

their own situation & perhaps they do but then we understand our situation best. I really resent their advice about militant tactics & think you and I alone could defeat the Wis. [Wisconsin] measure if we should go out in Milwaukee or Chicago & throw a few stones & get sent to jail.<sup>101</sup>

In many ways, Sylvia's strategy was similar to those adopted by other suffragette speakers in North America as she sought to contextualise militancy.<sup>102</sup> First, she argued that when governments behaved tyrannically by depriving people of a democratic voice then militant, civil disobedience was justified resistance. In front of American audiences, she likened suffragette militancy to the American Revolution: 'We are fighting the battle of human freedom. Americans should be sympathet[ic], for you did not hesitate to plunge your country and ours into war to gain the freedom for which we ask.'<sup>103</sup>

The suffragettes had adopted the American Revolutionary slogan 'Taxation without representation is tyranny', and when Sylvia proclaimed this in Oakland, California in March 1911 she was 'stopped by loud applause'.<sup>104</sup> Further, she argued that militancy was effective, pointing on the one hand to the fifty years' peaceful struggle for women's suffrage in Britain, which had not achieved the franchise, and on the other to 'how the men obtained suffrage'.<sup>105</sup> She then went on to cite examples of acts, far more violent than those undertaken by the WSPU, which had succeeded in expanding the male electorate:

we found that one time after another the men of England had obtained it [the vote] by burning buildings, raiding towns, dragging prominent legislators from their carriages and trampling on them – may more – by committing murder – that they had verily been forced into this before they got their vote, but that, being forced, they did get their vote.<sup>106</sup>

Militancy was, therefore, not inherently fanatical or female, as its opponents had charged, but a rather more moderate emulation of political protests undertaken by men.

Sylvia also placed suffragette militancy in the context of the much greater, repressive violence they faced. She explained the origins of militancy, graphically describing Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney attending a Liberal rally in 1905 and demanding an answer to their question on women's suffrage only to be roughly ejected, arrested

and imprisoned. In words that were repeated in *The Suffragette*, she described Christabel trying to defend her comrade from the stewards: 'her hand where she held them off was torn so and the blood ran down from it on Annie Kenney's white hat and we found it quite stained the next morning'.<sup>107</sup> She drew on her own experiences of imprisonment to vividly describe the humiliation and repressive treatment of suffragettes who were denied the status of political prisoners: 'We were condemned to solitary confinement, made to wear clothes which had been worn by other prisoners and bathe (once a week) in dirty baths'.<sup>108</sup> When women protested against this treatment they were brutally force fed. It was the authorities, not the suffragettes, that were using violence: 'we merely matched spiritual force against violence'.<sup>109</sup>

In a widely reported interview conducted upon her arrival in New York in 1911, Sylvia declared that thousands of English women were prepared to 'rush beneath the hoofs of the mounted police and die as the Christian martyrs of old died in the arena for their faith'.<sup>110</sup> Spoken two years before suffragette Emily Wilding Davison's protest – when she ran onto the racecourse during the Epsom Derby, was knocked down and killed after colliding with the king's horse and commemorated as the first martyr for the cause – these words now read as eerily prescient. Sylvia, however, was referring to the police brutality she had witnessed on suffragette demonstrations in London. Her allusions to martyrdom were by no means abstract, they formed the very substance of militancy and served as an indictment of the violence meted out to suffrage campaigners, violence of which she had painful personal experience. Sylvia's second arrest and imprisonment resulted from a WSPU march on Parliament on 13 February 1907 where

[m]ounted men scattered the marchers; foot police seized them by the back of the neck and rushed them along at arm's length, thumping them in the back, and bumping them with their knees in approved police fashion. Women, by the hundred, returned again and again with painful persistence, enduring this treatment by the hour. Those who took refuge in doorways were dragged down the steps and hurled in front of the horses, then pounced upon by constables and beaten again.<sup>111</sup>

Worse was yet to come. On Friday, 18 November 1910, WSPU demonstrators outside Parliament were sexually assaulted, beaten, kicked,