

another woman, the director of the relief work.¹⁵³ As Colette A. Hyman's work has shown, the Relief and Rent Committees were crucial in maintaining the strike and women's participation within it, as families were fed and landlords persuaded to wait for rent.¹⁵⁴ The scale of the task was daunting: at its height there were around 40,000 previously unorganised workers on strike, and the WTUL estimated that the number of strikers and their dependents who would need assistance over the bitterly cold winter months amounted to 100,000 individuals. Four months into the strike, the WTUL reported the 'tramp of thousands of weary feet' in their headquarters, the 'stream of stories of hardship and privation', and 'more than 7,000 tiny toddlers waiting for milk' – 1,250 babies were born during the strike.¹⁵⁵ There was also the challenge of helping the strikers overcome linguistic and cultural barriers to organise together – between them the strikers spoke nine different languages.¹⁵⁶ Instead of dismissing working-class women as weak, or speaking for them, Sylvia and some progressive middle-class women in Chicago, like Emerson, were striving to amplify working women's experience so that they could effect change. It is easy to see why Sylvia and Emerson struck up a friendship: Emerson, originally from Michigan, was from a wealthy background, but was said to have 'abandoned "society" for sociological investigation', and took jobs as a hotel kitchen worker, scrub woman and salesgirl in a department store to study working conditions.¹⁵⁷

Democracy from below

Gaining an insight into what working people themselves wanted to change, by speaking with them and experiencing their working conditions, was precisely what Sylvia had aimed to do in her 1907 tour. The value of first-hand experience was also what attracted Sylvia to the Settlement Houses which embedded themselves in deprived communities and sought to use their experience of the neighbourhood to deliver services that people needed. Women were often in the forefront of the Settlement movement and Sylvia was soon in contact with many of the most radical adherents; Emerson, for example, worked at the Northwestern University Settlement. Sylvia met Jane Addams, the founder of the Hull House Settlement in Chicago, during her visit there in 1911 and described her as 'the greatest American I have met so far in my travels through this country'.¹⁵⁸ Sylvia was also invited to dinner at Hull House during her 1912 tour.¹⁵⁹ In New York, Sylvia met Lillian Wald, a

nurse who established the Henry Street Settlement on the Lower East Side. Also working there, producing innovative theatrical productions with local young people, were Alice and Irene Lewisohn, two wealthy and philanthropic sisters whose combination of social commitment with artistic endeavour particularly appealed to Sylvia (see the editor's introduction to Chapter 3). She became warmly attached to them and stayed at their home when she was in New York in 1912.¹⁶⁰ Some of the Settlements actively assisted striking workers. Hull House and Henry Street having particularly close relationships with their local WTUL.¹⁶¹ Daily life in the Settlement proved that capitalism was not solving its own problems and caused many Settlement workers to call for reform. As Jane Addams observed, 'their neighbourhood experiences had made them only too conscious of the dire need for protective legislation'.¹⁶² Women who worked in the Settlements could therefore use their experience to comment authoritatively upon pressing social problems. Moreover, women's expertise in these areas further supported their claims for inclusion in the franchise.

Prioritising experience 'from below' began to inform Sylvia's conception of socialism. As Les Garner has argued, Sylvia's reflections on Milwaukee indicate that Sylvia 'was beginning to show her distaste for reformism or socialism imposed by managers and benevolent individuals', as well as 'her growing belief in socialism from below, created by, and in the interests of, working men and women'.¹⁶³ As Sylvia discusses in Chapter 5, she found herself disappointed that the administration's emphasis was upon efficient management, with permanent advisers who lacked 'special knowledge of social conditions or of working lives', excepting, she judged, the representative from the Settlement House (p. 113). It was in relation to what she saw in Milwaukee that she articulated her view here that

all forms of labour must receive due representation, one may look forward to the time when the garbage collectors, the scrub women, and the other city employees, will be powerfully represented by those who will be able to speak for them with direct knowledge of their lives and work, when plans for the reconstruction of the departments employing them are underway. (p. 121)

This emphasis on class implicitly rejected the view that elite, propertied women could represent working-class women either in the struggle