

**“Upheld by Force”
Sylvia Pankhurst’s Seditious of 1920**

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With dim lights and tangled circumstance they tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness; for these later-born Theresas were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul. Their ardor alternated between a vague ideal and the common yearning of womanhood; so that the one was disapproved as extravagance, and the other condemned as a lapse.

– George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 1872

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Abbreviations

BSP	British Socialist Party
CP(BSTI)	Communist Party (British Section of the Third International)
CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
DORA	Defence of the Realm Act(s)
ELFS	East London Federation of Suffragettes
ILP	Independent Labour Party
SLP	Socialist Labour Party
WSF	Women's Suffrage Federation, later Workers' Suffrage Federation, later Workers' Socialist Federation
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union

Introduction

*Only this age that loudly boasts Reform,
Had set its seal of vengeance 'gainst the mind,
Decreeing naught in prison shall be writ,
Save on a cold slate, and swiftly washed away.¹*

– Sylvia Pankhurst, 1921

On Monday October 18th, 1920, Inspector Lionel Kirchner of the Scotland Yard Special Branch entered the premises of a small organization now calling itself the Communist Party-British Section of the Third International at 152 Fleet Street in the City of London. He seized several party documents, including an edition of the group's paper, the *Workers' Dreadnought*, published that past Saturday, October 16th. Kirchner then proceeded down the block to the *Dreadnought's* publishing office at 10 Wine Office Court. There, he saw a woman writing in the composing room. Stopping her, he held up the confiscated newspaper and asked if she held herself responsible for it. That woman, Sylvia Pankhurst, replied, "Yes, I certainly do." As the inspector began searching amongst the workshop manuscripts for a letter of sensitive information from Pankhurst's informant in the Navy, she told him, "If you are looking for [the] letter, you won't find it, because I anticipated a visit from the police."²

The next day, City Police Detective Hugo Smith along with two other officers dressed in plain clothes arrested Sylvia Pankhurst at the printing office.³ As they read aloud her warrant, she asked, "Are there any more to come to this?" The following day, Pankhurst was charged before Sir Alfred Newton at the Mansion House for violating Regulation 42 of the Defence of the Realm Act, which proscribed any "act calculated or likely to cause sedition or disaffection among any of

¹ E. Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam), microfilm (henceforth Pankhurst Papers), reel 307, *Writ on a Cold Slate*, 1921 (manuscript), p. 5.

² Pankhurst Papers, reel 254, "Appeal of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst against sentence of six months imprisonment [...] for articles in the *Workers' Dreadnought*," October 1920 (trial transcript), p. 10.

³ The National Archives (London), HO/144/1697/414256, *The Dispatch*, Oct. 20, 1920 (clipping).

His Majesty's forces, or among the civilian population.”⁴ Specifically, as editor of the *Dreadnought*, Pankhurst was held responsible for three articles: “Discontent on the Lower Deck” by a radical English sailor named Dave Springhall (under the alias Hunter), “How to Get a Labour Government” by a Soviet spy, Veltheim (under the alias Rubinstein), and “The Yellow Peril and the Dockers” by Jamaican revolutionary and writer Claude McKay (alias Leon Lopez).⁵ Appearing for the Director of Public Prosecutions, Travers Humphreys told the alderman, “I shall ask you to look over the paper, but I should be sorry to nauseate you by reading the whole of it to you.”⁶

On the day of her trial, October 28th, as Pankhurst entered the court with a bouquet of red carnations, she reportedly looked “very pale... but gained colour.”⁷ After Pankhurst delivered her own defense, including introducing as exhibits letters she had written to Vladimir Lenin that week, Alderman Newton declared that “the punishment of six months’ imprisonment which I pass on you is quite inadequate.” But, as the Labour-affiliated newspaper *The Daily Herald* reported:

The Alderman again referred to treason felony [sic], and mentioned the words “hard labour,” but after a whispered consultation with the clerk, he added: “Having regard to your sex, I order it to be in the second division.”⁸

Pankhurst appealed this decision, with a second trial scheduled for January 1921 and an agreement not to participate in the *Dreadnought* or any political meeting.⁹ In her editorial absence, the *Dreadnought* proclaimed, “Let us be of good cheer. Other comrades must try to carry on Sylvia Pankhurst’s work until she is released. The arm of the capitalist is heavy and strong. It is put forth to crush the revolutionary workers and their leaders. Let us brace ourselves for the battle.”¹⁰

⁴ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, *The Daily Telegraph*, Oct. 21, 1920 (clipping).

⁵ Barbara Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst. Sexual Politics and Political Activism* (London: University College London Press, 1996), pp. 127-28.

⁶ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, *The Daily Telegraph*, Oct. 21, 1920 (clipping).

⁷ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, *The Daily Herald*, Oct. 29, 1920 (clipping).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “Sylvia Pankhurst Arrested,” *Workers’ Dreadnought*, Oct. 23, 1920.

Sylvia Pankhurst was born in Manchester in 1882 to Richard and Emmeline Pankhurst. The middle sibling between the elder sister, Christabel, and two younger siblings, Adela and Harry, Sylvia grew up in a family immersed in international socialist and feminist politics. Until his death in 1898, Richard Pankhurst cultivated a wide-ranging network extending from intellectual William Morris and trade unionist Tom Mann to feminist Harriot Stanton Blatch and sexual radical Annie Besant. Sylvia pursued an art education, first in Manchester and then in London. There, she began a decade-long relationship with her parents' friend, James Keir Hardie, the Scottish working-class union organizer who had founded the Independent Labour Party (ILP) to become Parliament's first Labour representative. During this time, Emmeline and Christabel continued their engagement with the Manchester ILP branch. However, they ultimately abandoned the ILP due to widespread misogyny amongst its leadership and founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903. They shortly drew Sylvia into the organization, and she became an ardently militant "suffragette" who participated in the rallies, marches, and public disruptions that frequently resulted in police intervention. Sylvia, like her mother and other militants, was arrested by the police and hunger struck in prison. Sylvia formed the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS) in 1913 as a subsidiary part of the WSPU and, due to severe family tensions, shortly cut her branch off from her family's and launched the *Women's Dreadnought*.¹¹

During the rest of the decade, she devoted herself to a wide array of causes, including assistance of working-class women and pacifism during the First World War. A socialist, Sylvia became emboldened by the Bolshevik Revolution. Transforming her organization and newspaper respectively into the Workers' Socialist Federation and the *Workers' Dreadnought*, Pankhurst entangled herself in the intense personal politics of British and international communists. By 1920,

¹¹ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, pp. 1-66.

the various communist organizations within the country were scrambling to unite and form *the* British Communist Party that would be officially linked to the Third Communist International. Pankhurst herself traveled to Moscow in the summer of that year to attend the Communist International, where she publicly debated Lenin over which principles the British party should adopt. When she returned to London in the fall of 1920, she continued presiding over the *Dreadnought*.¹²

Coinciding with Pankhurst's peak engagement and subsequent expulsion from British communist circles, her 1920 sedition charge and its fallout allow for unique consideration of the impact of the suffragette movement, left-wing radicalism, and state censorship of political dissent in interwar Britain. In particular, this thesis argues that the sedition episode demonstrates Pankhurst's ultimate inability to transplant claims to a prewar political authority of gendered and religious romanticism into a postwar context dominated by masculinized radicalism and emboldened state repression. Before and during the war, Pankhurst's political celebrity achieved various levels of success, having been aesthetically influenced by the utopian romanticism of her family's circles and the WSPU, as well as tactically developed by the suffrage movement and her home-front activities. But her leftward shift in ideology after the Russian Revolution increasingly placed her in opposition to other radicals who did not share the same aesthetic and tactical approach. At the start of the interwar period, Pankhurst occupied a paradoxical position in which her illusorily outsized influence set her into conflict with fellow communists and the British government. The sedition episode enabled her political opponents and the government to move against Pankhurst. In her absence the other communists unified without her and later expelled her from their party, while the government consistently rejected Pankhurst's appeals and petitions

¹² Ibid., pp. 75-127.

during the trial and imprisonment. As such, this thesis examines the ways in which both British communism and the state in the immediate interwar period were unreceptive to the self-presentation and political celebrity of women radicals.

Indeed, Pankhurst's contributions to British communism have only recently been reintegrated into the historiography. Historians first focused solely on British "Bolshevism" and even more narrowly, the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). In doing so, they reduced or ignored the activities and ideologies of heterodox communists. Consequently, in Pelling's historical profile of the CPGB, Pankhurst vanishes after page 20 as the "little British party thus deprived itself of the services of one of its most energetic propagandists."¹³ Uninspired by such exclusivity, other historians sought to broaden the field. Shipway remarks that because communists like Pankhurst clashed with the CPGB, "This enables historians of the CPGB to portray the *Dreadnought* group as an 'infantile' tributary flowing into the Leninist mainstream, later to emerge as an effluent which disappears into the void."¹⁴ Treating anti-parliamentary communism in its own right, Shipway analyzes the development of those like Pankhurst and Guy Aldred, who rejected parliamentarianism and instead advocated local soviet councils. Bringing all the British communists back together, Bullock emphasizes the allure of the "myth of soviet democracy" in legitimizing Soviet Russia for both British Bolsheviks and their dissenters.¹⁵ Pankhurst features prominently in these works, but her 1920-21 sedition sentence does not, to the detriment of ignoring a pivotal episode that contextualizes Pankhurst's ideology within interwar communism.

¹³ Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), p. 20.

¹⁴ Mark Shipway, *Anti-Parliamentary Communism. The Movement for Workers' Councils in Britain, 1917-45* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1988), p. xii.

¹⁵ Ian Bullock, *Romancing the Revolution: The Myth of Soviet Democracy and the British Left* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2014), ProQuest Ebook Central, p. 8.

Pankhurst's sedition case was a peacetime conviction using wartime emergency powers. Several historians, such as Cotter, Ewing, Gearty, and Simpson, have traced the legal history of civil liberties in 20th century Britain.¹⁶ In particular, they view the First World War with the accompanying Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) as the turning point, where Parliament gave the executive branch near unrestrained emergency power. Other historians like Andrew, Townshend, and Morgan have analyzed the transformation of these emergency powers during the unrest of the interwar period.¹⁷ Pankhurst occupies a unique space within this history. Her case stayed at the initial magistrate level, and she did not belong to a trade union. Consequently, her case does not fall into the scope of major court cases or industrial strikes that are these works' focus. However, Pankhurst was arrested under DORA in the midst of a coal strike and unemployment riot at the same time that Parliament was rushing through new emergency legislation. Her case must therefore be considered within this history to understand the ways in which the executive and judicial branches of the government treated Pankhurst's sedition.

The sedition episode developed in accordance with Pankhurst's gendered political celebrity. Historian Laura Beers draws upon a framework for understanding political celebrity and gender. An "affective affinity" exists between the public and the celebrity, the belief that "the celebrity is somehow both like them and above them." And the female political celebrity must

¹⁶ Cornelius Cotter, "Constitutionalizing Emergency Powers: The British Experience," *Stanford Law Review* 5, no. 3 (Apr. 1953): pp. 382-417, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1226448>; K. D. Ewing and C. A. Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties: Political Freedom and the Rule of Law in Britain, 1914-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), Oxford Scholarship Online; A. W. Brian Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious: Detention Without Trial in Wartime Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), Oxford Scholarship Online.

¹⁷ Christopher Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (New York: Viking, 1985); Charles Townshend, *Making the Peace: Public Order and Public Security in Modern Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Jane Morgan, *Conflict and Order: The Police and Labour Disputes in England and Wales, 1900-1939* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

contend with the gendered assumptions developed societally and sustained by the media.¹⁸ Pankhurst's political celebrity developed out of the 19th century utopian Romanticism her parents espoused. During the suffrage movement, it aligned especially well with the gendered roles for women: emotional feeling, religious conviction, and tightknit communality.¹⁹ But Pankhurst attempted to maintain this identity beyond the suffrage movement into her postwar communist activity. Ross McKibbin explains that because of sexual division of labor, "the social world of the organized working class was sectional, collectivist, and masculine."²⁰ In *Landscape for a Good Woman*, Carolyn Steedman describes how Labour's patriarchal assumptions and lack of interest in women's perspectives led Steedman's working-class mother to the Conservative Party.²¹ Additionally, the majority of British communist leadership (nearly all male) eagerly accepted Lenin as their leader, who historian Patricia Romero notes was "contemptuous towards women."²² Therefore, if the political circles of working-class labor and communism were dominated by men, then Pankhurst's approach put her at odds with the expectations of her colleagues in their quest to install communism within Britain.

¹⁸ Laura Beers, "A Model MP?: Ellen Wilkinson, Gender, Politics and Celebrity Culture in Interwar Britain," *Cultural and Social History* 10, no. 2 (2013): p. 233, [doi:10.2752/147800413X13591373275321](https://doi.org/10.2752/147800413X13591373275321).

¹⁹ Denise Riley, "*Am I That Name?*": *Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*, (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan Press, 1988); Laura Mayhall, "Defining Militancy: Radical Protest, the Constitutional Idiom, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1908-1908," *Journal of British Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): pp. 340-71, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/175976>; Kabi Hartman, "'What made me a suffragette?': The New Woman and the New (?) Conversion Narrative," *Women's History Review* 12, no. 1 (2003): pp. 35-50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612020300200346>; and June Purvis, "The Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes in Edwardian Britain," *Women's History Review* 4, no. 1 (1995): pp. 103-133, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612029500200073>.

²⁰ Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 285.

²¹ Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*, 8th ed. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006) pp. 9, 47.

²² Patricia Romero, *E. Sylvia Pankhurst: Portrait of a Radical* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 146.

Though Pankhurst's biographers have of course discussed this appeal trial, they have provided only a cursory treatment of it. Ian Bullock and Richard Pankhurst's *Sylvia Pankhurst: From Artist to Anti-Fascist* devotes barely a paragraph to it.²³ In the considerably longer biography *E. Sylvia Pankhurst: Portrait of a Radical*, Patricia Romero remarks:

Sylvia argued her own case... and was clearly a disturbed woman at this juncture. Instead of discussing the two articles for which she was convicted, she read long rambling excerpts from other *Dreadnought* articles... And she was dramatic: pleading frail health (which was true of her mental state).²⁴

Romero's parenthetical interpretation of Pankhurst merely as a "disturbed" woman does a disservice to the complex but consistent way she presented herself in the trial. Barbara Winslow goes the furthest of her biographers in treating the trial seriously, writing that "Pankhurst defended herself, using her trial as a platform for her ideals and reviving the old Pankhurst fireworks."²⁵ There is more to be said.

²³ Ian Bullock, "Sylvia Pankhurst and the Russian Revolution: the making of a 'Left-wing' Communist," in *Sylvia Pankhurst: From Artist to Anti-Fascist*, ed. Ian Bullock and Richard Pankhurst (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1992), p. 142.

²⁴ Romero, *Portrait of a Radical*, p. 151.

²⁵ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 131.

The End of Edwardian England: Pankhurst's Political Development

Pankhurst's political identity developed in accordance with personal influences and in reaction to government measures. Raised in a vibrantly political, literary, and artistic household, Pankhurst adopted fervent socialist and feminist convictions rooted in Victorian-era romanticism. And as her mother and sister launched the Women's Social and Political Union in Manchester, Pankhurst divided her time between her art education and their London branch. Suffragette militancy, in accordance with the motto "deeds, not words," operated on conviction, exposing women's political oppression within the country. Initially contemptuous of the suffragettes, the government found itself awkwardly needing to accommodate the well-connected and performative upper-class women in the movement. But when the First World War erupted, the movement crumbled, and Britain slipped away from Victorian-Edwardian liberalism towards coercive rule by emergency power. Once separated from her family, Pankhurst pursued causes like working-class assistance and pacifism during the war that kept her in conflict with authority. Ultimately, Pankhurst's politics shifted further leftward, shaped by the First World War, the Irish War of Independence, and the Russian Revolution. This transformation, coinciding with her increasingly negative perception of the government, set the foundation for her tumultuous position in the postwar period culminating in the 1920 seditious arrest.

In 1903, to counter the increasing hostility from the male leadership of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) towards women's suffrage and general political participation, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, along with several other women in the party, formed the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in Manchester. During this initial period of the WSPU, Sylvia maintained some involvement in its activities. But she focused primarily on her art studies following her enrollment at the Royal College of Art in London in 1904. Once in London, she entered the social circle of her parents' friends, among them James Keir Hardie. She began a sexual

relationship with Hardie in 1904 that lasted a decade. This relationship stoked personal and political tensions between her and Emmeline and Christabel, who grew more distrustful of the male-dominated Labour movement. In 1903 in an article for the *ILP News*, Christabel had asked, “Why are women expected to have... confidence in the men of the Labour Party?”, and by 1906 she and Emmeline had cut the WSPU’s ties with the ILP.²⁶

Although through Richard, Emmeline and Christabel had somewhat engaged in Fabianism and socialism, they now subordinated all political issues under “the Cause” of obtaining the vote. Influenced by sentimentalist and romantic ideologies such as in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Thomas Carlyle’s *The French Revolution*, Emmeline shaped the WSPU around commitment towards passionate quests of historical upheaval.²⁷ To do so, the WSPU adopted a wide range of tactics typical of 19th century male radical movements, such as rallies, marches, and disruptions of other political meetings.²⁸ And like these male movements, such as Keir Hardie’s ILP, the WSPU embraced a vibrant religiosity.²⁹ The group’s weaponization of these tactics was particularly effective because they were transposed into a highly gendered context. As separate spheres for men and women solidified in the 18th and 19th centuries, religiosity, or the intense piety “tarnished by sentiment and excess” as Denise Riley describes it, became “unambiguously feminized.”³⁰ It was precisely this religious femininity that the WSPU mobilized as an ideological filter for their acts of militancy: protests, property destruction, imprisonment, and hunger-striking. The WSPU framed the ultimate political goal of suffrage by way of a “necessary spiritual

²⁶ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, pp. 3-7.

²⁷ Sandra Stanley Holton, “In Sorrowful Wrath: Suffrage Militancy and the Romantic Feminism of Emmeline Pankhurst,” in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Harold L. Smith (Aldershot, Hants, England: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1990), pp. 8-14.

²⁸ Mayhall, “Defining Militancy,” p. 344.

²⁹ Hartman, “What made me a suffragette,” p. 37.

³⁰ Riley, *Am I That Name*, p. 19.

victory.”³¹ To that end, measures such as the development of a “suffragette conversion narrative” genre and the proliferation of suffragette martyrology furthered the movement’s aim as gendered performative activism designed to allow “women to put themselves on display for other women,” drawing individuals into the “Cause” and establishing a tight-knit communality.³²

In 1905, Christabel and mill worker Annie Kenney became two of the first WSPU members to be arrested after having disrupted a Liberal Party meeting. The following year, Sylvia’s scholarship ended, and she decided to dedicate herself fulltime to the WSPU. She contributed her artistry, designing pins, emblems, posters, and even a fully-fledged exhibit hall. That same year, in 1906, she was arrested for the first time for “abusive language” and sent to Holloway for two weeks. Profoundly shaped by her first prison experience, she published an exposé about the squalid conditions in Holloway, in contravention of Christabel’s demands to keep attention focused on suffrage alone.³³ As WSPU militants, including Sylvia and her mother, increasingly began hunger-striking in prison, the government response of forced feeding proved disastrous. To mitigate the public uproar over use of the invasive and oppressive tactic on primarily middle-class women, Parliament passed the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act in 1913.³⁴ Under this “Cat and Mouse” Act, Sylvia was released and re-imprisoned eight times between February 1913 until August 1914, conducting a hunger strike each time.³⁵

Sylvia returned to London after a two-year tour in America with a renewed commitment towards combining working-class and women’s movements. Coordinating with American

³¹ Purvis, “Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes,” p. 107.

³² Hartman, “What made me a suffragette,” pp. 35-36; Barbara Green, *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905-1938* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), pp. 56-57 in Mayhall, “Defining Militancy,” p. 341n4.

³³ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, pp. 9-12.

³⁴ Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood, “The Status of Political Prisoner in England: The Struggle for Recognition,” *Virginia Law Review* 65, no. 8 (1979): pp. 1476-77, doi:10.2307/1072581.

³⁵ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 55.

settlement house leader Zelig Emerson, she established the East London Federation of the Suffragettes (ELFS) in 1912 as a constituent branch of the WSPU. The East End of London had long been considered among the city's poorest areas as it contained the capital's docks, textile workshops, and chemical industries. Though initially connected to the WSPU, the ELFS differed significantly with respect to its goals, tactics, and composition. It operated democratically, collaborated enthusiastically with Labour, and expanded beyond women's suffrage towards devoting financial and material relief for the East London working class.³⁶

These differences coincided with the ever-growing personal and political tensions amongst the Pankhurst family. At the end of 1913, Sylvia served as a speaker for a socialist trade union rally on the Irish labor dispute known as the Dublin lockout. The breaking point for Christabel occurred when Sylvia took the platform with men and delivered an acclaimed speech on Irish labor conflict. She summoned Sylvia to sever WSPU-ELFS ties at the start of 1914. Now on its own, the ELFS increased its activities, reaching prominence in the summer of 1914. Sylvia, a "mouse" during this period, declared she would conduct a hunger, thirst, and sleep strike in and out of prison until Liberal Prime Minister Asquith agreed to a deputation. Swayed by political pressure, he received ELFS working-class members in his first suffrage-related deputation. He promised he would give the issue "careful consideration," and Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George offered to introduce a Private Member's Bill. But the First World War erupted weeks later, and the government promptly tossed suffrage aside.³⁷

War broke out on August 4th, 1914, sending government and society into frenzy. Historiography is divided over the extent to which the British government was actually prepared for the war. Historian Cornelius Cotter insists there was no "carefully planned scheme of

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 19-43.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 63-74.

emergency powers,” writing instead that its beginning stage “was a period of groping for answers to the difficult questions posed by war emergency.”³⁸ After an initial Privy Council proclamation on August 4th of the King’s “undoubted prerogative... to take all such measures as may be necessary,” the government began its haphazard mobilization of legal protocol.³⁹ As Cotter describes, it “was a hurriedly devised translation of martial rule and prerogative concepts into statutory provisions.”⁴⁰ Specifically, with the first Defense of the Realm Act (DORA), Parliament gave the government the ability to regulate the military “for securing the public safety and the defence of the realm.”⁴¹ It also allowed the government to establish trial by courts-martial and punish anyone disobeying regulations designed: 1. “to prevent persons communicating with the enemy or obtaining information for that purpose or any purpose calculated to jeopardise the success of the operations of any of His Majesty’s forces or to assist the enemy;” and 2. “to secure the safety of any means of communication, or of railways, docks or harbours...”⁴² Because this first DORA was a rushed, vague measure, subsequent amending acts were passed to fill in the gaps and resolve contradictions of the initial legislation.

The Defence of the Realm Consolidation Act, passed later that same year, extended the executive’s power to issue regulations concerning not just the military but ultimately all elements of British society in the name of “securing the public safety.”⁴³ Ewing and Gearty in *The Struggle for Civil Liberties* critique the law’s overwhelming legal and political implications: “[It] conferred so wide a discretion as effectively to give an unlimited power to enable the executive to do as it

³⁸ Cornelius Cotter, “Constitutionalizing Emergency Powers: The British Experience,” *Stanford Law Review* 5, no. 3 (Apr. 1953): p. 383, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1226448>.

³⁹ *London Times*, Aug. 1914, p. 3, col. 3, in *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Defence of the Realm Act, 1914, 4 & 5 Geo. 5, c. 63, in *ibid.*, p. 385.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

wished.”⁴⁴ Other acts further eroded civil liberties with the Aliens Restriction Act of 1914 allowing the government unfettered control over migration, the National Registration Act of 1915 establishing a national register of all people in Britain, and the Military Service Act of 1916 introducing military conscription.⁴⁵ Cotter, Ewing, and Gearty thus correctly claim that WWI was British democracy’s “most serious crisis” and that the Defence of the Realm Regulations posed a constitutional threat to civil liberties.⁴⁶ Yet, as Townshend has pointed out, popular militarism enabled these acts: “National sentiment, not government, was the architect of this revolution.”⁴⁷

Evaluating the tangible applications of DORA over the course of its existence is difficult as the government operated in secrecy. It did not even provide Parliament copies of the regulations until 1916.⁴⁸ Members of Parliament had to use the procedural “question period” to ask about DORA, thereby learning that 34 British subjects had been tried by the army and 36 subjects detained without warrant by February 1916.⁴⁹ A. W. Brian Simpson, in *In the Highest Degree Odious*, establishes that “just under 30,000 enemy aliens” were detained through DORA during the war.⁵⁰ DORA was also severely applied by the government during the Irish War of Independence from 1916 to 1922 (ultimately lying outside the scope of this paper), with 187 Irish tried under regulation 42 by court-martial (excluding those conducted in civil procedures).⁵¹ The *Gazette* cites nearly a million DORA arrests, including 11 executions of individuals charged with

⁴⁴ Ewing and Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties*, p. 91.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴⁷ Charles Townshend, *Making the Peace*, p. 61.

⁴⁸ Cotter, “Constitutionalizing Emergency Powers,” p. 389.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁵⁰ Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious*, p. 15.

⁵¹ “The state, the law and political imprisonment, 1914-1918,” *Century of Ireland*. Accessed December 4, 2017. <http://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/the-state-the-law-and-political-imprisonment-1914-1918>.

espionage.⁵² During the war, the government had been particularly concerned about a potential German infiltration. To that end, measures like the Alien Restriction Act 1914 sought to constrict migrant access, while the infamous Regulation 14B of June 1915 permitted executive detention without trial for any British subject “of hostile origin or *associations*.”⁵³ Similarly, the government hunted down the pacifist movement, which grew from relative obscurity at the start of the war to over 650,000 members in 1917.⁵⁴ These groups operated through the distribution of pamphlets, publication of newspapers, and organization of public events, provoking government surveillance, arrest of prominent leadership, and raids on publication offices.⁵⁵

Within this context, Pankhurst led her organization to its apex of activity as it transformed from the working-class women’s political organization, the ELFS, into the Workers’ Suffrage Federation (WSF), a socialist and pacifist network providing welfare services.⁵⁶ In March 1914 before the war, the ELFS had launched its weekly newspaper, the *Woman’s Dreadnought*.⁵⁷ It covered wide-ranging topics on the war: exposing squalid working conditions in women’s work factories, calling for government control of the food supply, and publishing anti-war accounts by English poet Siegfried Sassoon and German Marxist Karl Liebknecht.⁵⁸ The *Dreadnought* published its most influential work in the aftermath of the 1916 Irish Easter Rebellion, in which Irish independence groups rose up against increasingly oppressive wartime British rule. Pankhurst

⁵² “World War 1: Defence of the Realm Act | The Gazette.” Accessed December 4, 2017. <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/all-notices/content/217>.

⁵³ Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious*, p. 12.

⁵⁴ Ewing and Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties*, p. 63.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁵⁶ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 77.

⁵⁷ Given Pankhurst’s and the paper’s unyielding pacifism during the war, it seems a little curious that the leadership would agree to a title referencing the battleship class whose buildup helped lead European countries to war. For the paper’s part though, it declared its name to be “symbolic of the fact that the women who are fighting for freedom must fear nothing.” *Woman’s Dreadnought*, March 8, 1914.

⁵⁸ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, pp. 79, 91, 103.

published the account of ELFS-WSF member Patricia Lynch, who managed to sneak into Dublin—closed off by the English—and write a sympathetic account of the Irish.⁵⁹ Additionally, Pankhurst and the organization initiated a variety of services to assist the East End community, including cost-price restaurants, annual Christmas parties for children, and a toy factory to employ women. Pankhurst participated in numerous rallies and demonstrations. On April 8th, 1916, she and the WFS organized one of the largest anti-war demonstrations up to that point. Attended by 20,000, the Trafalgar Square rally galvanized support for universal suffrage and the repeal of wartime legislation.⁶⁰

The Russian Revolutions in 1917 transformed Pankhurst's radicalism by developing her already antagonistic relationship with the state into fully-fledged anti-parliamentarianism. In the February Revolution, revolutionaries forced the tsar's abdication and established a system of "dual power" between the constitutional Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. In the *Dreadnought*, Pankhurst heralded the new government, which established universal suffrage (in contrast to a Franchise Bill in Britain to extend suffrage only to property-owning women over the age of 30) and seemed eager to sue for peace.⁶¹ As it became apparent that the Petrograd Soviet and the Bolsheviki in particular held power within the country, Pankhurst and the WSF voiced support for them, especially Lenin. Over the summer, the organization changed its newspaper's name from the *Woman's Dreadnought* to the *Workers' Dreadnought*, later applauding the results of the October Revolution.⁶² Initially, the aftermath of the October Revolution appealed to Pankhurst because of the Bolsheviki's pacifistic insistence on "no annexations, no indemnities." The *Dreadnought* called for international recognition of the new Russian state, and Bolshevik

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 102.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 100; Shipley, *Anti-Parliamentary Communism*, p. 33.

⁶² Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 104; Shipley, *Anti-Parliamentary Communism*, p. 35.

policy began to mold Pankhurst's beliefs.⁶³ The Bolsheviks dissolved the constituent assembly created in the February Revolution. This act demonstrated to Pankhurst the fundamental lack of necessity for parliamentarianism and the supremacy of local soviets. Changing the Workers' Suffrage Federation to the Workers' Socialist Federation in 1918, she increasingly adopted an anti-parliamentarian position fully developed by 1919.⁶⁴

On October 28th, 1918, Pankhurst ran afoul of DORA. Her pacifism and socialism emboldened by the Bolshevik revolution, Pankhurst delivered a speech near a military encampment in Creswell, Derbyshire, in which she the secret "capitalist" Allied treaties released by the Bolsheviks after taking power. She called upon the working class to demand peace from the government and suggested that a soldiers' strike might not be "far off." Pankhurst advised the government "to be a little wiser, or the soldiers will take it on themselves."⁶⁵ She was arrested for inciting sedition and brought to the local magistrates. She defended her actions as not any less seditious than the publication of the secret treaties by other British newspapers. The bench nonetheless found her guilty and fined her £50.⁶⁶ Later that week in Parliament, Liberal MP Joseph King asked "whether the Government has taken any decision to suppress the advocacy of Socialist opinions." The Home Office instructed the Home Secretary to answer the question "in negative."⁶⁷ Pankhurst's DORA conviction, based on her socialist and antiwar rhetoric aimed at soldiers, revealed the government's growing postwar fear.

⁶³ Shipley, *Anti-Parliamentary Communism*, pp. 36-37.

⁶⁴ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, pp. 104-105; Shipley, *Anti-Parliamentary Communism*, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁵ TNA, HO/144/1558/234191, *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, October 29, 1918 (clipping).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ TNA, HO/144/1558/234191, "Miss Sylvia Pankhurst," Oct. 30, 1918 (HO meeting minutes).

After the War: Pankhurst's Collisions with Communism and the State

In the immediate postwar period, the Russian Revolution and the end of the First World War emboldened British communists seeking to unify under a single organization. Economic downturn, war weariness, and the uneven transition to peacetime fomented unrest within the country. As mutinies broke out and industrial strikes loomed, the British government scrambled to develop coherent (and legal) responses to these emergency threats. In the midst of communist unity negotiations and political agitation, Pankhurst occupied a contradictory position. Her organization had decreased in size since its pre-war peak and was vastly dwarfed by other communist groups. Whilst advocating revolution, Pankhurst herself lacked the capability to launch one. However, her ability to maintain significant social networks and organize an endless variety of activities (among which the publication of the *Dreadnought*) ensured her continuing political influence during this period. Her influence, though disproportionate to her actual capability, prevented both other communists and the government from simply ignoring her significance. This forced recognition of Pankhurst by her detractors set her on a collision course that by 1920 culminated in a public clash with Lenin at the height of communist unity negotiations and in her arrest for the publication of seditious articles.

The Russian Revolutions and the Armistice revitalized the energies of British communists following the Second International and the First World War. The Second International, created in the late 19th century, was already strained by incessant debates between reformists and revolutionaries. Its constituent delegations had vowed to repudiate all “capitalist and imperialist wars,” but when war erupted in August 1914, they all too easily divided along Allied, Central, and neutral lines. Further divisions fractured between patriotism and pacifism.⁶⁸ The war's end and the

⁶⁸ Stephen Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution 1917-1924* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 183.

establishment of a communist state presented an opportunity for reorganization. Pankhurst lay at the center of British efforts. After the First Congress of the Third International held in Moscow in March 1919, a Russian messenger reached out to Pankhurst with the “recommendation from the Third International [Comintern] that a Communist Party be inaugurated in this country.”⁶⁹ Kendall suggests that Pankhurst’s pre-war suffragette activities throughout Europe provided her with an extensive contact network enabling her to be the first British leader to engage with Comintern.⁷⁰ That same year, Pankhurst toured Europe’s radical hotspots, aided by her Italian anarchist lover, Silvio Corio. She attended the conferences of the Italian Socialist Party in Bologna, the Comintern Western Bureau in Frankfurt, and its “ultra-left” Sub-Bureau in Amsterdam.⁷¹ Additionally, she served as the British correspondent to the Comintern journal.⁷²

While Pankhurst’s personality and reputation enabled her to wield significant influence during the immediate postwar period, she, along with her organization, became politically outmaneuvered as unity negotiations launched. Of the three principal parties involved in the negotiations, the WSF was the smallest. The leading power was the “right-wing communist” British Socialist Party (BSP), led by Albert Inkpin and comprising 10,000 members by 1921.⁷³ It had also taken a pacifist position during the war and loosely collaborated with the ILP. After the Russian Revolution, the BSP adopted orthodox Leninism, specifically pro-parliamentarianism and the strategy of Labour Party affiliation. The Scottish-based Socialist Labour Party (SLP)

⁶⁹ Pankhurst Papers in Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-21* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), p. 238n20.

⁷⁰ Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 237.

⁷¹ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, pp. 142-45.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁷³ Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 302. “Right-wing” and “left-wing” were used by communists to insult another’s diverging ideology and were not necessarily terms that one would use to self-identify. Nonetheless, they are useful as shorthand to describe the pro- vs. anti-parliamentarianism ideologies that defined the internecine disputes during this period.

comprised a thousand members and committed itself to virulent anti-parliamentarianism, eschewing trade unions and advocating a general strike. The WSF's membership never reached the ELFS's prewar peak, constituting only a couple hundred members in the postwar period.⁷⁴

The two significant obstacles to unity were the questions of parliamentarianism and Labour Party affiliation. Pankhurst's WSF and the SLP rejected both parliamentary tactics and a relationship with Labour, questioning the ability of communists to maintain their revolutionary integrity under such circumstances. Because the "right-wing" BSP was so much larger, the two smaller groups feared unity with it would mean losing their "left-wing" voices. Negotiations began faltering as political differences cascaded with personal interactions: Pankhurst started lobbying attacks at BSP leader Inkpin, and he returned in kind through his organization's newspaper. Then, in April 1920, the BSP published a letter Pankhurst had anonymously written to Lenin in which she disparaged every other radical organization, praised her own, and asked for Lenin's thoughts on parliamentarianism. The BSP promptly published Lenin's reply, in which he patronizingly told Pankhurst that parliamentarianism had been used to great effect in Russia and that revolutionaries ought to collaborate despite significant differences.⁷⁵

Though the groups were to meet in August of that year for further unity talks, Pankhurst and the WSF decided to go it alone. With tiny affiliated groups, the WSF dissolved in June and reconstituted itself as the "Communist Party (British Section of the Third International)" or CP(BSTI). Outraged, the BSP and SLP wrote to Lenin complaining about Pankhurst's actions. In his response, he declared her actions to be wrong for having ignored the issue of unity and announced that he would defend his support of parliamentarianism and Labour affiliation at the

⁷⁴ Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution*, pp. 115-20.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-25.

Comintern Second Congress in Moscow in July.⁷⁶ The stage was set for a showdown between Pankhurst and Lenin. Pankhurst smuggled herself to Russia and was escorted into the Kremlin to sit at a table with Lenin, Bukharin, and John Reed to discuss the “British question.” Throughout the conference, she engaged in a series of debates in which she argued against Lenin’s assumption that Labour affiliation would provide communists with a political platform to expose the futility of reformism.⁷⁷ Ultimately, Lenin proved more persuasive. He sent delegates home with his pamphlet “‘Left-Wing Communism’: An Infantile Disorder,” which criticized Pankhurst’s ideology and derided it as “intellectual childishness, not the serious tactics of a revolutionary class.”⁷⁸ After a promising Unity Conference in August 1920, the BSP, SLP, and CP(BSTI) scheduled a final meeting to take place in Leeds in January, 1921.⁷⁹ Although Pankhurst committed to resuming unity talks upon her return from Russia, it became clear she insisted upon maintaining significant levels of “left-wing” independence.⁸⁰ Her subsequent activities placed her in conflict with the government as it dealt with critical challenges that flared up in 1920.

Though the 1918 Armistice had ended WWI’s large-scale combat, as far as the British government was concerned, unrest and the prospect of rebellion seemed to only increase in the early postwar period. The government shifted its focus from countering the threats posed by German subversion and domestic pacifism towards military-industrial unrest and international communism. The Russian Revolution in 1917 marked the rise of international socialism, as revolutions spread across Germany and the collapsed Austro-Hungarian empire.⁸¹ The government

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 127-28.

⁷⁷ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, pp. 156-57.

⁷⁸ Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution*, pp. 133-34; V. I. Lenin, “‘Left-Wing Communism’: An Infantile Disorder,” 8th ed. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981), p. 69.

⁷⁹ Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution*, p. 137.

⁸⁰ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 158.

⁸¹ Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 189.

thus feared similar insurrection in Britain, especially as industrial disputes had grown larger and more class-conscious. Just months after the Armistice, in 1919, ten thousand soldiers mutinied in Folkestone, Kent, accompanied by thousands of other soldiers demonstrating support elsewhere. Likewise, the navy, deployed both abroad and domestically, “was at times scarcely more reliable [than the Army].”⁸² The bubbling turmoil continued into 1920. The “Hands Off Russia” movement, of which Pankhurst was a leader, had spent years agitating against British intervention in Soviet Russia during its civil war and the Russo-Polish war. In May 1920, overall opposition to British military intervention in Russia had risen to such a degree that London dockers refused to load munitions onto ships bound for Poland in what became known as the *Jolly George* affair.⁸³

The threats of military mutinies, labor unrest, and rebellion against Parliament were amplified by the government’s fear of international communism. In February 1920, Head of the Special Branch Sir Basil Thomson wrote to the Home Secretary in astonishment that “it is still not illegal in England to advocate the abolition of Parliament and the setting up of Soviet Government, to circulate Bolshevik literature, to accept money from abroad for revolutionary agitation, and to be a secret representative of the Russian Soviet Government.”⁸⁴ Though many in the Cabinet feared communism, the Home Affairs Committee considered such type of legislation to lend itself “to the possibility of great abuse, and would be regarded by many as an attack on the liberty of the subject.”⁸⁵ As with the pacifist movement, considered an existential threat during the war, the government was unwilling to outright outlaw communism. Of course, the government still countered it. Just as pacifist organizations existed during the war only at the government’s

⁸² Morgan, *Conflict and Order*, pp. 189-90.

⁸³ Stephen White, “British Labour in Soviet Russia, 1920,” *The English Historical Review* 109, no. 432 (June 1994): p. 637, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/572911>.

⁸⁴ PRO, CAB 24/97, Special Report No 14, 2 February 1920, in Ewing and Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties*, p. 101n39.

⁸⁵ PRO, CAB 23/25, Cabinet Home Affairs Committee, 27 April 1921, in *ibid.*, p. 102n45.

discretion, likewise “so far as the Communist Party was concerned there was no freedom of association, no freedom of assembly and no freedom of expression.”⁸⁶ Though hesitant to strike openly at ideology, the government used its emergency power to go after individuals.

With the cessation of hostilities against Germany in 1918, the 1914-15 Defence of the Realm Acts might have been expected to expire. But wartime powers continued, unevenly, into peacetime. A 1918 act extended the legal status of wartime until the last ratification of the various WWI treaties on August 31st, 1921, but in February 1920, Parliament passed an another, contradictory act, which specified that a majority of the DORA regulations would expire at the end of August 1920.⁸⁷ As the threat of a national coal strike loomed, the government began drafting a new bill to circumvent DORA’s now ambiguous status and give itself full powers against a “potentially revolutionary situation.”⁸⁸ When the national strike did break out on October 16th, 1920, the day of the *Dreadnought* publication, the government immediately mobilized to introduce the bill. It presented the Emergency Powers Bill on October 22nd and rushed it through Parliament.⁸⁹ Townshend considers the law to be a “substantial and irreversible redefinition of the British state.” It allowed the government to establish states of emergency and issue regulations on the vague basis of “public order.”⁹⁰

Pankhurst’s actions with the *Dreadnought* during 1920 set her on a collision course with the government. She and her organization had long been under surveillance since the pre-war suffragette days. As industrial and military unrest reached boiling points in 1920, they fell into the police’s crosshairs. The WSF and the *Dreadnought* had been particularly vocal about anti-

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 92, 105.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 111.

⁸⁸ Morgan, *Conflict and Order*, p. 98.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Townshend, *Making the Peace*, p. 88.

interventionism, supporting the *Jolly George* affair in May. That month, two WSF affiliates were arrested for inflammatory speeches, and the *Dreadnought*'s offices were raided seven times.⁹¹ In spite of this, the organization kept up its work, and Pankhurst prepared for her trip to Moscow.

Upon her return, she resumed leadership of the *Dreadnought*, coordinating the contributions of several individuals each posing a subversive threat to the British state. In late 1919, unwilling to hire a Black writer, Pankhurst's friend and Labour politician George Lansbury referred the young Jamaican author Claude McKay to Pankhurst. Appreciative of his work, she asked McKay to write for the *Dreadnought* on race and labor in the London docks.⁹² Though the WSF may have been "more piquant than important," he noted that she "had a personality as picturesque and passionate as any radical in London... she was always jabbing her hat pin into the hides of the smug and slack labor leaders. Her weekly might have been called the Dread Wasp."⁹³

In 1920, McKay met a sailor named Dave Springhall. Springhall, evidently, was a "constant reader" of the *Dreadnought* and came for copies to bring to the other men on his ship.⁹⁴ In his memoir, McKay described him as "bold with youthful zeal and extremely incautious."⁹⁵ Springhall soon wrote to McKay with news from the navy about widespread discontent. When Pankhurst returned from Russia, she eagerly edited it for front-page publication in the *Dreadnought*. "The intelligence of the stuff was so extraordinary," McKay claimed, "that she did not want to risk having the youth's identity discovered by the authorities... she thought he could

⁹¹ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 123.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁹³ Claude McKay, *A Long Way from Home* (New York: Furman, 1937), *Black Thought and Culture*, pp. 76-77.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 84.

serve the social cause more excellently by remaining at his post.”⁹⁶ They changed his name to Hunter in the article to protect Springhall from implication.

During this period, a Bolshevik agent was working covertly with Pankhurst’s organization. Born in Finland, Erkki Veltheim adopted the aliases of Andersen and Rubinstein. Kendall describes him as “an unusually important agent.” The full extent of his role is still not known, but it is clear that Comintern had tasked him with assisting British communists. Veltheim established the underground line used by Pankhurst and other communists to reach Moscow for the summer congress, and he also contributed fiscally and editorially to the *Dreadnought*.⁹⁷

Thus, on Saturday October 16th, 1920, the *Dreadnought* published its weekly edition, in which “Discontent on the Lower Deck” by S. 000 (Gunner) H. M. S. Hunter featured prominently on the front page, accompanied by the articles “How to Get a Labour Government” by Rubinstein, “The Yellow Peril and the Dockers” by Leon Lopez, and “The Datum Line” by Pankhurst.⁹⁸ The former suffragette published articles in her communist newspaper by a revolutionary sailor, a Bolshevik agent, and a Jamaican writer that respectively exposed unrest within the navy, called for the overthrow of Parliament, and advised dockers to transcend racial divisions and destroy capitalism. Such ideas could not have coincided more simultaneously with the unrest that unfolded across Britain that same day and week. Also on October 16th, the coal miners began a nationwide strike, and on October 21st, railroad workers threatened the same.⁹⁹ In the buildup to the miners’ strike, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson had commented that “We have not nearly enough troops

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 82.

⁹⁷ Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, pp. 246-47.

⁹⁸ While Pankhurst’s own short article, “The Datum Line,” is included among the seditious articles cited in her initial arrest, it does not feature very prominently in accounts of her 1920 proceedings and is completely absent from the 1921 appeal trial. The article is about 15 lines long and is comparatively less “seditious” than the other three.

⁹⁹ Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 194.

here in England.”¹⁰⁰ Then, the following Monday, October 18th, an unemployed workers’ march in London broke out into a riot. A crowd had gathered along Downing Street to accompany a deputation of London government officials to see the Prime Minister. Tensions between the crowd and the police rose. As two more processions led by men carrying “red flags” forced their way through the police line, fighting broke out.¹⁰¹ Crowd members began throwing stones at the police and damaging property from Downing Street to Trafalgar Square, with more than 40 people injured and £3,000 of property damaged.¹⁰²

That same day, Scotland Yard raided the *Dreadnought* offices and confronted Pankhurst over the whereabouts of Hunter’s (i.e., Springhall’s) letter on discontent within the navy. McKay, recognizing the severity of Springhall’s transgression, hid the letter in his shoe and left unnoticed by the police.¹⁰³ The following day, October 19th, the London police arrested Pankhurst for sedition as the *Dreadnought*’s editor. As Pankhurst defended herself during the initial proceedings, further scandal erupted. On October 25th, Veltheim was arrested with his lover, Pankhurst’s secretary Miss Gilbertson, while leaving the house of communist MP Colonel Malone.¹⁰⁴ “Apparently,” McKay wrote, “it was his pre-occupation with his love affair that enabled the detectives to trap Comrade Vie.”¹⁰⁵

Veltheim was tried under various provisions of the Aliens Order of 1920 for having failed to register as a foreigner, having spent longer than the legal two months within the country, and

¹⁰⁰ C. E. Caldwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, Vol. II, London 1924, p. 261 in Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 194n34.

¹⁰¹ TNA, HO/144/1692/410769, “Metropolitan Police Report: Cannon Row Station ‘A’ Division,” October 18, 1920 (police report to Home Office).

¹⁰² TNA, HO/144/1692/410769, “Riot (Damages) Act 1886: Riot in Whitehall,” July 7, 1921 (letter from New Scotland Yard to Home Office).

¹⁰³ McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, pp. 82-83.

¹⁰⁴ Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 246.

¹⁰⁵ McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, p. 85.

for refusing to answer police questions about his status. The judge assigned him the maximum sentence limit of six months hard labor followed by deportation. But, reflective of the state's stumbling legal strategy during the interwar period, the Home Office and Parliamentary Counsel grew worried about the case's potential mistrial. The prosecutor wrote to Sir Basil Thomson of the Special Branch to express his concerns that the court clerk failed to properly ask Veltheim if he wanted a trial by judge or jury. Though the court attempted to later rectify its error, the prosecutor wrote that he was "strongly inclined to the opinion" that the error "might as a matter of law invalidate [some of Veltheim's charges], were the matter taken to a higher Court."¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Whitehall's Office of Parliamentary Counsel and the Home Office exchanged messages debating whether the onus of proving a foreigner's length of residency rested on the prosecution or defense.¹⁰⁷ They also discussed whether to amend the Aliens Order, itself a hasty amendment to what Townshend deems a "gaping breach in traditional notions of public crime" that continued into the 1990s.¹⁰⁸ Veltheim opted to defend himself and did not challenge the verdict.

His arrest sparked turmoil. His association with Malone prompted increased scrutiny towards the MP, who was called to testify at Veltheim's trial and was himself soon imprisoned for sedition for suggesting to hang "a few Churchills or a few Curzons on lamp-posts."¹⁰⁹ Among Veltheim's seized possessions were letters from Pankhurst to Lenin, a CP(BSTI) budget, a "Red Officers Corps" handbook, and payments for weapons and bombs.¹¹⁰ Sir Basil Thomson claimed

¹⁰⁶ TNA, HO/144/22952, "Prosecution v. Erkki Veltheim [...] Failing to comply with various provisions of the Aliens Order, 1920," Nov. 4, 1920 (letter from prosecutor to Sir Basil Thomson of the Special Branch).

¹⁰⁷ TNA, HO/144/22952, "Letter to Hugh Godley," Jan. 4, 1921, and "Letter to Sir John Pedder," Jan. 11, 1921 (letters to the Home Office and Office of the Parliamentary Counsel).

¹⁰⁸ Townshend, *Making the Peace*, pp. 95-96.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, HO/144/22952, "Prosecution v. Erkki Veltheim [...] Failing to comply with various provisions of the Aliens Order, 1920," Nov. 4, 1920 (letter from prosecutor to Sir Basil Thomson of the Special Branch); Christopher Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service* (New York: Viking, 1985), p. 271.

¹¹⁰ Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 247.

that they “threw considerable light on the British communist movement,” and one of his inspectors declared it “the most damnable stuff I have ever seen during my whole career.”¹¹¹ Secretary of the CP(BSTI), Edgar Whitehead, accused Pankhurst of being a police plant, although most others such as BSP member John Maclean believed Pankhurst’s innocence.¹¹² The double agent was in fact Russian-American communist Jacob Nosivitsky, captured and recruited by Thomson in 1919.¹¹³ Like Pankhurst, McKay was accused of being a spy, which scared him into ending his London sojourn early.¹¹⁴ During these flashpoints, Springhall returned to London and attempted to see Pankhurst, but McKay urged him to lie low on his ship: “he must have acted indiscreetly and created suspicion against himself, for when his ship arrived at its next port, he was summarily dismissed.”¹¹⁵ At Pankhurst’s initial proceedings in November 1920, alderman Sir Alfred Newton assigned her a six-month sentence to the second division of Holloway, though in his view “quite inadequate.”¹¹⁶ She appealed, and the next trial was scheduled for January 5th, 1921.

On the eve of her appeal, Pankhurst prepared to defend herself as the publisher of McKay, Springhall, and Veltheim’s articles, accused to be “calculated or likely to cause sedition and disaffection.”¹¹⁷ Pankhurst had attempted to hide evidence of Springhall’s implication at the time of her arrest, and asked “Are there any more to come into this?”¹¹⁸ In the resulting weeks, there was more to come to it. Police arrested Veltheim, who was imprisoned and deported. The ensuing chaos falsely implicated Pankhurst as a police plant and scared McKay away from England.

¹¹¹ “A Survey of Revolutionary Movements in Great Britain in the Year 1920,” Jan. 1921, PRO CAB 24/118, in Andrew, *Her Majesty’s Secret Service*, p. 271n35.

¹¹² McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, p. 86; Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, pp. 130-31.

¹¹³ Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, pp. 247-48.

¹¹⁴ McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, pp. 86-87.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹¹⁶ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, *The Daily Herald*, Oct. 29, 1920 (clipping).

¹¹⁷ London Metropolitan Archives, CLA/047/LJ/03/713, “Conviction. (Imprisonment) in the City of London,” Oct. 1920 (conviction charge).

¹¹⁸ Pankhurst Papers, reel 254, “Appeal of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst,” Oct. 1920 (trial transcript), p. 11.

Springhall soon saw himself dismissed from the navy. Sir Basil Thomson's Special Branch, which had previously mocked Lenin's purported instruction to Pankhurst to unite the communists as being the worst possible choice of person, now delighted in the dampened "ardour of the agitators who seemed to have a strong aversion to prison."¹¹⁹ On bail, Pankhurst agreed to step down from her *Dreadnought* role and to not attend political meetings. Another Unity Convention met at the end of December with a final meeting scheduled in January. While Lenin wrote a glowing article in *Pravda* expressing solidarity with Pankhurst during her arrest and commending her for representing "the interests of hundreds upon millions of people who are oppressed by the British and other capitalists," he would have equally appreciated her absence during these gatherings.¹²⁰

Up to this point, her communist detractors as well as the government had been forced to acknowledge Pankhurst's influence. In unity negotiations Pankhurst willfully led the tiny anti-parliamentary minority. And though she lacked the means to launch any uprising, her role as publisher directly tapped into national threats. The sedition episode thus reflected not only the paradoxical position she occupied, but it also provided an opportunity for both the government and her rivals to rid themselves of her: by respectively locking her up and unifying in her absence. Increasingly isolated and facing health conditions along with financial difficulty, Pankhurst used the appeal trial to both defend herself on a personal level and to project her values on the public platform of the courtroom.

¹¹⁹ CAB 24/112 CP 1908 PRO, in Romero, *Portrait of a Radical*, p. 146n30; "A Survey of Revolutionary Movements in Great Britain in the Year 1920," Jan. 1921, PRO CAB 24/119, in Andrew, *Her Majesty's Secret Service*, p. 271n35.

¹²⁰ V. I. Lenin, "Letter to the British Workers," in *On Britain*, trans. T. Dexter and I. Lasker (Moscow: Foreign Language Publications, 1941), p. 495.

Appealing Seditious: Performativity of Communism and Suffrage

The appeal trial operated as an antagonistic confrontation between Pankhurst and the government. The prosecutor portrayed Pankhurst as a dangerous agitator during a precarious time for the country. In her defense, Pankhurst depicted the government as the heartless oppressor of civil liberties. She appealed the sentence on three bases: that a second-division sentence would damage her health, that the isolated excerpts were not seditious when considered part of the entire publication, and that the *Dreadnought* fell within a tradition of radicalism, including communism, which had been permitted within the country. While Pankhurst wove together suffrage, working-class aid, pacifism, and communism throughout the trial, her appeal belies the tensions between relatively convincing claims towards her individual history (of suffrage and ELFS/WSF activity) and the rather clunky evocation of adherence to “scientific principles” of communism.

On January 5th, 1921, the Guildhall in the City of London heard Sylvia Pankhurst’s public appeal of her seditious conviction. The aldermen, comprised of gentlemen and businessmen, presided over the case in which Mr. Travers Humphreys served as senior counsel to the crown and Pankhurst represented herself. Humphreys restated Pankhurst’s conviction under Regulation 42 of the Defence of the Realm Regulations, according to which: “If any person does any act calculated or likely to cause seditious or disaffection among any of His Majesty’s forces, or among the civilian population, he shall be guilty of an offence against the Regulations.”¹²¹ Laying out the seditious content of the prosecuted *Dreadnought* articles, Humphreys claimed that “if the Court comes to the conclusion that these articles are reasonably correctly described in the conviction, I venture to submit that the Court will not have much reason to doubt as to whether those articles do not come within the—if indeed they do not go far beyond the language of Regulation 42.”¹²²

¹²¹ Pankhurst Papers, reel 254, “Appeal of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst,” Oct. 1920 (trial transcript), p. 1.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 2.

Two other DORA Regulation 42 conviction cases serve to further contextualize Pankhurst's, as they also involved legally ambiguous sedition charges of communists. On February 2nd, 1916, officials arrested revolutionaries John MacLean, William Gallacher, and John Muir of the Clyde Workers' Committee, along with their printer Walter Bell, for publishing the article "Should the Workers Arm?"¹²³ All four were charged under Regulation 42 for the article's advocacy of impeding ammunition production, although their counsel claimed that the article "meant exactly the opposite of the meaning extracted from it by the Crown... It was intended to prevent strikes and discourage violence."¹²⁴ All four were found guilty.

Months after Pankhurst's 1921 appeal, the General Secretary of the unified Communist Party of Great Britain, Albert Inkpin, was arrested for seditious publications under both the Emergency Regulations of 1921 and under Regulation 42 of the Defence of the Realm Act. For Inkpin's defense, his counsel pointed to the inconsistency between the Termination of the Present War (Definition) Act of 1918 indirectly extending DORA until the war's end in August 1921, and the War Emergency Laws (Continuance) Act of 1920 which directly extended DORA only until August 1920. Drawing upon what historians Ewing and Gerty describe as "surely torturing language and logic," the Lord Chief Justice presiding over the case explained how the two acts were not only compatible, but in fact "stand together."¹²⁵ The two historians contend that Inkpin's case "represented a cynical use of statutory powers for a purpose for which they can scarcely have been intended."¹²⁶

Although Pankhurst's sedition case was not as severely prosecuted by the British government and did not reach higher levels within the court system, her conviction consisted of a

¹²³ Ewing and Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties*, p. 75.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

similarly circumstantial situation. Increasingly evident throughout the prosecution's argumentation, the government desired to bring charges specifically against the authors of the three articles, but logistically could only reach Pankhurst. However, they did so on the basis of her role as publisher, and not from aiding and abetting the three authors. In this respect, Mr. Humphreys installed his argumentation within the "torturing language and logic" of the courts system. Analysis of his prosecution illustrates the specific ways in which the interwar governmental ideological fear and procedural uncertainty targeted individual civil liberties.

After introducing her charge, Humphreys further qualified the sedition charge on the grounds that the three articles in question "advocated disloyalty and refusal to obey orders in His Majesty's Navy, destruction of Parliament by force and the looting of the docks of London."¹²⁷

Though proposing to just read selected extracts, he suggested that:

The Court will... for itself if it desires, read the whole of the newspaper; and particularly if there is any part which would seem to lead one to any opposite conclusion to that which I invited the Court to draw. So far as I am aware, having glanced through the paper, there is nothing from beginning to end in it which detracts from the nature of the statements... in the three articles...¹²⁸

To prove that the three articles violated Regulation 42, Humphreys purposefully decontextualized the extracts. And while nominally entertaining the possibility that the court could arrive at an "opposite conclusion" in reading the entirety of the newspaper, he admitted to only having "glanced through" it himself.

Humphreys then proceeded to read aloud each selected excerpt to explain their seditious aspects. First discussing "Discontent on the Lower Deck" by S. 000 (Gunner) H. M. S. Hunter (aka Dave Springhall), Humphreys declared, "My submission to the Court is that to ask men in the Navy to hail the formation of a Red Navy... the whole object of it is not to obey the orders of the

¹²⁷ Pankhurst Papers, reel 254, "Appeal of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst," Oct. 1920 (trial transcript), p. 2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Government... is calculated to cause disaffection amongst the Navy.”¹²⁹ He then quoted from “How to Get a Labour Government” by H. Rubinstein (aka Erkki Veltheim), who had written, “How are we going to destroy Parliament? Firstly, by destroying the faith which millions of British workers still have in it...[and] to disperse Parliament by force it is necessary to organise and prepare, also outside Parliament for the armed mass-revolt and the general strike.”¹³⁰ Humphreys additionally read from Claude McKay’s “The Yellow Peril and the Dockers.” Rather than “being unduly concerned about the presence of their coloured fellow men, who, like themselves are victims of Capitalism,” the article advised, white dockers should instead “turn their attention to the huge stores of wealth along the water front... the jobless should lead the attack on the bastilles, the bonded warehouses along the docks to solve the question of unemployment.”¹³¹ The content of the extracts Humphreys cited, navy mutinies, destruction of the British government, and dock worker strikes, reflected the very threats plaguing the British government in the interwar period up to the moment of the issue’s publication.

Pankhurst presented her appeal against the sedition charge on three different bases to build upon her past before and during the war. She argued against the prison sentence and second division assignment on the basis of her health. In doing so, Pankhurst drew upon her past in the suffrage movement both directly and indirectly. She introduced her doctor, Ettie Sayer, to testify that six months in the second division would severely impact her health. Sayer affirmed that Pankhurst suffered from chronic internal inflammation received from her suffragette hunger strikes.¹³² Sayer made her recommendation under the knowledge that a transfer to the first division would allow the continued treatment necessary for recovery, while in the second division “she

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹³² Ibid., pp. 13-14.

would be subject to hardships.” Pankhurst began to ask about specific hardships brought on by the second division diet, but the prosecution and the court recorder interrupted, “We have no evidence of the diet. If your condition is such as to require special diet, it is dealt with by the prison doctor in the usual way.” “I must beg to state,” Pankhurst replied, “after long experience of Holloway, that is incorrect.”¹³³

Her long experience of Holloway had been one of trauma. In March 1913, Pankhurst wrote an article entitled “My Torture,” which provided a graphic account of the forced feeding she endured while hunger-striking. After Pankhurst had hunger struck for several days in prison, six female officers entered her cell and pinned her on the bed. Doctors entered and pulled her head back. She described, “I felt a steel instrument being forced against my gums, where I had had two teeth out. I fought against it with all my strength, but, cutting its way into the flesh it worked its way in.” The doctors force fed her multiple times over an extended period, and Pankhurst wrote that “Somedays I felt the tube go all the way down into the stomach... Once or twice I think I screamed terribly after it was over, in an uncontrollable sort of way.” As the force feeding continued, Pankhurst frequently vomited up the food, and her eyes began to look like “cups of blood.”¹³⁴ In addition to this debilitating episode, Pankhurst hunger struck seven more times in the following two-year period. Thus in 1921, Sayer referenced the consequences of hunger-striking and forced feeding in her cogent medical recommendation to dispute Pankhurst’s second division assignment.

Because Pankhurst invoked her suffragette history on the basis of her health, she implicitly brought up her earlier conflicts with authority and her defense of civil liberties. On January 27th, 1914, Pankhurst had written a letter to the editor in *Votes for Women* on the issue of an East London

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ TNA, HO/144/1558/234191, *The Daily Herald*, Mar. 26, 1913 (clipping).

council banning suffragettes from using its town hall. In it, she claimed that “I was imprisoned under the provisions of an old statute of Edward III because the Government did not like the tone of my speeches.”¹³⁵ Here, just as in the 1921 appeal, Pankhurst framed government prosecution as a personal attack against her right to free speech. And the same way she questioned DORA’s usage against her in 1921, she ridiculed in 1914 the application of centuries-old legislation. “What is the right of free speech? Is it the right to say what other people and especially people in power approve of?” Pankhurst had questioned. “No, else there had been no reason for our ancestors to fight and suffer and even die for it. No, free speech is the right to say what one believes, however much one’s belief may be condemned.”¹³⁶ Pankhurst rooted her defense of free speech in a support of radicalism and condemnation of unequal power structures.

Assertion of civil liberties in fact lay at the core of Pankhurst’s defense as she argued against her sedition accusation. Having examined Dr. Sayer, Pankhurst next addressed Humphreys’s decontextualized *Dreadnought* excerpts. She first considered the paragraph he had cited from McKay’s “Yellow Peril and the Dockers” in which dockers were advised to “turn their attention to the huge stores of wealth along the water front... The jobless should lead the attack on the bastilles, the bonded warehouses along the docks to solve the question of unemployment.”¹³⁷ She told the court that she had not interpreted it how the prosecution did. If it actually meant a direct call to an uprising, “I should not have put it in because it is contrary to my policy, and to how I think things should be done.”¹³⁸ In fact, it was against her views “to say that unemployment could be cured by looting. What the article means to me is that the workers should have control of

¹³⁵ Pankhurst Papers, reel 230, “Letter to the Editor,” Jan. 27, 1914, (from Sylvia Pankhurst).

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Pankhurst Papers, reel 254, “Appeal of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst,” Oct. 1920 (trial transcript), p. 6.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

the means of production.”¹³⁹ Thus, she argued that these passages served only as political metaphors. She tried to soften the controversial language by invoking her knowledge of the area. “The article by Lopez [McKay] was interesting to me,” Pankhurst explained, “because I know a good deal about the conditions in the East End. I have lived there since 1912, and had a great deal to do with coping with poverty and unemployment, and various evils down there.”¹⁴⁰

Pankhurst attempted to read other articles from the *Dreadnought*, including one that she had written herself. The chairman interrupted her, “This is another article; it cannot be the context of the paragraph.” She responded, “the context is the entire paper. I am responsible for the entire paper.”¹⁴¹ Humphreys prosecuted her as editor for the seditious content of three excerpted passages written by other authors within the newspaper. But by admitting both that he had only “glanced” at the rest of it and that the rest could contradict his argument, Humphreys laid the foundation for Pankhurst’s appeal before she began. Given her accused and accepted responsibility for the articles, she sustained, all of it must be taken into consideration as a “whole article,” and sedition could not therefore be brought upon the basis of isolated paragraphs.

Pankhurst likewise claimed that because comparably extreme works had been and were published in the country, she had the right to publish such material as well. She envisaged herself within a history of English radicalism that had otherwise been tolerated by the government. After discussing the Lopez (McKay) article on the dockers, Pankhurst reminded the court that none of the article’s concepts were new. “My father brought me up from my early childhood as a communist,” she said. “These ideas are current, legal and circulated in this country... We have *News from Nowhere*, a book anyone can buy and read, given to me by my father when I was a little

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 17.

girl.”¹⁴² William Morris, poet, designer, and founder of the Arts and Crafts movement, wrote the utopian socialist novel *News From Nowhere* in 1893. Morris had entered the social circles of the artistic Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and emerging 19th century socialist groups. Throughout his art designs, poetry, and philosophical tracts, Morris rejected the exploitations of industrialism and modernity and praised communal agrarian and folk-based elements. *News From Nowhere* presents a contemporary man who wakes up from slumber to find a bucolic England of the future.¹⁴³ In the excerpt from which Pankhurst read, he asks a member of that society why Parliament has been turned into a manure storehouse. The man responds that “the whole people is our Parliament.” Their society has no need of a system where “if the people made any attempt to deal with the cause of their grievances, the law stepped in and said, this is sedition, revolt or what not, and slew or tortured the ringleaders of such attempts.”¹⁴⁴

The chairman interrupted Pankhurst to ask what she was reading from and why. “It is not a seditious book,” she responded, “neither is this paper.”¹⁴⁵ In presenting a novelized utopia, Morris was not seditious in the way the prosecution contended that the *Dreadnought* articles advocated violent overthrow of the Navy and Parliament. Instead, Pankhurst’s reading of Morris reflects the way in which she considered the sedition charge and her newspaper through her fundamental political strain of culturally-centered utopian romanticism (initially developed in part by Morris’s works). Unlike the government and its concern of communist subversion in the wake of the *Jolly George* affair or the October miners’ strike, she considered her newspaper’s articles as part of a political-literary tradition as non-seditious as Morris’s novel.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s. v. “Morris, William (1834–1896),” accessed Feb. 20, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref.odnb/19322>.

¹⁴⁴ Pankhurst Papers, reel 254, “Appeal of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst,” Oct. 1920 (trial transcript), p. 19.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

Pankhurst installed herself within a more violently radical line by citing John Richard Green's *A Short History of the English People*, "another standard work given to me when a child at school."¹⁴⁶ Green, an Anglican deacon and settlement house leader, wrote his work in 1874 as a departure from conventional and conservative political accounts.¹⁴⁷ His book treated the social and cultural history of the English people who rose up against oppressive power structures. Citing once instance, she described:

[The book] applauds Cromwell first of all for having organised Pride's Purge — in which 150 members of Parliament were arrested quite illegally by the Army — and, secondly, for dissolving Parliament. Because Parliament was doing wrong it was thought right for the Army to revolt. We think Parliament is not doing right today... We are allowed to express our opinions — because such opinions are expressed in standard works...¹⁴⁸

With this excerpt, Pankhurst connected her opinion, the overthrow of Parliament, to a recognizably violent and controversial figure, Cromwell. More specifically, she claimed that to express her opinions was comparable to Green's praise of Cromwell's seditious actions. Pankhurst argued for the right to express these opinions that are "analyzing scientific causes and scientific results."¹⁴⁹

Pankhurst also identified herself as part of a larger communist community. As the aldermen became increasingly annoyed with Pankhurst's long reading of extracts, she clarified that she was "working on scientific communist principles, and not on indiscriminate looting."¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, she argued that seminal communist texts were far more violent than any *Dreadnought* article and yet considered suitable for publication. She cited Marx and Engels's *Communist Party Manifesto* as one such example, reading aloud that "the bourgeoisie has not only forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also produced the men who will wield these weapons — the modern

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁴⁷ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s. v. "Green, John Richard (1837–1883)," accessed Feb. 20, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/11391>.

¹⁴⁸ Pankhurst Papers, reel 254, "Appeal of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst," Oct. 1920 (trial transcript), p. 21.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

workers the Proletarians...” The chairman quickly interrupted, “all we are concerned with is the actual publications you have issued; the question is whether they infringe this Regulation.”¹⁵¹

Pankhurst concluded her appeal as a martyr of civil liberties and communism, galvanizing past and present threads of her life into the “old Pankhurst fireworks” described by Winslow.¹⁵² “I am afraid that if you send me to prison for six months,” Pankhurst challenged, “as soon as I get out I shall return to advocating the abolition of the capitalist system and its class rule...”¹⁵³ This defiance resounded throughout the rest of her closing remarks as she declared, “You will never crush it out of me, or kill it, and I am only one out of thousands or millions.”¹⁵⁴ Pankhurst proclaimed the impenetrability of her anti-capitalism and her identity within a larger communist movement including revolutions in Russia, Germany, and Hungary.

She similarly offered herself up as a guardian of free speech. “I think it most unfair,” she explained, “that the prosecution could not find anything I had written; but took it from the writings of other people. I prefer to suffer to letting others suffer – as you have seen in [my] destroying [Springhall’s] letter.”¹⁵⁵ Now, as at the moment of her arrest, she expressed her responsibility for the *Dreadnought* through a vocabulary of suffering. In doing so, she adopted the role of martyr derived from the suffrage movement. Indeed, she once again linked her suffragette hunger-striking to the sedition case by referring to the six-month imprisonment as a potential “death sentence.”¹⁵⁶

Dramatically drawing upon her East London engagement with the working class to explain the development of her radicalism, she told the court:

My convictions have been bitten into me hard and deep by experience in the working class. When the war broke out you took the men, and... the Government was not able to provide

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁵² Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 131.

¹⁵³ Pankhurst Papers, reel 254, “Appeal of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst,” Oct. 1920 (trial transcript), p. 29.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

for the women. Because I had been a suffragette and had fought for the cause of woman, the women came to me and asked me to help them. I had dying babies brought to me.¹⁵⁷

Her experience as a suffragette had developed into her working-class assistance and pacifism. Pankhurst highlighted the wartime suffering in the East End she had witnessed and attempted to alleviate. Drawing the past into the present, she concluded her appeal: “I have been in prison; most of the people are there by poverty or drink... Girls are in prison because they tried to commit suicide, because the world was too hard for them. You may put me in prison but you cannot stop the cause, it is stronger than I.”¹⁵⁸

Members of the public broke out in applause. An unidentified woman in the back rose up to shout, “You and your wretched system are upheld by force!” The chairman told her to remain quiet or leave, and she responded, “I have made my protest, I will go. You are upheld by force.” The trial transcript records further “applause and other protests from the back of the court.”¹⁵⁹ *The Times* presented an alternative account (enthusiastically picked up in Romero’s biography) that Pankhurst became “almost hysterical and incoherent... She waved her arms and thumped her papers, and as she went on at a great rate her hair became loosened and fell over her ears and forehead, giving her an almost haggard appearance.”¹⁶⁰ Having spent the course of the trial interrupting Pankhurst while she argued her defense, the aldermen certainly seemed to take a perspective similar to that of *The Times*. They immediately entered consultation and returned to announce that Pankhurst’s appeal had been unanimously rejected with Pankhurst to bear the session costs.¹⁶¹ The united ease with which the aldermen reaffirmed Pankhurst’s conviction demonstrates the scope of the powers afforded by the emergency wartime legislation to the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁶⁰ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, *The Times*, Jan. 6, 1921 (clipping).

¹⁶¹ Pankhurst Papers, reel 254, “Appeal of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst,” Oct. 1920 (trial transcript), p. 35.

executive and judicial branches. That the prosecutor specifically isolated paragraphs from the paper, admitted to not even having read the whole edition, and invited the aldermen at their volition to consider the complete publication, and that the defendant precisely attempted to do so, did not preclude the aldermen from immediately validating the government's position.

The imprisonment and fines came at a particularly inopportune moment for Pankhurst. The various communist parties had already set January 29th, 1921, to be the date of the final Unity Convention. Without Pankhurst there, anti-parliamentarianism lost its most vehement advocate. She also faced challenges within her own organization, the CP(BSTI). Her lover, Silvio Corio, had begun to help with the *Dreadnought*. But due to both Corio's politics (anarchism) and personal behavior (accusations of drunkenness), National Secretary of the CP(BSTI), Edgar Whitehead, asked Pankhurst to remove the *Dreadnought*'s affiliation from the organization.¹⁶² Additionally, the *Dreadnought* reached critical levels of debt in January, and Pankhurst's prison fines only added to her financial challenges.¹⁶³ Pankhurst was defending her communism in court as colleagues effectively ignored or challenged her.

Fundamentally, this appeal, her last such trial, reveals the tensions between Pankhurst's communist present and her suffragette and home front past. In the middle of her appeal, she cited Marx and Engels and made frequent reference to her adherence to "scientific principles" and "doctrines." But she cited Morris and Green far more comprehensively, and she did not elaborate beyond the generalized abstraction of communism as "scientific principle" and not "indiscriminate looting." Rather, it was her usage of the "Pankhurst family fireworks" that proved more compelling. She began her appeal by introducing her doctor as a witness to raise concern of her fragile health condition that directly resulted from Pankhurst's suffragette past (i.e., prior

¹⁶² Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, pp. 167-68.

¹⁶³ Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 266; Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 168.

government treatment of her). Invoking the suffrage movement provided her the thematic and celebrity basis for the rest of her appeal, including assertion of her continuity within the history of English radicalism and her impassioned conclusion as a revenant martyr, that communist allegiance could not. But though Pankhurst's appeal set a dramatic tone provoking audience reaction, it did not sway the judges' opinions, nor did it make a lasting mark in the way her suffrage activities had. In prison as well as upon release, Pankhurst escalated her usage of these tactics, but they were similarly limited.

Prison and Release: Attempted Constructions of Martyrology

Once in prison, Pankhurst, along with outside supporters, petitioned for various privileges on the basis of her status as political prisoner and her history as a suffragette. Upon her release, Pankhurst's reentry into society captured some media attention as well as her own publication, the *Dreadnought*. She used the spectacle of her release to cultivate her political celebrity. Drawing on her difficult experience during imprisonment, Pankhurst projected differing personas: on the one hand, a frail woman victimized by an oppressive government, and on the other, a transcendent heroine illuminating truth. These self-representations evoked the religious and sentimental rhetoric of the suffragettes, but under completely different circumstances. The government outright rejected her appeal and petition, she did not achieve significant or lasting media prominence, and fellow communists united in her absence and ultimately expelled her four months after her release. Thus, this sedition episode is emblematic of the way in which Pankhurst failed to transplant her utopian romanticism, effective in the suffrage movement, into an unreceptive postwar context.

At Pankhurst's January 5th appeal, the London Guildhall aldermen unanimously upheld her six-month prison sentence in the second division of Holloway. Sir Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood in "The Status of Political Prisoner in England" explain the development of British prison divisions within the context of Victorian reformism. At the height of the Chartist movement in the 1840s, the government found itself pressed to explain the widely divergent prison treatment of the Chartists, working-class constitutional reformers arrested for "political offences" like sedition and libel. More delicately, the government aimed to sidestep the Chartists' own demands to be treated categorically as "political prisoners" distinct from criminals. The government therefore passed the Prisons Bill of 1840 to circumvent direct acknowledgement of political prisoner rights by dividing

convicted criminals into three divisions.¹⁶⁴ A first division prisoner, as Radzinowicz and Hood write, was “for all intents, treated like an unconvicted prisoner awaiting trial.” The first division afforded substantial privileges and liberties over the second division, including no work requirement, the ability to choose clothing, rent furniture, and even hire another prisoner. The second and third divisions did not substantially differ overall, except for hard labor in the latter.¹⁶⁵ The bill placed the responsibility to assign prisoners to one or another division with the presiding judge.¹⁶⁶

As mentioned, Pankhurst’s appeal was not only against the prison sentence itself, but also against her specific assignment to the second division. Consequently, in prison Pankhurst petitioned for first division privileges, asking for Rule 243a to be applied to her. In 1910, Home Secretary Winston Churchill devised Rule 243a to address the public image crisis the government faced during the women’s suffrage movement. In 1905, the militancy of the WSPU had led to the widespread imprisonment of its member activists, charged with disorderly conduct, destruction of property, and harassing police officers.¹⁶⁷ Local jurisdictions frequently assigned suffragettes to the second and third divisions as the Home Office denied that English Law recognized “political motive as giving rise to any claim to special treatment.”¹⁶⁸ Public pressure exerted on the Home Office forced its leadership to begrudgingly accommodate the “highly strung” and “neurotic” temperament of the suffragettes with privileges based on medical grounds.¹⁶⁹ As the militancy

¹⁶⁴ Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood, “The Status of Political Prisoner in England: The Struggle for Recognition,” *Virginia Law Review* 65, no. 8 (1979): pp. 1432-33, doi:10.2307/1072581.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1459

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1433.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1457-8.

¹⁶⁸ *The Imprisonment of Suffragists*, 196 Parliamentary Debates (4th ser.) 1040 (1908) in *ibid.*, p. 1463n190.

¹⁶⁹ The National Archives (London), HO/144/882/167074/35, “Prison Treatment of Suffragettes,” 1908, in *ibid.*, p. 1465n193.

campaign further escalated, an increasing number of imprisoned suffragettes began hunger-striking in 1908, in part to protest being denied political prisoner status. The government's response, forcible feeding, drew widespread outrage for its oppressive and invasive nature, especially because most suffragettes were wives and daughters in prominent middle and upper-class families. Permanent Under-secretary Edward Troup (holding his position from 1908 to 1922) represented the bureaucratic perspective of the Home Office, complaining that "If these ladies are treated as First Division prisoners, there will be no end to the procession of candidates for easy martyrdom and then imprisonment will become meaningless."¹⁷⁰ Divided between the competing desires to discourage a too-comfortable prison environment for "easy martyrdom" and to salvage the government's tarnished reputation, Churchill instituted Rule 243a in 1910 to give the discretion over treatment to the prison commissioners.¹⁷¹ If granted (applicable according to Home Office policy by 1921 to suffragettes, conscientious objectors, and DORA offenders), the prisoner could wear her own clothing, receive reading and writing materials, and procure better food options among other privileges.¹⁷²

Pankhurst's petition for the benefits of Rule 243a in 1921 drew upon her personal involvement in this history. At the end of the request, she wrote that the government beginning in 1910 had granted privileges to those "charged with offences committed from political and conscientious motives," including Pankhurst herself for suffragette militancy in 1913-1914.¹⁷³ As she stated: "I am one of those who took part in the struggle to obtain Rule 243a and I do not feel justified in relinquishing that just amelioration which was won after much hardship and many

¹⁷⁰ TNA, HO/45/10389/170808/19, "CRIMINAL: Suffragettes treatment in prison following convictions in connection with the "rush" on the House of Commons," 1908, in *ibid.*, p. 1466n200.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1472.

¹⁷² TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, "Privileges allowed under Rule 243a," Jan. 1, 1921 (memo from Prison Commission, Home Office).

¹⁷³ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, "Petition," Jan. 13, 1921 (Sylvia Pankhurst to Home Secretary).

hunger strikes had been endured. I therefore again ask for its application in my case.”¹⁷⁴ In that earlier period, Pankhurst had hunger struck eight times and was forcibly fed in prison for several extended durations.¹⁷⁵ Just as she had done during the appeal trial and would do upon release from prison, in this petition Pankhurst mobilized her suffragette credentials.

Pankhurst also argued for the provision of food, clothing, and writing materials. She stressed the importance of having food sent by her friends because of her colitis and inflammatory condition, confirmed during her trial examination of Dr. Sayer to have developed out of her suffragette hunger-striking and force feeding.¹⁷⁶ This medical argument thereby served as an additional and tangible reference to her suffragette legacy, both during the trial and now in prison. Pankhurst also referenced her health as one of the two bases for her right to wear her own clothes, claiming to be ill from the cold temperatures of her second division cell.

Pankhurst’s petition progressed from medical grounds to ideological claims. “Moreover,” she specified, “since in my opinion I have not committed a crime but have done as my principles and conscience dictated, I object to wearing prison clothes and to submitting to the number of other indignities from which Rule 243a exempts those to whom it is applied.”¹⁷⁷ This distinction between criminal and political offense had been claimed by the Chartists, Irish Fenians, suffragettes and conscientious objectors, along with their parliamentary supporters.¹⁷⁸ Pankhurst installed herself within this history of political dissenters. She went further, arguing:

For a person of active mental life, it is no small thing to be deprived for six months of writing materials... I would point out that it is unusual throughout the world to deprive political prisoners of material for writing and study and that many of the finest books have been written in prison by political prisoners of various nationalities.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ See page 14, note 35.

¹⁷⁶ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, “Petition,” Jan. 13, 1921 (Sylvia Pankhurst to Home Secretary).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Radzinowicz and Hood, “Political Prisoner in England.”

¹⁷⁹ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, “Petition,” Jan. 13, 1921 (Sylvia Pankhurst to Home Secretary).

By reminding the Home Secretary that various eminent political prisoners produced substantial writings throughout history, Pankhurst suggested that, given the opportunity, she could too. Such an implication marks a shift in which Pankhurst focused principally on herself: her health conditions, her own history as a suffragette, her personal conscience, and her status as a person with an “active mental life.”

The prison and government officials were unsympathetic to her claims. Accompanying her petition sent to the Home Office were a letter from the medical officer and the prison commissioners’ meeting notes. Responding to Pankhurst’s claims of suffering from inflammation and the cold temperature of the cell, the medical officer wrote that her cell was kept at 60 degrees and that she was being treated with her doctor’s prescription. He concluded that “her general health appears quite satisfactory at the present time.”¹⁸⁰ The commissioners were significantly more antagonistic towards her request. Dismissing her adherence to “principles and conscience,” one argued that “Sedition-mongers and other persons who attempt to cause disaffection in the Navy have no claim in these critical times to specifically favourable treatment in prison.”¹⁸¹ Another described her as a “hysterical woman in feeble health”.¹⁸² While one did consider granting Pankhurst some of the privileges, they found no need to accommodate her request and advised the Home Office to reject it. The Home Office promptly followed suit and declared that she would only have “such food, clothing, etc. as the Medical Officer may consider necessary.”¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, “Memorandum: 9587. Sylvia Pankhurst,” Jan. 13, 1921 (Pankhurst’s medical officer and Holloway governor to HO).

¹⁸¹ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, “Prisoner Commissioners Forward for instructions of S. of S. report from Governor of Holloway Prison,” Jan. 10, 1921 (minutes).

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, “Petition response,” Jan. 24, 1921 (Under-Secretary of State to Governor of Holloway Prison).

In response, Clara Gilbert Cole, a WSF member whose husband served as the *Dreadnought* illustrator,¹⁸⁴ requested an interview with the Home Secretary to ask for the application of Rule 243a to Pankhurst and other political offenders. The Home Office sent a junior official to tell her that the request could not be granted. In his report, the official wrote that Cole and her two associates said “they represented a movement which would fight for this principle, which they had won as suffragettes.”¹⁸⁵ He disparaged them, “I saw many of these women in the old suffragette days and these are just the same—obsessed with the one idea that they are right and that it is their duty to fight for the recognition of the principle.”¹⁸⁶ Pankhurst and Cole invoked the suffrage movement when petitioning Rule 243a, as both a source of pride and as an appeal for consistency. Having “fought for” the rule then, they considered it logical to apply the rule in this instance. However, among the government, it is precisely this suffragette identity and its connotatively gendered characteristics, “hysterical” and “obsessed,” which they derided in their discussion of the petitions.

With the Rule 243a petitions rejected, Pankhurst completed the rest of her prison sentence and was released a month early on “good behaviour.” At 7:45 am on Monday, May 31st, 1921, *Dreadnought* members led a largely female group to rally outside the Holloway prison gate awaiting Pankhurst’s release.¹⁸⁷ They waved red banners and sang “The Red Flag.” It was raining as she emerged from the prison. Various publications like *The Daily News*, *The Times*, and *The Scotsman* reported that “she looked grey and wan, and appeared to find it difficult to walk.”¹⁸⁸ As

¹⁸⁴ E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front*, (London: The Cresset Library, 1987), p. 330.

¹⁸⁵ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, “Prison Department memo of interview with Miss Cole,” Feb. 25, 1921 (internal Home Office letter).

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ “Welcome to Sylvia Pankhurst,” *Workers’ Dreadnought*, May 21, 1921.

¹⁸⁸ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, *The Times* and *The Daily News*, May 31, 1921 (clippings); “Miss Sylvia Pankhurst Out of Prison.” *The Scotsman (1921-1950)*, May 31, 1921,

her supporters assisted her towards a taxicab, she told a reporter that she had spent four months of her sentence in the hospital division. Not strong enough to eat the typical prison diet, she was fed only milk and eggs.¹⁸⁹ Pankhurst took the opportunity to criticize the prime minister's unawareness "of the way in which political prisoners are treated" and again pointed out that suffragettes had been allowed privileges which political prisoners like herself were now denied.¹⁹⁰

As mainstream media emphasized Pankhurst's frailty and victimization, her own newspaper celebrated her resilience and path toward victory. In anticipation of her release, the *Dreadnought* published a front-page article on May 28th, entitled "A Woman's Welcome to Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst on Release from Holloway, May 30th."¹⁹¹ The article championed her as a model: "only through a spirit of great self-sacrifice, the enthusiasm and zeal of the real revolutionary who sees the goal..., can attainment... be won."¹⁹² The immediate issue published after Pankhurst's release on June 4th dedicated the entire front page to an article in which she recounted her prison life and platform for reform. Prominently featured below the headline was a drawing of Pankhurst emerging from prison and captioned "TO FIGHT AGAIN ! Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst."

<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/478988694?accountid=10226>.

¹⁸⁹ TNA, HO/144/1697/414256, *The Daily News*, May 31, 1921 (clipping).

¹⁹⁰ "Sylvia Pankhurst Released," *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*, May 31, 1921,

<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/476470766?accountid=10226>.

¹⁹¹ "A Woman's Welcome to Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst on Release from Holloway, May 30th," *Workers' Dreadnought*, May 28, 1921.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

Figure 1.¹⁹³Figure 2.¹⁹⁴

The drawing merits extended comparison with a suffragette pin Pankhurst had designed for the WSPU. As Winslow aptly describes, the pin presented a young woman “in flowing Grecian robes striding out of a prison over broken chains” and flanked by doves in flight. The design Winslow observes was “rooted in nineteenth-century, Pre-Raphaelite socialist symbolism” influenced by William Morris.¹⁹⁵ Though Pankhurst did not draw the *Dreadnought* sketch, significant similarities between the two enrich understanding of Pankhurst’s characterization and role amidst the 1920-1921 sedition episode. Pankhurst created the WSPU emblem during the phase of high militancy in which suffragettes, including herself, were conducting hunger strikes, subjected to forced feeding, and continuously released and re-imprisoned. The emblem’s allegorical suffragette emerging from prison in victory for suffrage and for prison reform found her successor in a resplendent “Comrade Pankhurst” exiting prison, head held high, to “fight

¹⁹³ *Workers’ Dreadnought*, June 4, 1921.

¹⁹⁴ “The Woman’s Suffrage Campaign,” *Inspiring Women: Hidden Histories*, from West Kent, Knowledge Transfer Project, accessed February 4, 2018, <https://www.kent.ac.uk/sspsr/womenshistorykent/themes/suffrage/>.

¹⁹⁵ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 17.

again” for communism, free speech, and prisoner’s rights as silhouetted rank-and-file members shuffle towards the gaol gate.

In the following *Dreadnought* issue, Pankhurst fused these two characterizations of frail victimization and allegorical victory to dramatic effect. She continued her editorial “Prison Life,” containing a list of sincere demands for prison reform justified by a sympathetic but condescending depiction of destitute inmates. She recounted an episode at Holloway pending her Rule 243a petition decision in which the governor had allowed her to use tooth powder in contravention of prison regulations. Since none of the other prisoners could use it, her usage evidently “caused quite a sensation in the prison.” However, she assured readers that “they expressed no jealousy. Their attitude was that of the thief crucified beside Christ, who protested: ‘This man has done nothing amiss.’”¹⁹⁶ Amplifying this self-depiction as Jesus was another *Dreadnought* article describing Pankhurst’s post-release breakfast. At the “small, almost devotional party,” it read, “a De Vincian figure at the long table of the quaint Eustace Miles’ Restaurant, pale, frail, yet flushed with happiness at being out of prison and amongst friends, Comrade Pankhurst spoke briefly of her prison life, without hatred, in a voice mellowed by sorrow.”¹⁹⁷

Pankhurst’s imprisonment and activities upon release coincided with the formation of a united Communist party and Pankhurst’s rapidly fading influence within it. Pankhurst entered Holloway immediately after her appeal on January 5th. The Unity Convention, held January 29th, felt Pankhurst’s absence. Graubard describes the convention as a “humdrum affair” with right-wing communism clearly dominant in the proceedings.¹⁹⁸ It resolved, in contravention of Pankhurst and other left-wing communists, to fully embrace the precepts of the Third International,

¹⁹⁶ “Complimentary Breakfast,” *Workers’ Dreadnought*, June 4, 1921.

¹⁹⁷ “Prison Life,” *Workers’ Dreadnought*, June 11, 1921.

¹⁹⁸ Graubard, *British Labour and the Russian Revolution*, p. 138.

particularly the acceptance of parliamentary tactics and Labour Party affiliation. Kendall aptly suggests that while Pankhurst nominally supported unity, “her arrest in October and subsequent imprisonment made it less likely that personal conflicts would cause any hitch in the arrangements.”¹⁹⁹ Before the January Unity Convention, the *Dreadnought* published articles discussing anti-parliamentarianism, trade unions, and other unity issues. But without Pankhurst at the helm to personally raise funds, the *Dreadnought* slipped further into debt.²⁰⁰ The group reached out to Alexandra Kollontai, a prominent internal critic of Lenin’s regime, for funding.²⁰¹

While Pankhurst and the *Dreadnought* had joined the CPGB, she made little effort to adhere to a group which had formed in her absence. Indeed, L. J Macfarlane and Martin Durham both cite Pankhurst’s eager and frequent publication of Kollontai’s Bolshevik criticism as a significant factor in her expulsion from the party.²⁰² The party expelled Pankhurst and the *Dreadnought* in September 1921, only four months after her release from prison. While she remained committed to her own conception of communism in the period following her release, her attention was shifting to a literary lens that would characterize the late 1920s for her: she tried to open a “red” salon with her Italian anarchist lover in 1924, and then began writing a series of lengthy books on topics as diverse as India, a “universal” language, and national maternity policy.

When evaluating Pankhurst’s extremely high levels of hunger-striking and forced feedings (“more than most suffragettes”), Winslow suggests Pankhurst courted martyrdom to establish herself as “the most self-sacrificing Pankhurst.”²⁰³ Hunger-striking during the Cat and Mouse Act

¹⁹⁹ Walter Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 266.

²⁰⁰ Kendall, *Revolutionary Movement*, p. 266; Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 168.

²⁰¹ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 168.

²⁰² L. J. Macfarlane, *The British Communist Party. Its Origin and Development until 1929* (London 1966), in Martin Durham, “British Revolutionaries and the Suppression of the Left in Lenin’s Russia, 1918-1924,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 2 (1985): 210, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/260531>.

²⁰³ Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 45.

period enabled her to win over sympathetic media. Newspapers like *The Suffragette*, *The Standard*, *The Morning Post*, and *The Daily Herald* all published Pankhurst's vivid depiction of forced feeding in the spring of 1913, in which she named the seven other suffragettes also force fed.²⁰⁴ And in 1914 she declared her intent to conduct hunger, thirst, and sleep strikes to (successfully) secure a deputation with Prime Minister Asquith, claiming that he "will find it hard to persevere in his refusal... when he knows that unless he relents another human being will die."²⁰⁵ Writing to his friend about Pankhurst's intention, announced just two weeks after suffragette Emily Wilding Davison had died at the English Derby after throwing herself onto the race track, Asquith stated that "I don't want, if I can help, to secure [for Pankhurst] the martyr's crown, but *que faire?*"²⁰⁶

This prewar suffrage context was fundamentally different from that in which Pankhurst found herself in 1921. The WSPU (to say nothing of the less controversial and constitutionalist National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies) reached a peak membership of 5000, with more than 1000 members arrested from 1905 to 1914. And of those, around 240 went on hunger strikes from 1909-1914.²⁰⁷ Within these large sizes of general membership and prisoners, supportive networks existed to turn the WSPU into, as one suffragette put it, "a sympathetic family helping each other to endure."²⁰⁸ Prisoners organized communal entertainment activities to the extent possible, while outside members coordinated large, periodic rallies outside Holloway.²⁰⁹ While contemporaries then and historians now have debated the ultimate help or hindrance of militancy

²⁰⁴ TNA, HO/144/1558/234191, *The Suffragette*, *The Standard*, *The Morning Post*, and *The Daily Herald*, Mar. 26, 1913 (clippings).

²⁰⁵ "June 10th," *Woman's Dreadnought*, June 13, 1914.

²⁰⁶ M. Brook & E. Brook, eds, *H. H. Asquith, Letters to Venetia Stanley*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 89, in Winslow, *Sylvia Pankhurst*, p. 72n112.

²⁰⁷ Gay L. Gullickson, "Emily Wilding Davison: Secular Martyr?" *Social Research* 75, no. 2 (2008): pp. 463, 465, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40972072>.

²⁰⁸ Daisy Dorothea Solomon (n.d. 1909?) *My Prison Experiences*, leaflet reprinted from the *Christian Commonwealth*, 25 August 1909, p. 7, in Purvis, "The Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes," p. 111n54.

²⁰⁹ Purvis, "The Prison Experiences of the Suffragettes," pp. 111-12.

towards women's suffrage, what it aimed, as Holton claims, was the engagement and expression of militants' self-realization and their individual and collective exertion of will onto society.²¹⁰

This 1920-21 sedition episode illuminates the limitations of Pankhurst's attempt to transplant this political identity past the pre-war suffrage period into the postwar. Pankhurst's prison release in May provided her with the opportunity to transfigure the different personas she drew upon in those months—dying victim, victorious heroine, prophetic communist—into an apotheosis of “true” martyrdom. Pankhurst presented herself as a Christ figure defying both the Pontius Pilate judgement of the government leadership and the Judas betrayal of other communists. But this image lost its prewar effectiveness without the institutional strength of the WSPU and the wider support of suffrage: the WSF/CP(BSTI) barely numbered among the few hundred, and its advocacy of Parliamentary overthrow was not even accepted by other communists. Crucially, overall national sentiment had shifted. The “antipathy towards mass emotion” resulting from the First World War, Riley explains, was “devastating for the standing of militant feminism.”²¹¹ Evoking prewar misogyny of the “easy martyrdom of these highly strung, neurotic ladies,” various government officials in “these critical times” derided Pankhurst as a “hysterical woman in feeble health.”²¹² Though previously forced to accommodate suffragettes, the government now risked little in outright rejecting the demands of a comparatively isolated radical during a postwar period of unrest and emergency rule. As described earlier, Pankhurst's strategy received tepid response from fellow communists who disciplined her for political dissent before subsequent expulsion. Pankhurst's activities afterwards, salon hosting and literary authorship, began to “fit” the type of political celebrity she ineffectively invoked in this sedition case.

²¹⁰ Holton, “In Sorrowful Wrath,” p. 12.

²¹¹ Riley, *Am I That Name*, p. 60.

²¹² See pages 47-48, notes 169-170, and page 50, note 182.

Conclusions

Months after Pankhurst's release from prison in 1921, Silvio Corio wrote to author Bernard Shaw, a friend of Pankhurst, asking for financial support for their operations. Himself facing financial difficulties, Shaw condescendingly responded:

I have known for some time past that Sylvia is in difficulties; ... though I am quite as much disposed to make a spoiled child of her as the rest of her friends I am not really sorry that she should lose a toy so expensive and dangerous as a printing press, and have a spell of total abstinence from *Weltverbesserungswahn* [the illusion of world improvement].²¹³

His answer reflected what those in Pankhurst's social circle who were not identically radical to her felt: exhaustion at Pankhurst's unyielding political agitation for her causes. Yet, years later, after having received the Nobel Prize for his play *Saint Joan*, Shaw was invited by the BBC to speak on Joan of Arc's "500th Anniversary of Martyrdom." In the half-hour broadcast, he defended Joan's extraordinary greatness and suggested that if one wanted "to find what women can feel when they have the whole power of society marshaled against them, and they have to fight it as it were," then one should consider Pankhurst and the suffrage movement. "Miss Sylvia Pankhurst," he continued, "like so many other women in that movement, was tortured: in fact, except for the burning, she suffered many actual physical tortures that Joan was spared." He advised that reading Pankhurst provided a much better depiction of Joan's trial than the "very dry historical accounts."²¹⁴ Shaw's substantive turn of opinion towards Pankhurst is emblematic of the polarizing evaluations of her life that have proliferated among her contemporaries and later historians.²¹⁵

²¹³ George Bernard Shaw to Corio, in Romero, *Portrait of a Radical*, p. 154n68.

²¹⁴ "Inquisition Persists, Says Shaw In Radio Address on Joan of Arc," *The New York Herald Tribune*, May 31, 1931,

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/1114187824/abstract/9BCAB3DC5F194E8EPQ/1?accountid=10226>

²¹⁵ With the vast scope Pankhurst's life already difficult to comprehensively address, her biographical accounts have become minefields of personal agendas and personal attacks. For example, see: Patricia Romero, review of *Sylvia Pankhurst: Sexual Politics and Political Activism*, by Barbara Winslow, *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 1 (Feb. 1998): p. 195, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2650835>; Rita Pankhurst, "Sylvia Pankhurst in perspective: Some comments on Patricia Romero's biography *E. Sylvia Pankhurst: Portrait of a radical*," *Women's Studies International Forum* 11, no. 3 (1988): p. 245,

In this respect, this thesis has offered Sylvia Pankhurst's final arrest and prison sentence as an examination of the dynamics between radicalism, gender, and censorship in interwar Britain. Pankhurst shared a reciprocally antagonistic relationship with the government, and it changed over the course of her life. During the suffrage movement, the government treated Pankhurst, as a militant hunger-striker and member of the Pankhurst family, with contempt. In response, Pankhurst published editorials and delivered speeches denouncing the oppression she and the other suffragettes experienced. After the outbreak of war, Pankhurst devoted herself to home-front relief and pacifism, demanding the government institute equal pay for women workers and end conscription. Although the government treated anti-war positions as existential threats to the country, Cabinet dismissed Pankhurst as "represent[ing] no important body of public opinion."²¹⁶ After the war and the Russian Revolution, Pankhurst viewed the capitalist and imperialist state no longer as a tool to begrudgingly wield, but solely as an obstacle. As the government scrambled to contain domestic and foreign communist activity, it derided Pankhurst as a joke.

But her influence remained disproportionately large. Although Pankhurst's organization had dropped to only a couple hundred members in the postwar from its peak before the war, it kept an active presence in East London with smaller branches elsewhere in Britain. The *Dreadnought* kept a weekly circulation, publishing the work of prominent European intellectuals and promoting a variety of the organization's events. Pankhurst maintained her vast social connections, frequently travelling throughout Britain and Europe. Pankhurst was the first contact by the Third International for establishing its British section. As a result of the influence Pankhurst wielded, both fellow communists and the British government had to treat Pankhurst with more significance than they

[https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(88\)90139-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(88)90139-2); and Jane Marcus, "An Activist's Activist," review of *E. Sylvia Pankhurst: Portrait of a Radical*, by Patricia Romero, *The Women's Review of Books* 4, no. 8 (May 1987): p. 12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4020055>.

²¹⁶ TNA, CAB/23/3/13, "War Cabinet meeting minutes," Sept. 1917 (meeting minutes).

would have preferred. Inkpin's pro-parliamentary British Socialist Party outnumbered Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation by more than a factor of ten, yet Russia insisted on a unification as inclusive as possible. Similarly, while the Special Branch laughed at the prospect of Pankhurst uniting the British communists, it actively tried to prevent Pankhurst's visit to the Congress of the Third International in Moscow. And it wasted no time raiding the *Dreadnought* office and arresting Pankhurst for sedition as it sought out Veltheim, Springhall, and McKay.

Ultimately, however, Pankhurst's political celebrity, the culmination of her political activism, proved to be a liability. Filtering her beliefs through a 19th century romanticism inspired by her father and developed with her fellow militant suffragettes, Pankhurst operated on personal convictions and expressed them through artistic and religious vocabulary. She was an individual that stood as part of, as well as outside, the collective. During the suffrage movement, the prominent middle- and upper-class women of the WSPU mobilized this identity to their satisfaction, achieving widespread recognition (positive or negative) and forcing the government to treat them as a significant movement.

But by 1920, the environment had completely changed. Although Pankhurst's organization remained female-led, Pankhurst was engaged in postwar issues dominated by men: communist politics, military unrest, and industrial disputes. To some extent, she attempted to adapt. In the *Dreadnought*, she published the articles of men like Veltheim, McKay, and Springhall. They provided insight into revolutionary activity, racial tensions among the London dockworkers, and discontent within the British navy. In her appeal trial, she drew upon language of "scientific principles" and "doctrine" to publicly explain her communism.

Yet Pankhurst continued to use the suffragette strategy and aesthetic, and both communists and the government rejected it. During the trial and imprisonment, she evoked the suffragette

identity of sacrifice and suffering. To be sure, the physical damages of her suffrage hunger-striking impacted her health during the 1921 prison sentence, and the debilitating prison conditions and inadequate medical support only exacerbated Pankhurst's hardship. But her attempts in prison to appeal to a suffragette legacy and her self-presentation in the *Dreadnought* upon release as a Christ figure could not achieve the result she sought. The government was contemptuous of the suffragette movement it had had to accommodate, and it subsequently found no reason to do so with a comparatively isolated woman representing a radicalized working-class group. Similarly, Pankhurst's religious and feminine strategy elicited little support from the other British communist parties which, already disliking Pankhurst personally and politically, tried to emulate Lenin's atheist and masculine Bolshevism.

Beyond Pankhurst's life, this sedition episode raises issues anchored in Edwardian and interwar history. 100 years since the 1918 Representation of the People Act, the aftermath of the suffrage movement remains a critical element within the period's broader context. In particular, it is worth considering the impact of suffragette organizations like the WSPU, which drew members into an ideologically charged and tactically hyperactive environment, on its members' lives beyond the movement. As Sylvia promoted leftist radicalism and international pacifism, Emmeline and Christabel rallied jingoist support for the war and later respectively joined the Conservative Party and an American Seventh-Day Adventist movement. Other suffragettes like Mary Richardson and Sophia Duleep Singh joined fascist and Indian women's suffrage movements. Like Sylvia, other suffragettes and suffragists such as Dora Montefiore, Helen Crawfurd, and Ellen Wilkinson pursued left-wing radicalism. The extent to which they were able to forge roles for themselves, and the legacy of suffrage in their approach to ideology and tactics, are important factors for contextualizing women's participation in radical movements and politics generally.

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