



6. Around 300,000 people lined the streets of New York and a further 100,000 marched in the funeral procession on 5 April 1911 to pay tribute to the 146 workers killed in the fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. Sylvia Pankhurst was among those present and her Preface recalls the day 'when rain poured from a grey sky, and a long procession of saddened workgirls marched in their poor black garments, to show honour and respect to their comrades burnt to death in an awful fire'. (Courtesy of the Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation & Archives, Cornell University)

1. A Strike of Laundry Workers in New York

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Pankhurst's second visit to North America began on 11 January 1912 when the *SS Oceanic* docked in New York. By the very next day, Sylvia had made contact and publicly identified herself with the citywide laundry workers' strike, a decision that reflected her increasing determination to connect the suffrage struggle with the women's labour movement.

The strike, which had started on 1 January, was conducted by a largely female workforce who fought a vibrant campaign, picketing outside the laundries against the efforts of hundreds of organised strike breakers, the constant threat of arrest and the bitterly cold winter conditions that Sylvia recalls here. They attracted the support of the Women's Trade Union League, who established a headquarters at the Harlem Arcade, described by Sylvia as a 'dirty and dingy' dancehall.

On 12 January the League organised a parade of automobiles to drive through the laundry districts adorned with pink and black banners proclaiming: '200 Laundries Organized', 'We Are Striking for More Pay and a Shorter Day', and 'Don't be a Scab'.¹ That afternoon, at a meeting in the Harlem Arcade attended by around two hundred women strikers, Sylvia spoke alongside leading industrial organiser Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Mary Dreier, the president of the New York Women's Trade Union League, and Margaret Sanger, at that time the secretary of the New York Women's Socialist Committee. Flynn later recalled the 'laundry workers' strike meeting, with her [Sanger] and with Sylvia Pankhurst, the British suffragist' during which Flynn called upon the strikers to stand together and to try and persuade the engineers to strike to strengthen the struggle.² Sylvia, meanwhile, 'urged them not only to stand for their industrial rights but for political equality as well. She told them of a recent strike in England and how the strikers there had won success through holding together'.³ Therefore, whilst Sylvia formally adhered to the WSPU doctrine of urging the importance of political rights, she avoided