

British Suffragettes and the Russian Method of Hunger Strike

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In the spring of 1878 male political prisoners in the Peter and Paul Fortress of St. Petersburg went on hunger strike to protest against the oppressive conditions in which they were held by the tsarist regime. After three days, news of the strike reached the prisoners' families, who appealed for relief to the director of military police, General N. V. Mezentsev. The director dismissed their pleas and reportedly declared of the hunger strikers, "Let them die; I have already ordered coffins for them all." It was a volatile period of repression and reprisal in the Russian revolutionary movement. The tsarist regime had cracked down on the revolutionary populists, the *narodniki*, and the era of terrorism had just begun in St. Petersburg that January, when Vera Zasulich shot and seriously wounded the city's governor. The hunger strikers were among a group of 193 revolutionaries who had been recently tried for treason and sentenced to various forms of punishment, including hard labor and imprisonment in Siberia. In these circumstances the news of Mezentsev's response spread quickly beyond the strikers' families, soon reaching a would-be terrorist and former artillery officer, Sergius Kravchinskii. Kravchinskii killed Mezentsev with a dagger on a city street, then fled Russia and made his way to Great Britain, a haven for Russian revolutionaries since Alexander Herzen had arrived in 1852 and established the first Russian revolutionary press abroad.¹ Kravchinskii likewise wrote against the tsarist regime, under the pen name Sergius Stepniak, and in 1890 he became the editor of a new, London-based periodical, *Free Russia*. Its first number chronicled a dramatic series of hunger strikes led by female revolutionaries imprisoned at Kara in the Trans-

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¹ The preceding account is drawn from *The Anglo-Russian* 11, 12 (June 1907): 1116; Leo Deutsch, *Sixteen Years in Siberia* (New York: Dutton, 1903), 263–64; Jonathan W. Daly, *Autocracy under Siege: Security Police and Opposition in Russia, 1866–1905* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), 4, 22–23; Charles Ruud and Sergei Stepanov, *Fontanka 16: The Tsars' Secret Police* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 40–44.

Baikál of eastern Siberia. These strikes had culminated in the death of one woman after she was flogged and in five suicides by female and male political prisoners who, after the death of their comrade, had ended their hunger strikes to eat poison. Having been inspired to terror by his sympathy for revolutionary hunger strikers, Stepniak, like other Russian exiles, believed that the hunger strike would win sympathy and support for Russian revolutionaries in Britain.

In July 1909 Marion Wallace Dunlop, a member of the militant suffragist organization the Women's Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U.), went on hunger strike in Holloway Prison in north London. She protested against her treatment as a common criminal in the British prison system, and demanded that she be moved from the system's second division into its first division in recognition of her conviction for a political offence. Prison officials and Home Secretary Herbert Gladstone fretted that Wallace Dunlop's hunger strike might harm or even kill her in only a matter of days. They contemplated the political crisis that would follow the death or injury of such a polite, if militant, prisoner: a painter and an illustrator of children's books, whose father had been a distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service.² Gladstone released her after just ninety-one hours to a heroine's welcome by the W.S.P.U., which regarded her hunger strike with both surprise and admiration. Wallace Dunlop had commenced her hunger strike without consultation, and it initially appeared to have been a singular, militant inspiration. In the weeks that followed, however, Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, the joint-editor of the W.S.P.U. journal, *Votes for Women*, published a leaflet in which he explained that Wallace Dunlop had "adopted the Russian method of the hunger strike."³ This adoption was timely. Wallace Dunlop and other militant suffragists, the so-called suffragettes, took up this "Russian method" less than a month before Tsar Nicholas II arrived in England to pay a call upon his uncle, King Edward VII.

The genealogy of the hunger strike as an international tactic of political protest begins with the transfer of this tactic from Russia to Great Britain in the early twentieth century. This article offers a preliminary perspective upon the origins of the hunger strike in the Russian and Siberian prisons of the tsarist regime, and suggests how Russian political prisoners understood the significance of their hunger strikes in the context of their revolutionary campaign to depose the tsar. My primary aim is to explain how British suffragettes learned of this "Russian method" and then adapted it to their campaign for

² Joseph Lennon, "Fasting for the Public: Irish and Indian Sources of Marion Wallace Dunlop's 1909 Hunger Strike," in Eóin Flannery and Angus Mitchell, eds., *Enemies of Empire* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 19–39.

³ F. W. Pethick-Lawrence, "The Treatment of Suffragettes in Prison," W.S.P.U. Leaflet No. 59, W.S.P.U. Collection, Museum of London.

the vote.⁴ Although the significance of the suffragette hunger strike was mainly defined by British domestic politics, it continually resonated with contemporary, critical representations of the tsarist regime in the British press and with the controversial politics of Anglo-Russian relations. Russia was at this time an important factor in British foreign and imperial policies, as well as a notable influence upon British intellectuals and artists.⁵ As Martin Malia explains, Britons, and western Europeans in general, had learned to regard the Russian nation “not as an alien entity but as one national culture within a common European civilization.”⁶ Nonetheless, British radicals, including prominent suffragists, vilified the tsar as a despot. This vilification illustrates Malia’s broader assertion that Europeans’ own domestic problems primarily defined their perceptions of Russia.⁷ Indeed, W.S.P.U. propaganda demonstrated that the suffragettes saw something of themselves and their political adversaries in the Russian hunger strikes.

Hunger is a universal experience of diverse significance, and the hunger strike was, and is, a versatile form of political protest. Although there is a great deal of scholarship on hunger strikes in particular national contexts, there is little work to date on the international transfer of the tactic.⁸ To understand that transfer, one must understand how the significance of the hunger strike refracts across political borders, how hunger strikers become distinctive bodies politic that are defined not only by their present cause, but also by the resonance of the strikers’ near or distant inspiration to starve themselves. The refraction of the significance of the hunger strike across Russian and British politics is particularly important, because it transformed the hunger strike into a global phenomenon. When Wallace Dunlop began her strike, she placed this “Russian method” within the ambit of the British Empire, where it was subsequently adapted by Irish and Indian nationalists, who then inspired numerous acts of hunger in protest around the world.⁹

⁴ Historians have referred briefly to the Russian origins of the suffragette hunger strike. See Brian Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 39; Kevin Grant, “The Transcolonial World of Hunger Strikes and Political Fasts, c. 1909–1935,” in Durba Ghosh and Dane Kennedy, eds., *Decentering Empire: Britain, India and the Transcolonial World* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006), 248–49.

⁵ Michael Hughes, *Diplomacy before the Russian Revolution: Britain, Russia, and the Old Diplomacy, 1894–1917* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000); Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 179–82.

⁶ Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes*, 163, 167.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8–9, 175.

⁸ For hunger strikes in national contexts, see Pramod Kumar, *Hunger-Strike in Andamans* (Lucknow: Martyrs Memorial and Freedom Struggle Research Center, 2004); Francis Costello, *Enduring the Most: The Life and Death of Terence MacSwiney* (Dingle, Co. Kerry: Brandon, 1995); Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁹ Grant, “Transcolonial World.”

We know little about the hunger strikes by female and male revolutionaries in Russian and Siberian prisons under the tsarist regime.¹⁰ There is fine work on the history of Russian prisons, the Siberian exile system, and “political crime” in this era, but this scholarship has not addressed specific policies pertaining to the hunger strike, such as those governing prison diet or forcible feeding.¹¹ Fortunately, there is a solid body of work on the Russian exiles in Britain who publicized Russian hunger strikes, especially among British radicals, after the 1890s.¹² These exiles persuaded influential British radicals and labor leaders that their goal was a new, apparently liberal, constitutional order for Russia. They represented Russian hunger strikers not as “terrorists,” but as victims of the tsarist regime, guilty of nothing more than fighting for freedom from despotism. These exiles and an American journalist, George Kennan, published the most thorough accounts of Russian revolutionary hunger strikes available to us. I begin my discussion of these Russian strikes with two particular cases, both of which were known not only to Russian revolutionaries but also to members and supporters of the W.S.P.U. before the First World War.

There is a multifaceted body of scholarship on the hunger strikes by British suffragettes. Scholars have dwelled upon these strikes and the experience of forcible feeding as embodiments of gender politics. They have specifically examined how suffragettes described forcible feeding in thinly veiled terms of sexual violation and thus challenged the moral authority of the patriarchal political system.¹³ Some writers have interpreted the hunger strike as a rejection of the woman’s maternal role, while others have conversely argued that the suffragettes represented it as a maternal act of sacrifice for the nation.¹⁴

¹⁰ For references to women’s hunger strikes, see Barbara Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Barbara Alpern Engel and Clifford N. Rosenthal, *Five Sisters: Women against the Tsar* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹¹ Abby Schrader, *Languages of the Lash: Corporal Punishment and Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002); Bruce Adams, *The Politics of Punishment: Prison Reform in Russia, 1863–1917* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996); Volker Rabe, *Der Widerspruch von Rechtsstaatlichkeit und strafender Verwaltung in Russland, 1881–1917* (Karlsruhe: Verlag M. Wahl, 1985); Jonathan Daly, “Political Crime in Late Imperial Russia,” *Journal of Modern History* 74 (Mar. 2002): 62–100.

¹² John Slatter, ed., *From the other Shore: Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880–1917* (London: Frank Cass, 1984); F. M. Leventhal, “H. N. Brailsford and Russia: The Problem of Objectivity,” *Albion* 5, 2 (Summer 1973): 84–86; Barry Hollingsworth, “The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom: English Liberals and Russian Socialists, 1890–1917,” *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970): 45–64.

¹³ Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*; Caroline Howlett, “Writing on the Body? Representation and Resistance in British Suffragette Accounts of Forcible Feeding,” *Genders* 23 (1996): 3–41; Barbara Green, *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905–1938* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Regarding hunger strikes as rejections of maternalism, see Mary Jean Corbett, *Representing Femininity: Middle-Class Subjectivity in Victorian and Edwardian Women’s Autobiographies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 163. For hunger strikes as embodiments of maternalism, see James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 72–73.

James Vernon has suggested that the suffragette hunger strikes capitalized upon a new humanitarian sympathy for hungry people, especially women and children, who were now cast as victims of misgovernment rather than as idle or immoral subjects who had brought hunger upon themselves.¹⁵ Stepping outside of these analytical frameworks, Joseph Lennon has situated Wallace Dunlop's hunger strike within the broad cultural and political contexts of fasting in Ireland and India.¹⁶

The political power of the suffragette hunger strikes derived from these various connotations of a woman's self-starvation and her experience of forcible feeding. Yet the objectives of the strikers were fundamentally constitutional. Wallace Dunlop had been arrested and then sentenced to one month in prison for stenciling an excerpt of the 1689 Bill of Rights in violet ink onto the wall of St. Stephen's Hall in the Palace of Westminster. The text read: "It is the right of the subject to petition the King, and all commitments and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal." As Laura Mayhall explains, "Wallace Dunlop's deed connects the Edwardian suffrage movement to a long tradition of radical protest and highlights suffragettes' use of the constitutional idiom...."¹⁷ This constitutional idiom was epitomized by the Bill of Rights, and in the summer of 1909 British suffragettes found the antithesis of constitutional government in the despotism of the tsar, who was soon to enjoy the hospitality of the British monarch. They accordingly articulated their constitutional claims by using the hunger strike to liken themselves to starving Russian revolutionaries and their own Liberal government to the tsarist regime. In a W.S.P.U. leaflet published in December 1909, Henry Brailsford observed that Wallace Dunlop "adopted the method of protest which Russian 'politicals' use in a like case."¹⁸ In fact, there was much to differentiate the Russian and British hunger strikers and their governments, but differences had been obfuscated by Russian exiles in their attempts to win British allies.

Russian "politicals," as these political prisoners were known, conducted hunger strikes in Russian and Siberian prisons from at least the late 1870s.¹⁹ They referred to their self-starvation as *golodovka*, which Kennan translated as "hunger strike."²⁰ It is noteworthy that this term is not a literal translation of *golodovka*, a word of Russian origin traceable back to Old Church

¹⁵ Vernon, *Hunger*, 44, 61, 64.

¹⁶ Lennon, "Fasting for the Public."

¹⁷ Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3; Vernon, *Hunger*, 64.

¹⁸ "Forcible Feeding. A Letter to a Liberal Member of Parliament," W.S.P.U. leaflet, W.S.P.U. Collection, Museum of London.

¹⁹ Sergius Stepniak, *Russia under the Tsars*, vol. 1 (London: Ward and Downey, 1885), 185; Rabe, *Der Widerspruch*, 280.

²⁰ George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, vol. 2 (New York: The Century Co., 1891), 238. Kennan spelled the word *golodófska*, but I have modified this in accordance with current transliteration.

Slavonic.²¹ Prior to the revolutionary period, it was used to refer to a time of famine or want. The 1880–1882 “explanatory dictionary,” edited by Dal’, does not include a political definition for *golodovka*.²² Significantly, native Russian speakers sometimes referred in English to the “famine strike.”²³ The political connotations of *golodovka* appear in the 1935 explanatory dictionary, edited by Ushakov, which defines *golodovka* as “a refusal or abstention from food as a sign of protest.”²⁴ It is possible that the changing definition of *golodovka* reflects a transitional era in the use of hunger as a form of protest in Russia, which is all the more interesting given the influence of Russian hunger strikes upon the British.

Kennan and leading figures in the Russian exile community in Britain cooperated in criticizing the tsarist regime and represented hunger strikes in similar terms. These terms simultaneously exposed the suffering and resistance of imprisoned Russian dissidents and obscured the revolutionary politics and terrorist acts for which these dissidents had been incarcerated. Kennan and the Russian exiles were aware that the U.S. and British publics were fearful of the on-going violence of Fenians and anarchists at home and abroad, which culminated in the assassination of President William McKinley by an anarchist in 1901.²⁵ They therefore downplayed the militancy of Russian dissidents and instead fostered sympathetic support for them as victims of tsarist despotism.²⁶ Their portrayal of victimhood was sometimes sensationalist. Kennan lectured on the Siberian exile system in the tattered uniform and shackles of a prisoner, as did the prominent Russian exile Felix Volkhovsky in Britain.²⁷ Stepniak eschewed such display, redirecting the British public’s attention away from his militant past. He represented himself to Britons not as a revolutionary assassin, but as a staid advocate of the downtrodden Russian people. Thus, this former assassin would become a guest of the future suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst in her home in London, where he mingled with a diverse group of eminently respectable social reformers.²⁸

²¹ I thank Shoshana Keller for consulting the Russian explanatory dictionaries and providing me with the following information on *golodovka*.

²² Vladimir Ivanovich Dal’, *Tolkovyi slovar’ zhivogo velikorusskogo iazyka* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1955, repr. of 1880–1882 ed.).

²³ Stepniak, *Russia under the Tsars*, 185; Prince Kropotkin, *The Terror in Russia: An Appeal to the British Nation* (London: Methuen & Co., 1909), 18.

²⁴ D. N. Ushakov, *Tolkovyi slovar’ russkogo iazyka* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1935–1940).

²⁵ Robert Gregg, “Valleys of Fear: Policing Terror in an Imperial Age, 1865–1925,” in Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann, eds., *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism, c. 1880–1950* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 169–90.

²⁶ Jane E. Good, “America and the Russian Revolutionary Movement, 1888–1905,” *Russian Review* 41, 3 (July 1982): 279–80.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 274; Donald Senese, “Felix Volkhovsky in London, 1890–1914,” in John Slatter, ed., *From the other Shore: Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880–1917* (London: Frank Cass, 1984), 73.

²⁸ June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2002), 28.

Kennan and the Russian exiles implied that particular cases of prison abuse and hunger striking were representative of the suffering of all politicals throughout the Russian and Siberian prison systems. In fact, the treatment of politicals was both exceptional and variable. Jonathan Daly explains that the quality of one's life in a Russian prison or in exile was determined by four factors: "one's social status, the economic and social conditions of the place of confinement, the character of local officials, and the political climate in St. Petersburg."²⁹ The majority of politicals in the 1880s and 1890s had relatively high social status, since they came from well-to-do families and were educated.³⁰ They therefore received better treatment than did regular criminals, and they were rarely subjected to corporal punishment.³¹ A large proportion of politicals was freed early under periodic amnesties or through appeals for clemency.³² Nowhere in the works by Kennan and the Russian exiles does one find acknowledgement that the translation of Kennan's exposé into Russian in the early 1890s caused a public outcry in Russia and considerable embarrassment within the tsarist regime.³³ The Interior Ministry urged officials to exercise leniency toward political exiles, and it enacted reforms, such as the 1893 abolishment of the practice of flogging female exiles.³⁴ Over the course of the 1890s, most political exiles enjoyed progressively more freedom of movement and less abuse, even as Kennan and Volkhovsky lectured in shackles.³⁵ In the light of the fact that representations of Russian hunger strikes to the British public were highly selective and propagandistic, and in the absence of archival research on Russian hunger strikes in the late imperial era, this essay offers a provisional treatment of the conduct and significance of the hunger strikes recounted by Kennan and the Russian exiles.

Kennan and Leo Deutsch, a Russian revolutionary exile in London, wrote the best-known contemporary accounts of Russian hunger strikes. In 1891, Kennan published his two-volume work *Siberia and the Exile System*, which recounted his investigations as a journalist in Siberia between 1885 and 1888. In 1903, Deutsch published *Sixteen Years in Siberia*, a memoir of his incarceration in Russian and Siberian prisons between 1884 and 1901. Helen Chisholm, the translator of Deutsch's memoir, suggested that the two works should be read together.³⁶ The authors refer to several hunger strikes, by women and men both, the earliest being the aforementioned strike in the

²⁹ Daly, "Political Crime," 88.

³⁰ Rabe, *Der Widerspruch*, 167–70.

³¹ Daly, "Political Crime," 91.

³² *Ibid.*, 88, 92.

³³ Rabe, *Der Widerspruch*, 198, 242–54.

³⁴ Schrader, *Languages of the Lash*, 168–75.

³⁵ Daly, "Political Crime," 89, 91.

³⁶ Deutsch, *Sixteen Years*, v.

Peter and Paul Fortress.³⁷ Both highlight the hunger strikes of female politicals in Siberia, which is remarkable given the relatively small number of female politicals sent to Siberia. Politicals made up only about 2 percent of the approximately 170,000 people exiled to Siberia between 1878 and 1885, the year in which Kennan arrived. Only a small fraction of them were women, and the majority were young, unmarried men.³⁸ One destination for political exiles in Siberia was the prison and penal colony at Kara, where the inmates labored in gold mines. When the revolutionary Katerina Breshkovkaia reported to the prison director there in 1878, he observed, “I have no cell for political women. You are the first one here,” and sent her to live with a family in a nearby town.³⁹ Kennan and Deutsch provide full accounts of the hunger strikes by political prisoners at Kara in 1888–1889, the same strikes covered by Stepniak in the first number of *Free Russia* in 1890.⁴⁰ Their accounts merit summary here, since the “Kara Tragedy” became infamous among both Russian revolutionaries and British suffragists who followed Russian affairs. It appeared not only in *Free Russia*, which we will see had a significant suffragist readership, but also in *Votes for Women* in 1912.

According to Kennan and Deutsch, the prisoners’ protest at Kara began when one of the women politicals, Elizabeth Kovalskaya, insulted the visiting Governor General Baron Korf by refusing to stand in his presence.⁴¹ Korf ordered her transfer, which the commandant Masyukov decided to execute in the dead of night, employing a group of criminal convicts to assist the wardens in pulling Kovalskaya out of bed.⁴² Outraged by this act, three other women politicals staged a hunger strike.⁴³ The commandant was unable to persuade them to end it, so he sought assistance from a male prisoner, Alexander Kalyushny, who was incarcerated in a nearby men’s prison with Deutsch. Both Kalyushny’s wife, Nadyeshda Smirnitskaya, and his sister, Maria Kalyushnaya, were taking part in the strike.⁴⁴ The third striker was Maria Kovalevskaya, who had joined three other female prisoners in a previous hunger strike in the prison at Irkutsk in Siberia in 1882.⁴⁵ According to Deutsch, the commandant “begged Kalyushny to ... pacify the women, and induce them to give up their hunger strike, promising beforehand that he

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 263–64.

³⁸ Kennan, *Siberia*, vol. 1, 52, 81; Rabe, *Der Widerspruch*, 177.

³⁹ Katerina Breshkovkaia, *Hidden Springs of the Russian Revolution*. Lincoln Hutschinson, ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1931), 191.

⁴⁰ Kennan, *Siberia*, vol. 2, 260–70; Deutsch, *Sixteen Years*, 271–94.

⁴¹ Kennan, *Siberia*, vol. 2, 260; Deutsch, *Sixteen Years*, 271. For more on Kovalskaya, see Engel and Rosenthal, *Five Sisters*, 202–49.

⁴² Deutsch, *Sixteen Years*, 272.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ George Kennan, “Exiles at Irkutsk,” *The Century* 37, 15 (1889): 502–11.

would do anything in reason to give them satisfaction.”⁴⁶ Kalyushny and his male comrades urged the women to end their strike if the commandant apologized to them, fearing that they might otherwise die in a hopeless gambit. In a concession to the men, the women agreed to eat if the commandant arranged his own transfer under some pretext. The women also asserted that if the commandant had not gone in a fixed period of months, they would resume their strike to the bitter end.⁴⁷

The commandant’s request for transfer was denied, so the women resumed their strike, now joined by four other female politicals. Although Deutsch and his comrades believed that an apology from the commandant should have sufficed, they joined the women’s strike in an act of solidarity.⁴⁸ The women had not eaten for eight days, and the men for three, when the commandant presented them with a telegram confirming that his superiors had agreed to transfer him.⁴⁹ All of the politicals ended their strikes, but months later, in 1889, approximately a year after Kovalskaya’s departure, the commandant was still there. So four women decided to commence a third hunger strike. In an effort to pre-empt the suffering of her comrades, one of the women, Nadyeshda Sigida, hit the commandant, anticipating that the usual procedure would follow: his transfer and her death.⁵⁰

Contrary to expectations, the governor general left the commandant at his post and ordered that Sigida be flogged rather than executed for her offence. This news shocked Deutsch and his comrades, given that even male politicals were rarely flogged.⁵¹ In disbelief, the men further learned that Sigida had died shortly after her punishment—perhaps of injuries suffered in the flogging, perhaps of a nervous fit, or perhaps of self-poisoning. In response to her death, the other three women poisoned themselves and died in the prison infirmary.⁵² Seventeen of the thirty-nine male politicals then attempted to commit suicide with poison, two successfully.⁵³ In the aftermath of this calamity, in 1890, officials in St. Petersburg ordered the closure of the prison at Kara and transferred all of the politicals to nearby Akatoui, where the male and female politicals were henceforth subjected to the same treatment as common criminals in reprisal for their rebellion.⁵⁴

The women who led these hunger strikes were *narodniki*, revolutionary populists committed to the violent overthrow of the tsar. Most of the

⁴⁶ Deutsch, *Sixteen Years*, 273.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 277–78.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 280–81.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 288.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 294.

revolutionary women of this generation were from privileged backgrounds and had joined the struggle in their twenties.⁵⁵ Kovalskaya, the woman dragged from her bed, was exceptional in being a former serf. These women shared with their male comrades a clear vision of the ideal woman, largely derived from a nihilistic ethos that had a strong influence upon the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia after the 1870s.⁵⁶ The ideal woman displayed moral purity, recognition of duty, hatred of compromise, and fearless sacrifice.⁵⁷ She did not treat sacrifice in symbolic, self-aggrandizing terms of martyrdom, but as a necessary, selfless means to a principled end. She was duty-bound to resist the oppression of the people at large, rather than the particular social or political oppression of women. The “women’s question,” as it was known in Britain, had been long subsumed in the broader socialist cause.⁵⁸

The *narodniki* combined their pragmatic acceptance of sacrifice with a commitment to terrorism. Although women constituted a small percentage of the revolutionary movement, they took part in some of its most famous assassinations.⁵⁹ Sophia Perovskaya, a leading member of the revolutionary organization Will of the People, oversaw the operations that resulted in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in March 1881. One of her accomplices, Vera Figner, evaded arrest until 1883, then served twenty-two years in Russian prisons, twenty of them in the infamous Schlüsselburg Fortress. Women continued to perpetrate revolutionary acts of violence, especially those who joined the secret “Battle Organization” of the Socialist Revolutionary Party after 1902. In 1905, a party operative named Maria Spiridonova shot a general in the face. This was the same year in which Christabel Pankhurst began the “militant” phase of W.S.P.U. protest in Britain by persistently questioning Sir Edward Grey in a Liberal Party meeting and then spitting in the face of a policeman to provoke her own arrest.⁶⁰ British suffragettes in their speeches and publications drew no distinctions between Russian revolutionary populists, members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, and themselves. Sylvia Pankhurst recalled her response to news of female Russian revolutionaries in the summer of 1906: “And now it seemed to us as though the spirit of revolt against oppression were flowing onward and spreading, like some great tide to all the womanhood of the world.”⁶¹

⁵⁵ Richard Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 149.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 19, 100, 113.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 19, 233–39.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 126–28, 153.

⁵⁹ Amy Knight, “Female Terrorists in the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party,” *Russian Review* 38, 2 (Apr. 1979): 139–59.

⁶⁰ Mayhall, *Militant Suffrage Movement*, 38; Stites, *Women’s Liberation*, 229, 272; Daly, “Political Crime,” 99.

⁶¹ E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette* (New York: Sturgis & Walton, Co., 1911), 91. The Russian suffragists who were more like British suffragettes made up a small, middle-class pressure

Neither Kennan nor Deutsch, or Stepniak, or any subsequent journalist or revolutionary memoirist explained the cultural or political connotations of the hunger strikes against the tsarist regime.⁶² They did not refer to precedents for these strikes prior to 1878, and they did not articulate the relationship between one strike and another. Yet they referred to such strikes as “customary” or “traditional.”⁶³ The definition of the word *golodovka* in the early 1880s suggests that the act of self-starvation may have customarily manifested a general condition of deprivation attributable to famine, perhaps with the religious connotations of *dvoeverie*, a combination of Orthodoxy and pagan beliefs. Russia’s rural communities commonly fasted in accordance with the calendar of the Russian Orthodox Church, but these fasts generally required abstinence from particular foods and had rules regarding the allowance of rations.⁶⁴ There were also “public fasts” observed by everyone in a town or village community. “Disasters such as epidemics and epizootics, drought, long periods of rain, etc., were the main reasons for keeping public fasts,” explains Tatjana Voronina. “People kept such fasts on the permission of the priest after the local peasants’ community decided to fast.”⁶⁵ These fasts could have constituted direct appeals to the paternalistic duties of a landowner or government official, but this is only speculation.⁶⁶

Although the genealogy of the Russian hunger strike remains obscure, it does appear that revolutionary populists, in particular, adapted an earlier practice of fasting to their political ends. This is not to say that the *narodniki* on hunger strike at Kara conceived their self-starvation in coherent ideological terms, let alone as the embodiment of a constitutional program. Unlike the suffragettes, they advocated agrarian socialism, and they did not aspire to replace the tsar with a particular political regime.⁶⁷ The hunger strike became political in the sense that revolutionary populists used it as a weapon against the penal

group that advocated constitutional reforms through constitutional means and never set foot in prison. See Stites, *Women’s Liberation*, 191–230.

⁶² For examples of other accounts of Russian hunger strikes, see Stepniak, *Russia under the Tsars*, 185, 248–49; Ernest Poole, “Katharine Bereshkovsky: A Russian Revolutionist,” *The Outlook* 79 (Jan.–Apr. 1905): 85; Kropotkin, *Terror in Russia*, 18; H. N. Brailsford, *The Fruits of Our Russian Alliance* (London: Anglo-Russian Committee, 1912), 23; and various references in *Free Russia* (1890–1915), and *The Anglo-Russian* (1897–1914).

⁶³ For “customary,” see “Prison Strikers,” *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Mar. 1912. For “traditional,” see *Free Russia*, 1 Nov. 1904, 89.

⁶⁴ Tatjana Voronina, “Fasting in the Life of Russians (19th–20th Centuries),” *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 51, 3–4 (2006): 235–55.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 244

⁶⁶ If there is a connection between fasting by peasants and hunger strikes by politicals, it might come to light in new scholarship that rejects the binary opposition of “popular” and “elite” faiths and challenges the concept of *dvoeverie*. See Christine Worobec, “Lived Orthodoxy in Imperial Russia,” *Kritika* 7, 2 (Spring 2006): 329–50.

⁶⁷ Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes*, 171.

institutions of an oppressive government. The *narodniki* regarded it as a weak weapon, however. Deutsch states plainly that it was a “more passive means” of prison protest than breaking windows or furniture.⁶⁸ Recalling her own experiences, Figner would later characterize the hunger strike as not only ineffective but also potentially damaging to prisoner morale and camaraderie.⁶⁹ The *narodniki* did not see the hunger strike as an extension of the terrorist campaign beyond the prison walls, and they directed it only as a last resort against specific prison conditions and personnel.

The *narodniki* regarded the hunger strike as instrumental rather than symbolic. The tactic was consistent with the *narodnikis*’ commitment to self-sacrifice, but their objective was not martyrdom. Instead, they sought to defy specific authorities, disrupt the order of prison life, and secure mundane, immensely important goals: better food, the transfer of an unethical official, or, as we will see, access to books.⁷⁰ Arguably, there was a gendered symbolism in the Kara Tragedy, given the emphasis that Kennan and Deutsch placed upon the role women played. Yet one might observe in turn that Kennan and Deutsch were writing for audiences in Britain and the United States. Women led the Kara strikes, but men generally shared the hunger strike as a tactic of protest. More importantly, none of the strikes in Russian and Siberian prisons were directed toward a women’s cause. *Golodovka* was not a “womanish thing,” as some Irish militant republicans initially perceived the hunger strike in view of British and Irish suffragette protests.⁷¹

For years the British press had covered the brutalities of the tsarist regime and the swelling ranks of Russia’s reform-minded and revolutionary parties.⁷² After the turn of the century, the liberal press, and especially the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily News*, offered the most consistent and intense criticism of the tsar and Anglo-Russian relations. It condemned the tsar for the massacre of civilians by Russian troops on Bloody Sunday (9 January or 22 January, new style, 1905), and critically assessed his subsequent gestures toward a constitutional monarchy. It covered the tsar’s creation and dissolution of two intractable Dumas in 1906 and 1907, and condemned his revocation of all meaningful reforms and his turn to a repressive policy of “pacification”

⁶⁸ Deutsch, *Sixteen Years*, 189.

⁶⁹ “Prison Strikers,” *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Mar. 1912; Vera Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), 223–25.

⁷⁰ For similar goals, see the hunger strike of 1878, in Stepniak, *Russia under the Tzars*, 185.

⁷¹ Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, “Reminiscences of an Irish Suffragette” (1941), in Andrée Sheehy Skeffington and Rosemary Owens, eds., *Votes for Women* (Dublin: E. & T. O’Brien, Ltd., 1975), 23.

⁷² For example, *The Times* featured two critical articles and an editorial about the Kara tragedy in February and March of 1890. See *The Times*, “Flogging and Suicide of Female Political Prisoners in Siberia,” 11 Feb. 1890; “The Siberian Suicides and Hunger Strikes,” 28 Feb. 1890; Editorial, 14 Mar. 1890.

through censorship, incarceration, and summary courts martial.⁷³ Against this backdrop, the liberal press and radical members of parliament strongly criticized Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey for striking an alliance with the tsarist regime under the Anglo-Russian Convention of August 1907.⁷⁴ King Edward further aggravated radicals by visiting Tsar Nicholas at Reval (now Tallinn, the capital of Estonia) in June 1908 in tacit support of his government, and then by inviting the tsar and his family to visit England in the following summer.⁷⁵ In the months preceding the tsar's visit, radicals protested against a "liberal" British government endorsing this visit by a self-professed divine-right autocrat with blood on his hands.⁷⁶

London was a staging ground for Russian revolutionaries, who conducted important and arguably momentous meetings there in the early twentieth century. The Social Democrats' conventions in London and Brussels in 1903 saw the split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. The Social Democrats then returned to London in 1907, followed by the Socialist Revolutionary Party in 1908. The Russian exile community had been a vociferous lobby against the tsar since the early 1880s, publishing exposés, holding public meetings, petitioning, and, finally, establishing with British radical allies the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom (S.F.R.F.) in 1890.⁷⁷ The founders of the S.F.R.F. were R. Spence Watson, parliamentarians Thomas Burt and W. P. Byles, Prince Peter Kropotkin, and Stepniak.⁷⁸ Until 1915, the society published *Free Russia*, an English-language periodical on Russian political affairs that challenged apologists of the tsarist regime and otherwise indicted the regime by enumerating its alleged atrocities. At the same time, another Russian, Jaakoff Prelooker, published *The Anglo-Russian*, an English-language periodical devoted mainly to British commercial prospects in Russia that was not only critical of the tsarist regime but also ardently supportive of British suffragists. Prelooker was not a revolutionary exile. He had immigrated to Britain in 1891 after leaving his post as the headmaster of a government school in Odessa. Along with Stepniak, he attended suffragist events at the Pankhursts' home as early as 1892.⁷⁹ In the November 1908 edition of *The Anglo-Russian*, Prelooker

⁷³ Nicholas Riasanovsky and Mark D. Steinberg, *A History of Russia* (7th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 378–91.

⁷⁴ A. J. Anthony Morris, *Radicalism against War, 1906–1914* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972), 52–70.

⁷⁵ John A. Murray, "Sir Edward Grey and His Critics, 1911–1912," in Lillian Parker Wallace and William Askew, eds., *Power, Public Opinion, and Diplomacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1959), 142.

⁷⁶ Hughes. *Diplomacy*; Fiona Tomaszewski, "The Tsarist Regime's Manipulation of Public Opinion in Great Britain and France, 1906–1914," *Russian History* 24, 3 (Fall 1997): 279–92.

⁷⁷ Hollingsworth, "Society of Friends": 47–51.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: 50–51.

⁷⁹ John Slatter, "Among British Liberals: Jaakoff Prelooker and *The Anglo-Russian*," in J. Slatter, ed., *From the other Shore: Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880–1917* (London: Frank Cass, 1984), 53.

quoted Adela Pankhurst, who, in the face of several hundred police deployed against the W.S.P.U. at York, observed that the government “would not be able to dispense with Russian methods until women got the vote.”⁸⁰ This characterization of police actions and government security measures as “Russian methods” was not uncommon among suffragettes, who recognized, according to Martin Pugh, that being likened to the Russians was “one of the worst insults for a Liberal at this time.”⁸¹ With a more nuanced understanding of Russian society, Prelooker encouraged his readers to follow the example of liberal-minded Russian men, like himself, who had long supported women’s enfranchisement.⁸² He regularly attended suffragist protests, joined the Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage after its founding in 1907, and in 1912 joined the Men’s International Alliance for Women’s Suffrage.⁸³ Remarkably, Prelooker was the first man in Britain to support the suffragist movement by refusing to pay his rates and taxes. Two representatives of the W.S.P.U. attended his hearing at the Horsham Petty Sessions in Sussex and held open-air meetings in his support.⁸⁴

The S.F.R.F. benefited from the membership of suffragists, such as Charles Dilke, M.P., and Charlotte Despard, the leader of the Women’s Freedom League, as well as supporters of the militant W.S.P.U., including Brailsford, the journalist Henry Nevinson, Keir Hardie, M.P., and F. W. Pethick-Lawrence, co-editor of *Votes for Women*.⁸⁵ Brailsford and Nevinson provided the liberal press with some of the most incisive critiques of the tsarist regime and British foreign policy toward Russia before the First World War.⁸⁶ In cooperation with the *Daily News*, the S.F.R.F. led the public protest against the tsar’s visit in the spring of 1909. This protest cannot be called popular, since it never expanded beyond a small pressure group of radical activists, non-conformist ministers, and Labour Party leaders. Yet the cooperation between Russian exiles and suffragists, in particular, is significant because it forms the context in which the W.S.P.U. took up the Russian method of hunger strike.

There were two conspicuous features of this protest against the tsar. The first was the illustration of his despotism through accounts of brutal prison conditions, and the second was the assertion that Britain’s alliance with a despotic ruler not only undermined Britain’s prestige as a leading democracy but also

⁸⁰ *The Anglo-Russian* 12, 5 (Nov. 1908): 1215.

⁸¹ Martin Pugh, *The March of the Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 189.

⁸² *The Anglo-Russian*, 12, 5 (Nov. 1908): 1215.

⁸³ Slatter, “Among British Liberals,” 57.

⁸⁴ *The Anglo-Russian*, 11, 10 (Apr. 1908): 1176–78.

⁸⁵ For other suffragists, see Paul Laity, *The British Peace Movement, 1870–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 136–37.

⁸⁶ Brailsford, *Fruits of Our Russian Alliance*; Henry Nevinson, *The Dawn in Russia* (London: Harper & Bros., 1906).

threatened to weaken its own democratic institutions.⁸⁷ These discourses complemented larger, radical critiques of government that had been current in Britain since the South African War (1899–1902).⁸⁸ Radicals such as J. A. Hobson had warned that the democratic bases of British domestic, imperial, and foreign policy were being undermined by the secrecy of officials and the self-serving influence of large commercial enterprises and international financiers—the “special interests” of capitalism.⁸⁹ Others had brought their points home with narratives and sometimes photographs of atrocity or “outrage,” as in stories of Afrikaner women and children held in British concentration camps during the South African War, or of Congolese killed and mutilated by the infamous Congo Free State ruled by King Leopold II of Belgium.⁹⁰ There was significant overlap among the prominent participants in these campaigns. For example, suffragists including Dilke, Nevinson, Labour Party leader James Ramsay MacDonald, and the prominent nonconformist minister Dr. John Clifford were simultaneously active in the Congo reform campaign and the protests against the tsar.⁹¹ These radicals were connected in a variety of causes by their commitment to an expanded franchise, their defense of civil society against special interests, and their insistence that government should serve and represent the needs and will of all British society in domestic, imperial, and foreign policies. Thus, the interaction of the campaign for women’s suffrage and the protests against the tsar exemplified a multifaceted, radical campaign for reform in the Edwardian era.

In May 1909, the protests against the tsar’s visit were joined by Figner, the legendary accomplice in the assassination of the tsar’s grandfather, who had moved to Europe after her release from prison in 1904. She had visited England twice in 1908, the first time for sightseeing, and the second to attend the Socialist Revolutionary Party’s convention in London.⁹² She returned to England in May 1909 to raise funds for political prisoners in Russia and Siberia, and to join in protests against the tsar’s visit, now scheduled for early August.⁹³ Yet while Figner joined British radicals in denouncing the tsar, she did not necessarily endorse their vision of Russia’s future. The Labour Party

⁸⁷ For example, “Medieval Prisons,” *Free Russia* (Jan. 1909): 2–3. See the Labour Party resolution in the *Daily News*, 29 June 1909.

⁸⁸ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Troublemakers* (London: Pimlico, 1993), 95–131.

⁸⁹ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965, repr.), 56, 61.

⁹⁰ Emily Hobhouse, *Report of a Visit to the Camps of Women and Children in the Cape and Orange River Colonies* (London: Friars Printing Association, Ltd., 1901); E. D. Morel, *King Leopold’s Rule in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1904).

⁹¹ See Kevin Grant, *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slavery in Africa, 1884–1926* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁹² Lynne Ann Hartnett, “Perpetual Exile: The Dynamics of Gender, Protest, and Violence in the Revolutionary Life of Vera Figner (1852–1917)” (PhD diss., Boston College, 2000), 755–56.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 763.

adopted a resolution in the House of Commons that called on the government to deny official recognition of the visit of the tsar, “under whose authority and direct sanction so many terrible atrocities have been perpetrated on a people constitutionally struggling for political freedom.”⁹⁴ Figner herself had not engaged in a constitutional struggle, but rather in a terrorist campaign, and, although she wanted freedom for Russia, she did not advocate the replacement of the tsar with a constitutional regime.⁹⁵ Both the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily News* overlooked this discrepancy in their favorable coverage of her activities.

On 23 June, Figner was the guest of honor at a reception at the South Place Institute hosted by the London Russian Hertsen Circle. *Free Russia* featured a summary of her speech that focused upon inhumane prison conditions and prisoners’ protests. Figner gave credit for the most effective act of protest to one M. F. Grachevsky, who had immolated himself with kerosene while in solitary confinement and thus provoked the replacement of a brutal prison director. The chairman, Volkhovsky, closed the meeting with three cheers for Figner. “Then the platform was invaded by a crowd of ladies who wanted to shake hands with Mme. Figner, or have her autograph.”⁹⁶

In the run up to the tsar’s visit, Figner was the most famous woman in Britain to have received official political prisoner status and resisted brutal prison conditions. Members of the W.S.P.U. were certainly aware of her presence in London, whether through reports of her activities in the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily News*, their affiliation with the S.F.R.F., or personal contacts with the Russian exile community.⁹⁷ However, Figner did not co-operate with the W.S.P.U., even as it campaigned in 1909 to secure political prisoner status for its incarcerated members. She was, after all, committed to a comprehensive socialist revolution, not to a women’s movement, and she may have also learned that Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst had resisted the influence of British socialists in guiding the W.S.P.U. after 1907.⁹⁸ Figner observes in her memoirs that she could have probably raised more money for Russian political prisoners if she “had entered into relations with the militant suffragettes.” She was dissuaded from this by Kropotkin’s wife Sophie, even though the Kropotkins themselves were acquainted with Emmeline Pankhurst, and even though Christabel Pankhurst impressed Figner with her political talents.⁹⁹ Perhaps

⁹⁴ Repr. in *Free Russia* (July 1909): 2.

⁹⁵ For Figner’s political views, see Richard Stites’ introduction to Figner, *Memoirs*, ix–xxiii; and Hartnett, “Perpetual Exile.”

⁹⁶ *Free Russia* (July 1909): 7.

⁹⁷ Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, 436.

⁹⁸ Andrew Rosen, *Rise Up, Women!* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 86–94; Laura Ugolini, “‘We Must Stand By Our Own Bairs’: ILP Men and Suffrage Militancy,” *Labour History Review* 67, 2 (Aug. 2002): 149–69.

⁹⁹ Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, 28. Thank you to John Bartle for translating this section of Figner’s memoir. See Vera Figner, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Izd-vo Vses. ob-va politkatorzhan i ssyl’poseletsev, 1932), 352.

Kropotkin was troubled by the ideological divide between Figner's revolutionary populism and the Pankhursts' militant campaign for constitutional reform, or maybe he worried that Figner would be misrepresented in W.S.P.U. propaganda. In the end, Figner met only Despard, the leader of the Women's Freedom League, who unlike the Pankhursts had been a life-long socialist and an active S.F.R.F. supporter.¹⁰⁰

The W.S.P.U. distributed leaflets in advance of its march on parliament on 29 June to deliver a petition to the prime minister in support of the enfranchisement of women. The leaflets quoted the Bill of Rights and asserted, "Mr. Asquith, as the King's representative, is bound, therefore, to receive the deputation and hear their petition. If he refuses to do so, and calls out the police to prevent women from using their right to present a petition, he will be guilty of illegal and unconstitutional action."¹⁰¹ It was after this that Wallace Dunlop stenciled part of the text of the 1689 Bill of Rights on the wall of St. Stephen's Hall, for which she was sentenced to one month in prison in the second division. She insisted that she be transferred to the first division in recognition of the political nature of her offence, but the prison officials refused to comply. The British prison regulations did not recognize the category of "political prisoner," so when Wallace Dunlop and other suffragettes protested that they were denied "political prisoner" status, prison officials replied that the suffragettes could not be denied something that did not exist. Wallace Dunlop nonetheless began her hunger strike for political status, and on 9 July the home secretary authorized her release. In its coverage of the hunger strike, *Votes for Women* declared, "The treatment which the Suffragettes receive in Holloway is ... inferior in some respects to that which Russian political prisoners are receiving to-day."¹⁰² Pethick-Lawrence explained in a W.S.P.U. leaflet titled "Treatment of the Suffragettes in Prison" that the hunger strike was a Russian method.

Wallace Dunlop, and those who followed her example in hunger striking, regarded this tactic of protest as effective in both instrumental and symbolic terms. Like Russian political prisoners, Wallace Dunlop took up the hunger strike as a weapon with which to challenge the authority of prison officials and the practical capacities of the prison system. She had declared to the medical officer at Holloway, "You may feed me through the nostrils or the mouth, but suppose you got 108 women in here on Friday all requiring to be fed through the nostrils? At this," she noted, "the doctor's face was a delightful study."¹⁰³ As this comment suggests, suffragettes quickly recognized that prison officials lacked

¹⁰⁰ Hilary Frances, "'Dare to be Free!' The Women's Freedom League and Its Legacy," in June Purvis and Sandra Holton, eds., *Votes for Women* (London: Routledge, 2000), 181–202.

¹⁰¹ Rosen, *Rise Up*, 118.

¹⁰² *Votes for Women*, 16 July 1909: 934.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

adequate staff with which to manage hunger strikes by groups of prisoners; twelve suffragettes went on hunger strike after Wallace Dunlop and all were released within a week. The sheer numbers of suffragette strikers, sometimes dozens at a time, placed major strains upon the prison system, and especially upon the medical officers who were responsible for prisoners' diets and health and for virtually all day-to-day prison conditions.¹⁰⁴ One or two medical officers and one or two deputy medical officers found themselves overwhelmed as they attempted to oversee the welfare of hundreds of convicts in a given prison, monitor the vital signs of multiple suffragettes on hunger strike, keep up with mandatory paperwork, and respond to inquiries from the home secretary, who sometimes discussed individual cases of hunger striking with the prime minister.¹⁰⁵

Unlike the Russian politicals, the suffragettes represented the hunger strike as a symbolic act of heroic martyrdom inspired by the suffragettes' indomitable, "spiritual" commitment to their cause.¹⁰⁶ The W.S.P.U. represented strikes through speeches, posters, and numerous publications as acts of sacrifice for the nation and as embodiments of the coercion upon which the government's "virtual representation" of women depended.¹⁰⁷ In the former respect, the strikes tapped into the strong ethos of martyrdom that had been symbolically identified in W.S.P.U. spectacles with Joan of Arc.¹⁰⁸ In the latter respect, they served the same purpose as did the suffragettes' attempts to provoke public, physical confrontations with police in order to shame the government through the violent display of its disproportionate and allegedly despotic power.¹⁰⁹ The W.S.P.U. organized parades and receptions for suffragettes who had been released on hunger strike, awarded them medals, and published harrowing accounts of the strikers' sufferings to inspire both its rank-and-file members and subscribers.¹¹⁰ Christabel Pankhurst and others asserted at the outset that the strikers were shielded by the sympathies of the general public, which would presumably never stand for the death of a woman starving herself for the vote. This presumption was never tested.¹¹¹

By this time, the British press was generally critical of the suffragettes' escalating violence, which now included window breaking and physical attacks on government ministers, and it represented the hunger strike as a means to escape

¹⁰⁴ Stephen Hobhouse and A. Fenner Brockway, *English Prisons To-Day* (London: Longmans & Co., 1922), 256, 260–62, 274.

¹⁰⁵ For example, John Edwards, medical officer, to governor of Strangeways Prison, 7 Sept. 1909, Public Records Office (hereafter PRO), HO144/1041/183189.

¹⁰⁶ For example, see *Votes for Women* issues: 16 July 1909: 934; 23 July 1909: 971, 977; and 30 July 1909: 1014.

¹⁰⁷ For example, *Votes for Women*, 30 July 1909: 1014.

¹⁰⁸ Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*, 83; *Votes for Women*, 23 Aug. 1912: 765.

¹⁰⁹ *Votes for Women*, 23 July 1909: 977; Pugh, *March of the Women*, 193.

¹¹⁰ Tickner, *Spectacle of Women*; *Votes for Women*, 6 Aug. 1909: 1043.

¹¹¹ *Votes for Women*, 30 July 1909: 1014.

the just consequences of illegal and dangerous actions.¹¹² The liberal press simultaneously supported British protests on behalf of Russian political prisoners in the light of the tsar's visit. On 12 July the *Daily News* reported that over one hundred nonconformist churches in London and the countryside had devoted the previous day to sermons about Russian prison conditions. Nevinson had given an address at Westbourne Park Chapel, with Figner in the congregation. Figner was then present in Trafalgar Square on 25 July 1909 as a participant in the largest public demonstration against the tsar's visit, organized by the S.F.R.F. and the *Daily News* and attended by a variety of prominent suffragists.¹¹³ Sylvia Pankhurst would later accuse the liberal press of a double standard in condemning the suffragette hunger strikers at the same time that it praised Figner for once assaulting a prison official to gain better conditions for her comrades.¹¹⁴

Nicholas II visited Edward VII between 2 and 5 August at Cowes, on the Isle of Wight, under heavy security. On the day of the tsar's arrival, *The Times* published a letter to the foreign secretary from the Parliamentary Russian Committee, a coalition of radicals and Labour Party M.P.s that had formed in the previous year. After describing the oppressive treatment of prisoners in Russia, the committee stated, "We desire to base our protest on the ground of simple humanity; but it is none the less important to remember that many of these prisoners, if guilty at all, are suffering for acts or words which in any constitutional country would be lawful, or even praiseworthy."¹¹⁵ In the same issue, an editorial accused the letter's signatories of "boorishness."¹¹⁶ Critics of the tsar had no success in raising public protest during his visit, and it appears that no dissident voices reached his ears. The tsar observed in his farewell message: "The Emperor is deeply impressed by his visit to this country.... The attitude of British statesmen, people, and Press are all happy auguries for the future."¹¹⁷

The contest between suffragette hunger strikers and the government intensified after 24 September, when prison medical officers began to forcibly feed the strikers with the authorization of the home secretary. This was by no means a new procedure in British prisons. There was a longstanding practice of forcibly feeding women and, more often, men in prisons, hospitals, and asylums.¹¹⁸ Since 1904, prison medical officers had forcibly fed at least eighty-two men and thirty women; one male prisoner had been forcibly fed for over two

¹¹² C. J. Bearman, "An Army without Discipline? Suffragette Militancy and the Budget Crisis of 1909," *The Historical Journal* 50, 4 (2007): 880.

¹¹³ Hollingsworth, "Society of Friends": 62.

¹¹⁴ Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, 436.

¹¹⁵ *The Times*, 2 Aug. 1909.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *The Times*, 6 Aug. 1909.

¹¹⁸ Regarding policies on forcible feeding, see Grant, "Transcolonial World," 243–46, 262–67.

years.¹¹⁹ It appears that such feedings had been most often administered to criminal convicts who had stopped eating to protest against their incarceration or specific prison conditions, on non-political grounds, but they were also administered to people whose self-starvation was attributed to insanity.¹²⁰ Authorities called this process “artificial feeding” and characterized it as a standard medical procedure. They subsequently resisted using the term “forcible feeding,” though it quickly gained currency in the press and in parliament.¹²¹ The suffragettes did not look to the past incidents of “artificial feeding” as precedents for their own political protests. Their entire campaign for political status in prison was designed to refute the identification of their actions with those of criminals, and they explicitly rejected any identification with the insane. In a much publicized law suit brought by the suffragette Mary Leigh against the home secretary and prison officials who had authorized her forcible feeding in 1909, Leigh testified that she had told the prison medical officer that it would be illegal to forcibly feed her. She had explained to him that if forcible feeding was indeed a medical operation, then it could not be performed without a sane person’s consent.¹²²

Home Secretary Herbert Gladstone had been reluctant to authorize the forcible feeding of suffragettes due to both the privileged class positions of many of the women and his anticipation of public criticism. Ultimately, however, he was more concerned that the release of suffragette hunger strikers was making a mockery of the judicial and penal systems. While “artificial feeding” was nothing new, the release of dozens of hunger strikers over the summer of 1909 was unprecedented and potentially damaging to general prison discipline. He shared an overriding concern with prison and home office officials that their continued release of suffragette strikers would not only undermine prison discipline, but perhaps even tempt ordinary criminals to hunger strike for reduced sentences.¹²³

On 24 September, the same day on which medical officers began to forcibly feed hunger strikers, *Votes for Women* featured a front-page cartoon of Prime Minister Asquith entitled, “The British Czar” (Image 1). This cartoon represents the extraordinary security precautions that had been taken against suffragettes when Asquith delivered a major speech on the controversial “people’s budget” at Birmingham on 17 September.¹²⁴ The precautions included secret passages,

¹¹⁹ Memorandum on hunger strikes, 12 Oct. 1909, PRO, HO144/1042/183256.

¹²⁰ A notation by Herbert Smalley on the Home Office memorandum of 12 October 1909 (ibid.) indicates that twenty-nine of the eighty-two men and ten of the thirty women were insane.

¹²¹ J. F. Geddes, “Culpable Complicity: The Medical Profession and the Forcible Feeding of Suffragettes, 1909–1914,” *Women’s History Review* 17, 1 (Mar. 2008): 79–94.

¹²² E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1931), 319.

¹²³ Chairman of the Prison Commission Sir E. Ruggles-Brise to Sir Edward Troup, Oct. 1909, PRO, HO144/1042/183256.

¹²⁴ *The Times*, 18 Sept. 1909.

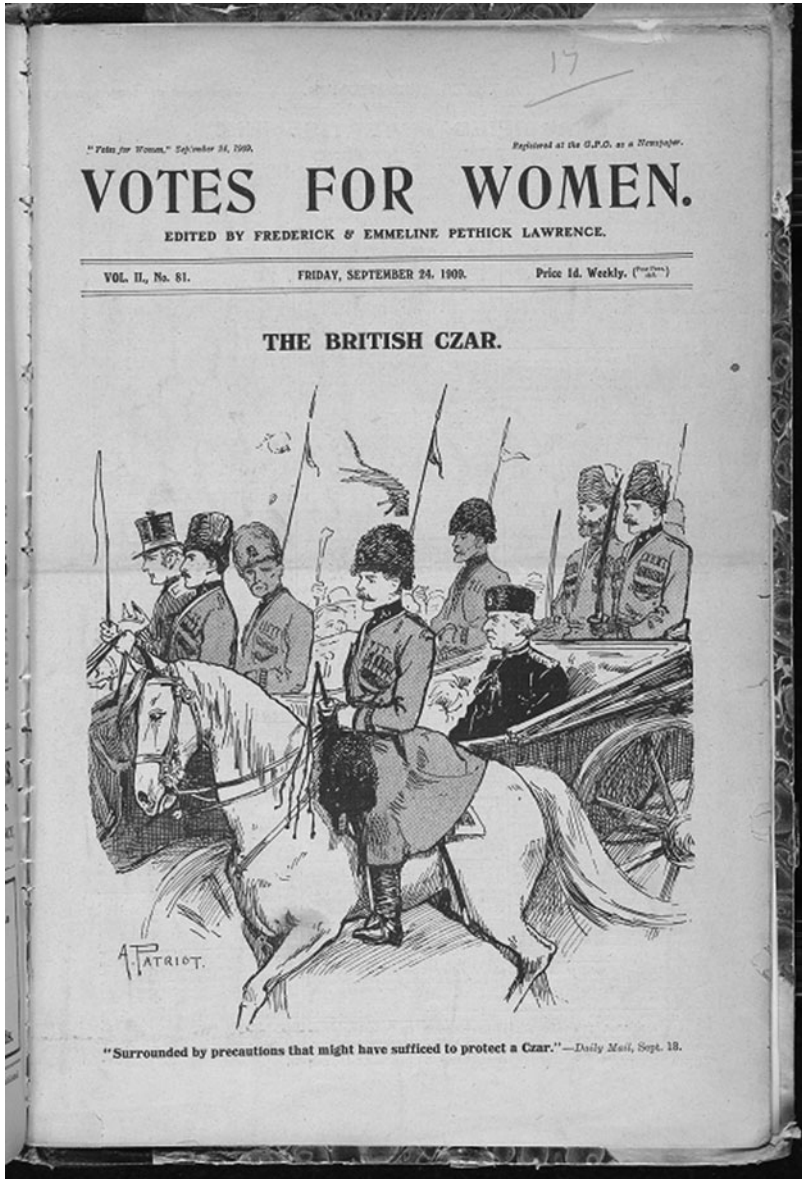


IMAGE 1. Cartoon from *Votes for Women*, 24 September 1909. By permission of the British Library. © British Library Board.

a closed motorcar, barricades in the streets, and the deployment of hundreds of policemen. Referencing the Tsar's visit under heavy security in the previous month, the cartoon portrays Asquith in military uniform and guarded closely by armed Cossacks, two with sabers drawn. The sub-caption, a quotation from the *Daily Mail*, observes that Asquith was "surrounded by precautions that might have sufficed to protect a Czar." Three days later, in their protests against forcible feeding, the suffragettes' supporters in parliament again likened the government to the tsarist regime.

On 27 September, Hardie asked Deputy Home Secretary Charles Masterman in the House of Commons if suffragette hunger strikers in Birmingham Prison had been fed by force. Masterman replied that they had undergone the "ordinary medical treatment." Pursuing the issue, Hardie asked, "Can the hon. Gentleman say if the full operation is the food being pumped through the nostrils of these women or inserted by a tube down the throat?" Masterman answered, "I think the ordinary method is the second one." Hardie was appalled by this revelation, probably all the more so given Masterman's usage of a medical discourse that rendered normal what Hardie found extraordinary. Philip Snowden, M.P., interjected and ironically invoked the Spanish inquisition and the tsarist regime to reorient the terms of the debate from medical treatment to torture. Snowden said, "May I ask if the hon. Gentleman will convey the suggestion to the Home Secretary that he should make application to Spain or Russia in order to adopt the most brutal and up-to-date methods of barbarism?"¹²⁵ A week later Nevinson and Brailsford resigned from the *Daily News* because the editor, A. G. Gardiner, refused to denounce the forcible feeding of suffragettes. The men declared in a letter published in *The Times* on 5 October: "We cannot denounce torture in Russia and support it in England, nor can we advocate democratic principles in the name of a party which confines them to a single sex."¹²⁶

Although the suffragettes were vitriolic in their condemnation of forcible feeding, C. J. Bearman observes that there is little evidence in British press coverage to suggest that the general public was particularly concerned about, let alone divided over this issue.¹²⁷ "When the process [of forcible feeding] was actually applied," explains Bearman, "almost every national newspaper applauded the decision, or accepted it as a regrettable necessity made inevitable by the suffragette's own actions. Only the *Manchester Guardian* stood apart...."¹²⁸ The W.S.P.U. published powerful images of forcible feeding in an effort to liken the process to torture and to render this "method of barbarism"

¹²⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, Fifth Series, 1909, vol. 8, 923–35. The term "methods of barbarism" had been coined by the former Liberal leader Henry Campbell-Bannerman in 1901 to describe British military atrocities during the South African War.

¹²⁶ *The Times*, 5 Oct. 1909.

¹²⁷ Bearman, "An Army": 886.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*: 881.

symbolic of the Liberal government's despotic dependence on violence.¹²⁹ However, the press generally rejected the equation of forcible feeding and torture upon which the power of the images depended.¹³⁰ The symbolic power of the image of forcible feeding was further undermined in December 1909 when the W.S.P.U. lost both Leigh's action against forcible feeding and a legal action regarding the right to petition.¹³¹ These rulings weakened the W.S.P.U.'s assertion that hunger strikers were resisting the "illegal and unconstitutional action" of the government. Following the government's victory in the General Election of January 1910, Emmeline Pankhurst declared a suspension of W.S.P.U. militancy, in a "truce" that lasted until November 1911.

In March 1910, in a conciliatory gesture to suffragette prisoners, Home Secretary Winston Churchill instituted Rule 243A, which gave prison officials the discretionary authority to grant special privileges to suffragettes. This was not political prisoner status. Emmeline Pankhurst and Frederick and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence jokingly referred to it as "one-and-a-half class," that is, a special category somewhere between the second and first divisions.¹³² Two years later, Churchill's successor, Home Secretary Reginald McKenna, abrogated Rule 243A, prompting a new series of hunger strikes at the same time that W.S.P.U. violence beyond the prison walls intensified. In late 1911 suffragettes began to employ arson, and they extended their so-called "argument of the broken pane of glass" from governmental property to private and commercial properties.¹³³ In this context, on 29 March 1912, the *Manchester Guardian* featured an account of the experiences of Russian "prison strikers," which on 12 April was reprinted in *Votes for Women* under the title, "What a Hunger-Strike Means."¹³⁴ Constance Garnett, a widely respected translator of Russian literature, had rendered it from the notes of an anonymous Russian prisoner who had been held in Schlüsselburg Fortress. That the prisoner was Figner can be deduced from the account's content, which corresponds to the abridged, English edition of her memoirs.¹³⁵

Figner had left Britain in the fall of 1909, in the midst of suffragette hunger strikes and forcible feeding, to speak on the Continent on behalf of Russian political prisoners. She had established the Paris Committee to Help Political Prisoners Condemned to Hard Labor, and in 1911 had published *Les Prisons Russes*, the most comprehensive exposé of the conditions of Russian political

¹²⁹ See the cover of *Votes for Women*, 28 Jan. 1910, reproduced in Vernon, *Hunger*, 66.

¹³⁰ Bearman, "An Army": 886.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*: 887.

¹³² F. W. Pethick-Lawrence, *Fate Has Been Kind* (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1943), 93.

¹³³ Emmeline Pankhurst, "Speech Delivered at the Dinner at the Connaught Rooms in Honour of the Released Prisoners" (1911), in Cheryl R. Jorgenson-Earp, *Speeches and Trials of the Militant Suffragettes* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), 144; Rosen, *Rise Up*, 156–59.

¹³⁴ *Votes for Women*, 12 Apr. 1912: 444.

¹³⁵ Figner, *Memoirs*, 190–94, 218–27. Garnett had befriended Figner in England. See David Garnett, *The Golden Echo* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1954), 119–20.

prisoners to date.¹³⁶ She had also been writing her memoir, in which she had begun to reflect on hunger strikes, but not those of the suffragettes. Rather, she had reflected on hunger strikes, including her own, in Schlüsselburg Fortress. Figner had not publicized her experience of hunger striking while she resided in London in 1909, even as suffragettes had adopted this Russian method to secure political prisoner status. Perhaps her silence is attributable to her political distance from the Pankhursts, or perhaps, as I suggest below, she was still coming to terms with one of the darkest moments in her long prison experience. It is probably not a coincidence that Figner agreed to convey at least part of the story of her hunger strike to British readers just as the W.S.P.U. renewed its hunger strikes in March and April of 1912.

The juxtaposition of the “prison strikers” article with Figner’s speech in London in June 1909 is telling. The article begins by recalling the 1889 Kara Tragedy. It recounts a series of protests by political prisoners in Schlüsselburg Fortress, including Grachevsky’s immolation of himself with kerosene, “the most awful form of death.” The article then describes a hunger strike undertaken by a group of politicals, including the anonymous author. The strike was a response to the authorities’ confiscation of books from the prison library and lasted eleven days, though most prisoners gave up earlier. The author observes, “The protest ended in failure.... All without exception suffered even more than before in health and nerves.” “This form of protest, customary in Russian prisons, is a most agonizing one....” the author warns. “From its very nature this form of protest is doomed to failure. With the decline of physical strength the will grows weaker.”¹³⁷

A week later, the W.S.P.U. published a bold, column-length advertisement in *The Times* entitled “Suffragist Prisoners” and addressed to “Citizens of the British Empire!” It posed a series of rhetorical questions in support of the suffragettes’ claim to political prisoner status: “Is it the wish of the Nation . . . that women should be subjected to the cruel torture of forcible feeding through the nose because they have adopted the hunger strike as a protest against receiving the prison treatment of criminals? Is it the wish of the Nation that we should follow the cruel practices prevailing in Russia...?”¹³⁸ Despite the misgivings of an anonymous Russian prisoner, the W.S.P.U. employed the same tactics in 1912 that it had initiated in 1909, but this time the public responded frequently with contempt and occasionally with violence. When Sylvia Pankhurst appealed on behalf of hunger strikers at a meeting in Hyde Park in April 1912, the crowd ridiculed her.¹³⁹ On two occasions in September, W.S.P.U. members heckled Lloyd George and were then attacked by crowds, which in one case

¹³⁶ Hartnett, “Perpetual Exile,” 766.

¹³⁷ *Votes for Women*, 12 Apr. 1912: 444.

¹³⁸ *The Times*, 17 Apr. 1912.

¹³⁹ Rosen, *Rise Up*, 165.

stripped two women to the waist and took home pieces of their shirts as souvenirs.¹⁴⁰ The W.S.P.U. continued to represent hunger strikes as symbols of sacrifice, but the avowed altruism of the women's suffering did not sanctify their militancy and did not attach to W.S.P.U. members beyond the prison walls, where many Britons regarded the organization as a threat to public order and private property.

Although the British public was apparently reconciled to the forcible feeding of suffragettes, prison medical officers were not. As before, this small corps found it difficult to attend to hunger strikers and still fulfill its many duties to the general prison population. At the end of 1912, Medical Inspector of Prisons Herbert Smalley observed that the forcible feeding of suffragettes was ultimately distinguished from previous practices of "artificial feeding" by "the persistent, great struggling and resistance of these females" and by "the want of assimilation of food administered, owing partly to more or less self induced vomiting and partly to inhibition to digestion owing to their mental condition."¹⁴¹ He acknowledged that medical officers were releasing prisoners on dubious medical grounds, which he attributed to "the natural hesitation of the Medical Officer to use force towards the opposite sex, more especially in the case of persons many of whom are cultured and of refined habits."¹⁴² Recognizing the burdens upon the prison system, McKenna introduced the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Act in April 1913. The so-called "Cat and Mouse Act" enabled the government to release hunger strikers whose health was deteriorating and then arrest them once more after their health had recovered. The Home Office readily conceded that this was not a complete solution to the problem, but it emphasized that the beleaguered prison staff required some form of relief. One memorandum concluded, "The Home Secretary will be able ... at any rate greatly to diminish the number of cases in which that repulsive duty [of forcible feeding] is forced upon prison officers by the action of the suffragettes."¹⁴³ The game of cat and mouse continued until Britain's declaration of war against Germany in August 1914. As Britain prepared to enter the war in alliance with Russia, the W.S.P.U. again suspended its militant protest after more than 240 British and Irish suffragettes had gone on hunger strike in British and Irish prisons.¹⁴⁴

Emmeline Pankhurst recreated her public image as a patriot, asserting that in advocating women's suffrage the W.S.P.U. had always fought for the good of the nation first and foremost. She assumed a variety of roles in the war effort, including that of a British emissary to Russia. After the abdication of

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 171.

¹⁴¹ Memorandum by Herbert Smalley, 31 Dec. 1912, PRO, PCOM 7/355.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Memorandum on Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill-Health) Bill, 28 Apr. 1913, PRO, HO45/10699/234800.

¹⁴⁴ Pugh, *March of the Women*, 212.

Nicholas II in March 1917, she traveled to Russia on behalf of the British government to assist in persuading the provisional government of Alexander Kerensky not to withdraw from the allied war effort. In the capital, Petrograd, she received a private message that the tsar wished to meet her, as he had heard about her leadership of the British women's suffrage campaign.¹⁴⁵ Pankhurst, who had herself conducted hunger strikes and endured forcible feeding, declined the request. She might have accepted, but she had been commissioned to work with the government that had replaced the tsarist regime. She departed from Russia in October, having been told that the strangely quiet streets of Petrograd were the calm before a Bolshevik storm.¹⁴⁶

In the meantime, Figner had returned to Russia and found herself extolled as the heroic founder of a revolution that she now found unfamiliar. She did not find in Bolshevik governance the freedom for which she had fought, yet she remained in Russia, an unquiet legend, and devoted herself to work for the poor and advocacy for political prisoners and exiles. She continued to write about her own experiences of prison and exile, and in 1928 she published her finished memoirs, in which she finally provided a full account of her own hunger strike.

Figner recounts in her memoir that Grachevsky conducted an eighteen-day hunger strike against prison conditions in 1886 before immolating himself in October 1887.¹⁴⁷ Figner also provides more details about her hunger strike and reflects further upon the difficulties that it created for her. She indicates that it took place in the fall of 1889 and explains that most prisoners abandoned the strike after a male comrade began vomiting blood on the ninth day.¹⁴⁸ Figner and a male political continued for another two days, but then reluctantly stopped after two comrades said that they would kill themselves if they starved to death.¹⁴⁹ Not only did Figner regard the strike as a "failure," but she found that this particular failure had made her doubt the revolutionary commitment of her comrades and question her own commitment to collective action in the future—a deeply troubling thought for a revolutionary populist. Figner had suffered, by her own account, "burning disillusionment" and a "moral catastrophe."¹⁵⁰

Figner's speech in London in 1909, her account of her hunger strike published in 1912, and her account of 1928 illustrate important features of Russian revolutionary hunger strikes that were already apparent in Kennan's and Deutsch's accounts of the Kara Tragedy. Figner's hunger strike was not

¹⁴⁵ Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, 296.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁴⁷ Figner, *Memoirs*, 193–94.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 220–21.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 223–25.

“a womanish thing,” for she starved with men to disrupt and defy prison authorities in order to secure specific changes in prison conditions. The strike may have fulfilled Figner’s commitment to self-sacrifice, but she did not see it, from a practical standpoint, as an extension of her terrorist campaign. Like Russian revolutionaries in general, she regarded it as weak. In her speech of 1909 on prison conditions and prison protests, she highlighted Grachevsky’s self-immolation as the most effective protest of her prison experience, and she did not even mention his earlier hunger strike or the subsequent strike in which she participated. In *Les Prisons Russes* she addressed famines in Russia and deprivation of food, hunger, and suicide in prison, but not hunger strikes.¹⁵¹ When Figner finally publicized her hunger strike in Britain in 1912, she characterized it as a failure, but even then she did not convey the “burning disillusionment” and “moral catastrophe” that it had produced in her. On one hand she regarded the hunger strike as a weak method of protest, and on the other she apparently struggled to come to terms with its powerful effect upon herself, the political prisoner. Figner in 1909 had been an epitome of the political prisoner in Britain, and suffragettes had thus resented that the liberal press criticized their hunger strikes for political prisoner status even as it lauded her.¹⁵² In fact, Figner did not share in the suffragette’s political priority, “votes for women,” and she was skeptical of the “Russian method” as a means to this or any other political end.

The suffragettes’ understanding of the Russian hunger strike had been primarily shaped by the Russian revolutionary exiles that had preceded Figner to Britain. They represented their revolutionary movement to British radicals as a campaign for constitutional reform in which the brutality of the tsarist regime rendered the revolutionaries as sympathetic martyrs rather than terrorists. Suffragettes therefore perceived Russian hunger strikers in terms not of a contemporary anarchist threat but of their own struggle for constitutional reform. This perception was perhaps reinforced by the exiles’ decision to foreground the leadership of women in the momentous strike at Kara. Be that as it may, suffragettes defined the hunger strike as a distinctly feminine tactic of protest, though a small number of so-called “suffragettes in trousers” employed this tactic as well.¹⁵³ According to the W.S.P.U., women had particular qualities necessary to a successful hunger striker, such as selflessness and discipline. Sandra Holton further explains, “The suffragette identity was one built

¹⁵¹ Vera Figner, *Les Prisons Russes* (Pully-Lausanne: Imprimerie des Unions Ouvrières, 1911), 28, 30, 31–32, 34.

¹⁵² Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, 436.

¹⁵³ Speech by Lady Constance Lytton at the Queen’s Hall, 31 January 1910,” in Jorgenson-Earp, *Speeches and Trials*, 108–9; Sandra Stanley Holton, “Manliness and Militancy: The Political Protest of Male Suffragists and the Gendering of the ‘Suffragette’ Identity,” in Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, eds., *Men’s Share? Masculinities, Male Support and Women’s Suffrage in Britain, 1890–1920* (London: Routledge, 1997), 122, 124.

around a feminine heroic, and a rhetoric of female rebellion which the presence of men continually threatened to undermine."¹⁵⁴ In 1912, with the resumption of hunger strikes and the escalation of W.S.P.U. violence, the Pankhursts began to distance the W.S.P.U. from its male supporters.¹⁵⁵ Such a move would have been incomprehensible to Russian revolutionary populists.

Leaders of the W.S.P.U. regarded the hunger strike as "the strongest weapon they had ever used against the Government."¹⁵⁶ Indeed, it served as both an instrument of liberation and a symbol of heroic martyrdom. Suffragettes adapted it to a symbolic idiom of feminine sacrifice that they had already developed in their militant campaign, especially in seeking physical confrontation, arrest, and imprisonment. Their hunger strikes and experiences of forcible feeding embodied for the British public the despotic violence of an ostensibly liberal government and their own altruistic willingness to sacrifice themselves for the nation. They represented their present sacrifice as the basis of their future vote, and they invoked the past protests of Russian revolutionaries, whose greater suffering in a presumably similar quest for political representation heightened the significance of their own. Although the Russian analogy was only one facet of the propaganda that accompanied the suffragette's strikes, it illuminated most precisely the constitutional goals of their campaign. These were obscured, however, by increasing violence. In January 1913, the W.S.P.U. began a campaign of destruction across Britain that included window breaking, arson, bombings, cutting telephone and telegraph lines, and destroying artwork in galleries and museums. The British press and the general public were alienated not by the constitutional goals of the hunger strikers, but rather by the fearful violence that had brought the strikers to prison in the first place. This violence widened the division of the suffragist movement itself between a militant minority and the non-violent majority. The latter included Millicent Garrett Fawcett, president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, who repeatedly condemned W.S.P.U. violence and voiced support for the government.¹⁵⁷ As representatives of the W.S.P.U. were heckled, pelted with fruit and eggs, and sometimes assaulted by hostile crowds, the government cracked down on the organization, now confident in its moral authority over suffragettes who, in 1913, declared themselves to be "terrorists."¹⁵⁸ When in June 1914 a suffragette turned to King George V in

¹⁵⁴ Holton, "Manliness and Militancy," 110–11.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 122; Pugh, *March of the Women*, 262–64.

¹⁵⁶ *Votes for Women*, 30 July 1909: 1014.

¹⁵⁷ For example, "Suffragist Violence: Mrs. Fawcett's Appeal to Cabinet Ministers," *The Times*, 5 Dec. 1911; Mayhall, *Militant Suffrage Movement*, 105.

¹⁵⁸ Pugh, *March of the Women*, 206–10. Regarding "terrorists," see Mayhall, *Militant Suffrage Movement*, 107; Emmeline Pankhurst, "Address at Hartford," 13 Nov. 1913, in Jorgensen-Earp, *Speeches and Trials*, 322–49.

His Majesty's Theatre and yelled, "You Russian Tsar!," her cry must have rung hollowly, if offensively, in the ears of his subjects.¹⁵⁹

The suffragettes' campaign for constitutional reform and their multifaceted discourse on rights nonetheless resonated with critics of British imperialism in the United Kingdom and abroad. News of their hunger strikes spread through British imperial networks of governance and communication, conveyed by official and private correspondence, newspapers, books, and rumor.¹⁶⁰ These strikes inspired two distinct forms of hunger in protest in the Empire, the first defined by militancy and the second by non-violence. Both of these forms of hunger in protest would continue to spread internationally long after the Empire's demise, embodying in different cultural contexts the disparate ideologies and objectives of their practitioners.

In the first case, the hunger strike was taken up by Irish suffragettes, some of whom experienced forcible feeding in Britain.¹⁶¹ The first Irish suffragette hunger strike in an Irish prison was undertaken on 15 August 1912 in Mountjoy Gaol by four members of the Irish Women's Freedom League: Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Marguerite Palmer, and two sisters, Hanna and Margaret Murphy.¹⁶² Following their release after ninety-two hours without food, Sheehy Skeffington explained to the *Irish Independent*, "The hunger strike is a method of passive revolt that was initiated in Russian prisons where 'politicals' adopt it when all else fails. In Russia they do not add the further refinement of cruelty—forcible feeding; it has been reserved to civilized England to adopt that method of 'persuasion.'"¹⁶³ A year later, James Connolly, a militant socialist and supporter of women's suffrage, went on hunger strike following his imprisonment for leading a major Dublin tramway strike. He was released after one week due to poor health. "What was good enough for the suffragettes is good enough for us," he subsequently declared.¹⁶⁴ Irish militant republicans, men and women, then cooperated in thousands of hunger strikes in prisons and internment camps in the Irish revolutionary era between 1916 and 1923. They conducted dozens thereafter, culminating in the 1981 strike by militant republicans in Long Kesh prison that left ten men dead.¹⁶⁵ Adapting the Irish model, Indian militant nationalists undertook hunger strikes against

¹⁵⁹ Rosen, *Rise Up*, 235.

¹⁶⁰ Christopher Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine, eds., *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁶¹ Cliona Murphy, *The Women's Suffrage Movement and Irish Society in the Early Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 109, n. 10.

¹⁶² They conducted their hunger strikes in solidarity with Mary Leigh, Gladys Evans, and Mrs. Jennie Baines, three members of the W.S.P.U. who had begun a hunger strike for political status on the previous day.

¹⁶³ From an article in the *Irish Independent*, repr. in *Votes for Women*, 23 Aug. 1912: 765.

¹⁶⁴ W. K. Anderson, *James Connolly and the Irish Left* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), 21.

¹⁶⁵ Pdraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

the British from 1918 until India achieved independence in 1947.¹⁶⁶ As the British suffragettes had invoked Russian dissidents to enhance the significance of their own strikes, so Indian militants invoked the Irish. Jatinder Nath Das, a militant socialist, became known as the “Indian Terence MacSwiney” following his death after a hunger strike of sixty-three days in Lahore jail in 1929.¹⁶⁷ He was likened to a prominent Irish republican and lord mayor of Cork, who had died in a British prison in 1920 after a strike of seventy-four days.

Mohandas Gandhi developed a different form of hunger in protest, but this also began with the suffragettes. Gandhi noted the effectiveness of the suffragette hunger strikes against the British government when he was moving in suffragist circles in London in 1909.¹⁶⁸ He had already begun to articulate his non-violent program of *satyagraha*, which included fasting as a method of self-purification and atonement, and he accordingly criticized the suffragettes’ militancy, even as he admired their courage.¹⁶⁹ There were two respects in which the suffragette hunger strikers influenced Gandhi’s subsequent approach to hunger in protest. Their strikes demonstrated that hunger could move even the British government, and they introduced Gandhi to the concept of a “fast unto death,” an extreme course of protest to which he would resort only on a handful of occasions in undertaking more than a dozen public fasts in India between 1918 and 1948. It is important to bear in mind that Gandhi was quick to distinguish his fasts from the hunger strikes of his militant Irish and Indian contemporaries. Gandhi insisted that he conducted his fasts with love, and that their success depended upon another’s love for him.¹⁷⁰ This distinction was not consistently recognized by subsequent activists who employed hunger in political protests in the post-imperial era. During the 1960s, Cesar Chavez was inspired by Gandhi to fast in the course of his non-violent civil rights campaign on behalf of farm workers in the United States, and Gandhi also inspired militant anti-apartheid activists in South Africa to hunger strike for prison reforms on Robben Island. Gandhi’s love was arguably sustained by the liberal principles of British governance and the publicity of a modern media, both of which protected him, like the suffragettes, from starvation without comment or care. It was harder and more dangerous for prisoners to starve in

¹⁶⁶ Ujjwal Kumar Sing, *Political Prisoners in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁶⁷ Manmathath Gupta, *They Lived Dangerously: Reminiscences of a Revolutionary* (Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1969), 295.

¹⁶⁸ James D. Hunt, *An American Looks at Gandhi* (New Delhi: Promilla & Co., 2005), 102.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 93–112.

¹⁷⁰ *Young India*, 1 May 1924: 145, cited in R. K. Prabhu and U. R. Rao, eds., *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 2002), 36; Joseph Alter, *Gandhi’s Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 28–52; Dennis Dalton, *Gandhi’s Power: Nonviolence in Action* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 139–67.

isolation against an illiberal government that was indifferent to declarations of rights and the display of blood on its hands. Gandhi once observed, “You cannot fast against a tyrant...”¹⁷¹ Nonetheless, the use of hunger as an international tactic of political protest began when British suffragettes took up the “Russian method” from the prisoners of a tyrannical tsarist regime.

¹⁷¹ Letter to George Joseph, 12 Apr. 1924, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 23 (1922–1924), 420.