

'It had been well educated in the principles of the Women's Movement by able American women advocates, amongst whom Harriot Stanton Blach has always been a steadfast light, and was already fully informed and keenly appreciative of our militant struggle across the Atlantic.'⁹⁴

Other American advocates included the group called the 'American Suffragettes', also inspired by the WSPU to take their political activism to the streets, under whose auspices Sylvia visited and spoke in Milwaukee in February 1912. Moreover, some American women, most prominently Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, had themselves participated in the British suffragette movement and returned to tell of their experiences. Alice Paul was at the head of a reception committee of omnibuses and taxis decked in suffrage banners to greet Sylvia when she arrived at Philadelphia's Broad Street station in early April 1911.⁹⁵ These activists and organisations facilitated Sylvia's participation in the American suffrage movement.

The fact that some American states had granted women's suffrage directed the efforts of suffrage organisations in this period towards winning the vote in individual states and thus to lobbying state governments. In late February, the WPU brought Sylvia to Albany, the capital of New York State, to speak on her prison experiences as part of their 'suffrage week' of campaigning there. Likewise, her visit to Wisconsin in 1912 coincided with suffrage campaigning ahead of a state-wide referendum on women's suffrage.

It was not only the suffrage groups explicitly inspired by militancy that sought Sylvia's contribution. On 23 February 1911, when the State House in Boston, Massachusetts voted on a resolution on women's suffrage, suffragists organised a huge torchlight procession through the city, with music and banners, and Sylvia marching in the front row. She addressed the marchers outside, as well as three overflow meetings and was invited to speak inside the State House to the representatives who would make the decision, despite the fact that she was not a resident of the state or an American citizen: 'The chairman of the committee stated that it was not the custom to allow citizens of foreign countries to speak at such hearings, but they would accord her the privilege. She was received with great applause and listened to with strictest attention.'⁹⁶

In her speech, Sylvia used the example of British militancy to warn against denying women's citizenship, urging: 'Do not drive your women to go the lengths to which we have had to go.'⁹⁷ Ida Husted Harper, an American suffragist and historian of the movement, considered that

'Sylvia Pankhurst addressed the committee in a simple and effective way.'⁹⁸ It was here that Sylvia met Alice Stone Blackwell, the editor of the *Woman's Journal*, the organ of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. This newspaper was granted the rights to publish Sylvia's *The Suffragette*, which they promoted as their 1911 New Year's Offer, and widely reported on Sylvia's 1911 tour. Sylvia later recalled 'many memories of meeting Alice Stone Blackwell each time I was in America; in the 1930s, Sylvia replied to a letter from Stone Blackwell telling her that 'the spirit of your letter brings you back to me' and closing with 'kind remembrances'.⁹⁹ Likewise, Sylvia's invitations to address the state governments of Colorado, Iowa and Michigan, all discussed in this book, are indications that she was regarded by many as a powerful exponent of their cause.

Defending militancy

The promotion of leading suffragettes was not, however, universally popular in the American suffrage movement. Even Sylvia's first meeting at the Lyceum proved controversial, with some suffrage campaigners complaining that the English suffragettes' lecture fees were depriving the American movement of funds.¹⁰⁰ More fundamentally, American suffragists were divided over militancy, with some arguing that association with English suffragettes would discredit their cause and jeopardise its chances of success. Catharine Waugh McCulloch, the vice-president of the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association and former vice-president of the NAWSA, wrote a furious letter to the organiser of the Wisconsin referendum campaign on the day of Sylvia's arrival there at the behest of the American Suffragettes. Complaining that the suffragettes were 'coining money out of us' because their dramatic stories held appeal – 'people pay hard cash to Miss Pankhurst & want our women to speak for nothing, chiefly because our women have not been in jail' – she went on to object to any association between the referendum campaign and the English militants:

I am not convinced that the English women who throw stones & go to jail help our cause. They did not reach the goal as fast as did the women in Cal. and Wash. [California and Washington]* and those women did not act like tomboys. Of course they say they understand

* Women won the right to vote in Washington in 1910, in California in 1911.