

9 dollars. Then there were various deductions. Any work that was spoilt, perhaps through its being dropped on the floor, or in any other way, had to be done over again for nothing. Then there was what was called the 'overcount'. Each woman counted her neighbour's work in order to find out how much she had earned, but before she was paid the work was again counted, and she frequently found that one dollar, two dollars, three dollars, or even more was deducted from the sum to which she believed she was entitled. The women claimed that if a recount were necessary, it should be made in their presence, in order that they might be satisfied that it was correct.

A woman employed in another laundry, who had been a widow for eight years and had two children of school age, said that she earned 7 dollars a week, and gave as her working timetable: – Monday, 2 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.; Tuesday, 7.30 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Wednesday, 7.30 a.m. to 7 or 7.30 p.m.; Thursday, 7.30 a.m. to 9 or 9.30 p.m.; Friday, 7.30 a.m. to 9 or 9.30 p.m.; Saturday, 7.30 a.m. to 6 or 7. These times, she said, were frequently exceeded. Here, again, one half hour at lunch time was the only interval, and this appeared to be the general rule in the laundries. Many further enquiries elicited but slight variations in the specimen timetables for the week that I have already given. There was general complaint in regard to the sanitary arrangements of the laundries. Few supplied any room where the women could change or keep extra clothing, though this was really a necessity in New York, owing to the fact that the cold outside was very much more intense than anything that we have in England, whilst the heat inside the laundries was, of course, exceedingly great. Many women complained of the bad language used by the 'bosses' and foremen.

When the strike began on New Year's Day 1911,\* the laundry workers, two-thirds of whom were said to be women and girls, and one-third men, were quite unorganised, but a Trade Union was quickly formed, and the workers joined in large numbers. Miss Dreier† and other energetic

\* This is an error; it should read 1912. The laundry workers' strike in New York began on 1 January 1912.

† Mary Dreier (1875–1963) was, at the time Sylvia met her, president of the New York Women's Trade Union League. Sylvia and Dreier spoke together on 12 January 1912 at the Union's headquarters, 211 East 124<sup>th</sup> Street in New York in support of the laundry workers' strike. See *New York Times* which reported Miss Pankhurst and Miss Dreier Exhort Laundry Workers' (13 January 1912, p. 7).

members of the Women's Trade Union League took an important part in this work.

The demands which were being put forward on behalf of the strikers include a 10 hour day for all workers, the raising of some of the time and piece work rates, and the provision of better sanitary and cloak room accommodation.

Whilst we had been talking to the women adjoining, a meeting had begun in the dance hall proper, where there was a stage at one end and some tawdry decorations upon the walls. Looking down upon the crowd of faces, we were again struck by the refinement of the women, both in dress and general bearing. A large proportion of them were certainly American, and it was interesting to notice this, because one is frequently told that over work, under pay, and bad conditions of employment amongst women are confined to the foreign immigrants, and that the American woman does not need to work in a factory, and is always well paid and well cared for. Of the men in this meeting, a larger proportion appeared to be foreign, and their dress and physique seemed, on the whole, to be poorer, though it is very difficult of course, to generalise in such matters.

As we entered the meeting, a bouquet of flowers was just being presented to a woman, an American citizen, just released from prison – one of the strike pickets who was to be tried for obstruction, and who had been arrested and kept in prison for two days before bail could be procured. She replied in a short speech, which was received with great cheering, and immediately afterwards an enthusiastic welcome was given to a negro man strike picket, who also was released from prison that day. Then an Italian, speaking with impassioned eloquence in his native tongue, as a stimulus and encouragement to all present, called upon them to remember the hundreds of British women who have suffered violence and imprisonment in the cause of their Enfranchisement.

It was clear that the laundry strikers would need to bring tremendous courage and determination to their struggle, for American police methods are harsh and cruel and picketing from six o'clock in the morning [in] that bitter weather, must truly have been an awful thing.