

Labour

Journal of Canadian Labour Studies

Le Travail

Revue d'Études Ouvrières Canadiennes



E. Sylvia Pankhurst, edited with an Introduction by Katherine Connelly, A Suffragette in America: Reflections on Prisoners, Pickets and Political Change

Joan Sangster

Volume 85, Spring 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1070918ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lt.2020.0017>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Sangster, J. (2020). Review of [E. Sylvia Pankhurst, edited with an Introduction by Katherine Connelly, A Suffragette in America: Reflections on Prisoners, Pickets and Political Change]. *Labour / Le Travail*, 85, 306–308.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/lt.2020.0017>

provinces and the federal government, and the influence of the United States on Canadian energy policy.

For all its undoubted strengths, some readers may regret the book's lack of theoretical engagement or discussion of issues like class, gender, or race. The author's approach is decidedly top-down. Taylor pays much attention to Imperial's preeminent status within the Canadian business community, but less on the social and cultural aspects of Imperial's legacy. Workers and their experiences are not included in the book, and Taylor's examination of the class dynamics between Imperial's board of directors and the rank and file is limited to a few anecdotes. Chapter 5 briefly delves into the establishment of safety programs, benefit and retirement packages, and social clubs for Imperial workers during the 1910s and 1920s, but these developments are framed not as part of a growing class consciousness but, instead, as "policies that would hold the labour unions at bay." (107) Taylor's history of Imperial contains virtually no discussion of women and gender, either. The first and only mention of women and their role in the company's history appears at page 275, in a paragraph on geologist Diane Loranger. There is very little on the history of the company's marketing activities – many of which were aimed at women – and while Taylor describes the minutia of boardroom decision-making, analysis of the company's methods of actually *selling* its products to the public is surprisingly lacking. Lastly, there was also room for more discussion about Indigenous issues beyond how much money oil companies have made, lost, or doled out. The book is also marred by some typographical and formatting errors, but it remains an impressive piece of archival research.

Imperial Standard will be valuable to readers in Canadian history, business history, and the history of oil. Taylor

has produced a detailed reconstruction of Imperial Oil's activities over the past 140 years, which reveal how the company skillfully navigated changing and uncertain energy landscapes, triangulating itself between global energy hegemony while forging a uniquely Canadian path. Much more than a corporate history, *Imperial Standard* offers a window onto the rise of the age of oil in Canada and beyond.

IAN WERELEY

University of Calgary

E. Sylvia Pankhurst, edited with an Introduction by Katherine Connelly, *A Suffragette in America: Reflections on Prisoners, Pickets and Political Change* (London: Pluto Press 2019)

TRAVEL WAS AN integral part of the early twentieth century international suffrage movement. Suffragists, especially those from North America and Europe, built international organizations of solidarity, visited other nations as political tourists, and created alliances and friendships as they lectured in other countries. Travel was primarily the prerogative of the more affluent, though some socialist suffragists also moved in international circles, and some suffrage lecturers paid their own way through lecturing fees. The latter arrangement was used by Sylvia Pankhurst in her 1911 and 1912 visits to the US and Canada.

A Suffragette in America traces Sylvia's two North American tours through the manuscript she prepared about the visit, which was never published. Katherine Connelly has assembled and edited pieces of the unfinished manuscript, available through the International Institute of Social History, and added a long introduction as well as short introductions to each section. The result is an extremely valuable and enlightening picture of

Sylvia Pankhurst's changing political ideas, as well as revealing snapshots of the American women's movement and U.S. labouring and social life. Connelly's extended introduction provides an excellent picture of the context framing Sylvia's travel, including the variegated British and American suffrage movements that she interacted with.

Travelling suffragist lecturers like Sylvia Pankhurst helped to solidify international feminist solidarities while informing audiences about suffrage progress, or lack of it, in their mother countries. Some also raised money for their own organization or had audiences send telegrams of support to the British government—a tactic intended to embarrass the intransigent British state. By World War I, the Pankhursts – mother Emmeline, sisters Christobel and Sylvia – were some of the best-known feminists on the lecture circuit in North America. Although the British constitutional suffrage organization, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) had longstanding links with the National American Woman Suffrage Organization, North Americans were eager to hear about the Pankhurst-run Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), especially as it was increasingly committed to militant action. Audiences wanted to hear about hunger strikes, property destruction, and women's courageous assaults on the state – whether they thought them foolhardy or courageous.

Connelly, who has already written a monograph on Sylvia Pankhurst, uses this edited collection to trace Sylvia's evolving politics as well as her insightful commentary on American society. Sylvia Pankhurst's two trips had punishing schedules as she crossed the country multiple times, speaking sometimes twice a day for hours to both large and small audiences. At the same time, she used her trip to investigate and describe

the conditions of American working-class life, much like social investigators in Edwardian Britain. Connelly has included chapters, for example, on Pankhurst's study of women's laundry work, prisons and workhouses, a long investigation of Milwaukee municipal socialism, colleges, including a "Red Indian" college – and more. Pankhurst was not the only British suffragist to demand tours of prisons when abroad. Having experienced prison themselves, they became highly attuned to the deplorable conditions of women's incarceration in all countries.

Pankhurst's detailed observations are valuable in themselves, and sometimes show the difference between her American guides' and her own views. While some American suffragists assured her only the "foreign" workers suffered sweating conditions, Pankhurst thought differently. One tour guide spoke positively about Taylorism in the workplace, but Pankhurst was far more critical. Pankhurst also differed with her American guides over questions of race: against their advice, she insisted on visiting the south and was critical of racial segregation and Jim Crow, as she was also critical about the dispossession of American native peoples. Sylvia's commentary on both race and "Red Indians" were early indications of her later anti-imperialist and anti-racist work after World War I.

Canadians will find a mere smattering of text on Sylvia's few stops north of the 49th parallel. Sylvia, like many other lecturers, spent most of her time in the US: there were more funds to be raised, larger populations to impress, and many wanted to assess claims about American democracy for themselves. Pankhurst did briefly visit Ottawa (including the jail), Toronto, and St. John, where she was looked after by progressive labour reformers Elle and Frank Hatheway, contacts made through

Sylvia's mentor and romantic attachment, ILP leader Keir Hardie.

What is especially significant about Connelly's collection is the way in which it traces Sylvia's changing politics along with her travel. During and after her US visit, she was moving away from her mother and sister, who rejected all earlier labour ties as they built a top-down, authoritarian organization. As Connelly shows, Sylvia's trip brought her into close contact with class issues as she interviewed working-class women and prisoners. Her research, and indeed her geographical distance from Emmeline and Christobel, allowed her to cement her own left-wing suffrage ideals. When she returned to London with American suffragist Zelig Emerson, who was versed in settlement house work, she began to build the East London Federation of Suffragettes. Sylvia's desire to hear the voice of working women, Connelly argues, along with her belief that they must mobilize in their own interest, led her to advocate for working-class suffrage mobilizations in the East End, a tactic that, along with her anti-war stance, led to her banishment from the WSPU by her more elitist and pro-war mother and sister.

Like all the suffragettes, Sylvia later wrote histories that justified her own politics, but this collection of her early writing is a revealing window into her views on class, politics, and gender at a key moment in the WSPU's evolution. Connelly's edited collection is a welcome addition to the literature on travel, internationalism, and the divergent ideas that underwrote suffrage struggles.

JOAN SANGSTER
Trent University

Vivien Goldman, *Revenge of the She-Punks: A Feminist Music History from Poly Styrene to Pussy Riot* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press 2019)

VIVIEN GOLDMAN takes the reader on a whirlwind tour of feminist punk music that spans time and geography. The book is broken down into four primary themes: girly identity, money, love, and protest. The structure of *Revenge of the She-Punks* is further organized around carefully curated playlists. These playlists represent the specific themes that each chapter of the book explores, and each song corresponds to a sub-section of the text. One can find the majority of these songs on contemporary streaming platforms, such as Spotify and YouTube. The ideal way to experience this book is to listen to each individual song followed by its accompanying written text. One may feel initially dismayed by the lack of visual imagery throughout the book, particularly because punk culture is so synonymous with punk fashion. However, *Revenge of the She-Punks* is just as much a piece of auditory media as it is a written work. With these songs, Goldman enables each artist to interject their voice, to speak for themselves; Goldman is there to provide context and make connections.

Goldman's themed playlist chapter structure also communicates to the reader that the history of feminist punk is not a linear or progressive story. There is no neat progression from ridiculed social minority to mainstream feminism. Each artist that Goldman highlights provides a unique snapshot into the experience of a specific time and place that stands alone in its details and particular challenges, but also links to the broader feminist punk history. As the "primal yowl of a rebellious underclass," (11) Goldman demonstrates that punk is still relevant, and the fight continues.