1912, which was a leap year, prompted reporters to ask what she thought of the convention of women asking their beaus to marry them on the extra day in February, which provoked the exasperated response: 'I have other and more important things to think of. You ask me a silly and personal question.'<sup>79</sup>

The personal nature of press interest extended to Sylvia's personal appearance. Unlike Emmeline Pankhurst, who consciously sought to disarm critics by fastidiously conforming to conventionally feminine dress, Sylvia was uninterested in adopting such tactics – indeed, she would later recall her mother's 'frequent complaint that I dressed so poorly.'<sup>80</sup> Despite conceding to wear an evening dress for some lecturing engagements, most of the time she wore more comfortable and practical