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Parliamentary History, Volume 25, Part 1, 2006, pp. 88-114 (Article)

Published by Edinburgh University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/pah.2006.0004>

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Opposition by Journalism? The Socialist and Suffragist Press and the Passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1912^{*}

IAN CHRISTOPHER FLETCHER

In April 1912, W. T. Stead, the famous practitioner of the ‘new journalism’, drowned in the sinking of the *Titanic*. Stead was an advocate of ‘government by journalism’, the notion that the press might become the instrument of an aroused public opinion and conscience against the indifference and corruption of the political establishment. Indeed, he had worked with Josephine Butler and other social purity and feminist activists to mobilize popular opinion during a moral panic over ‘white slavery’ in the 1880s, helping pressurise parliament into passing the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) with the publication of his *exposé* of child prostitution, ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon’, in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Even though Stead’s brand of crusading journalism fell far short of moralizing politics and public life, it set a standard for reformers and radicals. In 1912, activists saw a signal opportunity in Stead’s death to relaunch their campaign to legislate increased penalties for procurers and bullies that had failed for several years to make headway in parliament. Giving way to pressure, the Liberal government backed the Criminal Law Amendment (White Slave Traffic) Bill, and this measure, although dogged by controversy, eventually reached the statute book at the end of the year.

In his discussion of romance, Northrop Frye distinguishes between greater and lesser forms of this mythos. In its most developed form, romance involves a quest that ends in recognition of the hero. Frye observes, however, that we can find romance even in the quotidian narrative forms of newspaper comics.¹ Pursuing this insight in connexion with parliament and the press, we might suggest that a popular-political struggle for reform is structured like a romance, with the ups and downs of the campaign to rally people and parliament corresponding to the quest and the eventual legislative victory to the moment of recognition for the reformers.² But if a sort of parliamentary romance was endlessly serialized during the great reform struggles of the nineteenth century, not least of which was the abolition of colonial slavery in the 1830s, we might consider how the radical press complicated and even subverted this romance during the crisis of legitimacy in the Edwardian era.

^{*} My thanks to Karl W. Schweizer, Jean Tucker Fletcher, Yaël Simpson Fletcher, James Garland, Nicole Gilbertson, Rachel Neiwert and Aubrey Underwood. This article is dedicated to Paul McLennan of Atlanta Jobs With Justice.

¹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 186–206.

² For an expansive discussion of ‘democratic romances’ in Victorian popular politics and culture, see Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects. The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1994).

The passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1912) both drew from and contributed to a second white slavery panic, the widespread fear that traffickers were forcing large numbers of innocent young women into an organized, global system of prostitution. The 'moral entrepreneurs' of the social purity organizations and the churches certainly took the lead in steering this panic towards their legislative goal, along the way overcoming the doubts of what Frank Mort calls the 'reluctant state'.³ It is important not to conflate the various actors in the agitation with social purity *en bloc* or with the wider panic, as one undifferentiated manifestation of what the Edwardian social thinker Graham Wallas famously called 'human nature in politics'. Indeed, many socialists and suffragists entered the 'pass the bill' campaign or the controversy surrounding it on consciously oppositional political grounds.

Historians increasingly recognize the intertwined nature of socialism, suffragism, and the social movements of workers and women during this period.⁴ This plural Edwardian left was served by a growing radical press in London, which in 1912 included five suffrage and feminist weeklies, the *Common Cause*, *Freewoman*, *Suffragette*, *Vote*, and *Votes for Women*, the labour and socialist *Daily Herald*, and four socialist weeklies, the *Clarion*, *Justice*, *Labour Leader* and *New Age*.⁵ As Deian Hopkin and

³ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast. Sexuality and the Early Feminists* (New York, 1995), esp. pp. 297–304; Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance. Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin, 1977), chs 7–8; *idem*, *Prostitution and Prejudice. The Jewish Fight against White Slavery 1879–1939* (New York, 1983); Angus McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity. Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870–1930* (Chicago, 1997), ch. 1; Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities. Medical-Moral Politics in England since 1830* (1987), pt. 3; Stefan Petrow, *Policing Morals. The Metropolitan Police and the Home Office, 1870–1914* (Oxford, 1994) pp. 158–75; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society. The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (2nd edn, 1989), ch. 5. The essential starting point for any work on the white slavery panics of the 1880s and the Edwardian era remains, of course, Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society. Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge, 1980); *eadem*, *City of Dreadful Delight. Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992). For a groundbreaking study of moral panics, see Stan Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics. The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (Oxford, 1987).

⁴ For example, see Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement, 1880–1914* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 153–61, 189–92, 284; Christine Collette, *For Labour and for Women. The Women's Labour League, 1906–1918* (Manchester, 1989); Krista Cowman, "'Incipient Toryism"? The Women's Social and Political Union and the Independent Labour Party, 1903–14', *History Workshop Journal*, LIII (2003), 129–48; June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women. Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (2002), ch. 5; Sandra Stanley Holton, *Suffrage Days. Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement* (1996), ch. 5; Karen Hunt, 'Fractured Universality: The Language of British Socialism before the First World War', in *Languages of Labour*, ed. John Belchem and Neville Kirk (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 65–80; Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us. The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (3rd edn, 2000); Laura Ugolini, "'It is Only Justice to Grant Women's Suffrage": Independent Labour Party Men and Women's Suffrage, 1893–1905', in *A Suffrage Reader. New Directions in British Suffrage History*, ed. Claire Eustance, Joan Ryan and Laura Ugolini (2000), pp. 126–44; *eadem*, "'We Must Stand By Our Own Bairs": ILP Men and Suffrage Militancy, 1905–14', *Labour History Review*, LXVII (2002), 149–69. Cf. Donna J. Guy, *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead. The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln, 2000), pp. 155–72, on Argentine socialists and white slavery.

⁵ For the suffragist and feminist press, see the special double issue edited by Ann Heilman, 'Words as Deeds: Literary and Historical Perspectives on Women's Suffrage', *Women's History Review*, XI, 4 (2002) and XII, 1 (2003); David Doughan and Denise Sanchez, *Feminist Periodicals, 1855–1984. An Annotated Critical Bibliography of British, Irish, Commonwealth and International Titles* (New York, 1987), pp. 23–37. For the labour and socialist press, see Deian Hopkin, 'The Socialist Press in Britain, 1890–1910', in *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, ed. George Boyce, James Curran and Pauline Wingate (1978), pp. 294–306; *idem*, 'The Labour Party Press', in *The First Labour Party 1906–1914*, ed. K. D. Brown (1985), pp. 105–28; Huw Richards, *The Bloody Circus. The Daily Herald and the Left* (1997),

Carolyn Malone have shown, the innovations of the new journalism influenced the oppositional press.⁶ Alongside leading articles and political speeches, there were eye-catching cartoons, pithy commentaries on political news, *exposés* and crusades against injustice, and fictional stories and personal essays. This print culture, enlivened by debates among socialists, suffragists, and other Edwardian radicals, was the palpable manifestation of a 'counterpublic sphere'.⁷

The following chapter explores the socialist and suffragist press's engagement with the pass-the-bill campaign and the legislative process in parliament. In re-narrating the twists and turns of this episode, it focuses on press interventions in the effort to secure a second reading for the bill in the Commons, the outcry over weakening amendments agreed during the committee stage, and the controversy over the flogging of procurers agreed by the Commons during the report stage and subsequently ratified by the Lords. Several interrelated aspects of this episode interest me. Mindful of both Nicos Poulantzas's view that the state is a condensation of forces and a terrain of struggle rather than merely an apparatus of class (or gender) power, and the historically specific crisis of representation into which parliament and the party system fell in the years around 1912, I am interested in the radical press's critique of parliament as the legislature of men and the plutocracy rather than of women and the democracy.⁸ Andrew Chadwick argues that public political discourse, conducted chiefly in the press, was a key site for the construction of radical political alliances in the Edwardian era.⁹ Thus, this chapter also addresses the struggle to appropriate the white slavery agitation and forge a 'chain of equivalence' between the socialist and suffragist movements, around the key link of the working-class woman subject as white slave, sweated worker, and potential socialist and suffragist citizen.¹⁰ Finally, in light of Lucy Bland's point that the white slavery panic in 1912 was an intensely racialized event, I am concerned to establish the limits of 'opposition by journalism' in an age of empire as well as democracy.¹¹

⁵ (continued) ch. 1. For the radical and progressive Liberal press, see Alan J. Lee, 'The Radical Press' in *Edwardian Radicalism 1900–1914. Some Aspects of British Radicalism*, ed. A. J. A. Morris (1974), pp. 47–61. A second daily, the *Daily Citizen*, was launched with Labour's official support in the autumn of 1912. See R. J. Holton, 'Daily Herald v. Daily Citizen, 1912–15: The Struggle for a Labour Daily in Relation to the "Labour Unrest"', *International Review of Social History*, XIX (1974), 347–76.

⁶ Deian Hopkin, 'The Left-Wing Press and the New Journalism', in *Papers for the Millions. The New Journalism in Britain, 1850s to 1914* ed. Joel H. Wiener (New York, 1988), pp. 225–41; Carolyn Malone, 'Campaigning Journalism: The *Clarion*, the *Daily Citizen*, and the Protection of Women Workers, 1898–1912', *Labour History Review*, LXVII (2002), 281–97. See also Angela V. John, '“Behind the Locked Door”: Evelyn Sharp, Suffragette and Rebel Journalist', *Women's History Review*, XII (2003), 5–13.

⁷ Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience. Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis, 1993) For the nexus of this print culture and street politics, see Maria DiCenzo, 'Gutter Politics: Women Newsies and the Suffrage Press', *Women's History Review*, XII (2003), 15–33.

⁸ Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism* (1978).

⁹ Andrew Chadwick, *Augmenting Democracy. Political Movements and Constitutional Reform during the Rise of Labour, 1900–1924* (Aldershot, 1999).

¹⁰ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2nd edn, 2001).

¹¹ Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 301–2; cf. Bronwyn Dalley, '“Fresh Attractions”: White Slavery and Feminism in New Zealand, 1885–1928', *Women's History Review* IX (2000), 588.

The early Edwardian era saw the boom and bust of the business cycle, wartime jingoism and an anti-aliens' agitation against Jewish immigrants, the coming to power of the Liberals, and the beginnings of a protest cycle led by militant suffragists, socialists and labourists. Slavery remained a powerful trope, most notably in scandals over Chinese indentured labourers in South Africa and atrocities in the Congo, but also in connexion with sweated labour in the United Kingdom.¹² This was the context for renewed anxiety about the traffic in women. Overshadowed by the constitutional crisis of 1909–11, a conjoint committee of social purity organizations had been negotiating with the home office over the drafting of a Criminal Law Amendment (White Slave Traffic) Bill for several years. In the final version presented to the Commons in the autumn of 1911, four short clauses authorized arrest without warrant of suspected procurers, increased penalties for brothel-keepers, allowed landlords to terminate leases for flats used for prostitution but also established penalties for those who knowingly let flats for such purpose, clarified solicitation by men to include either sex, and increased penalties for bullies living on the earnings of prostitutes. After it was highlighted by the Ladies' National Association and the National Union of Woman Workers, the demand grew around the country for the government to adopt the bill.¹³ However, with the cabinet determined to introduce bills for Irish home rule, manhood suffrage, and Welsh disestablishment under the new Parliament Act, the prospects for such a course were extremely unlikely in the new session of 1912.¹⁴ The anti-suffragist Unionist Arthur Lee, responsible for promoting what remained a private member's bill, was thwarted by his fellow Unionist Sir Frederick Banbury, 'the natural enemy of all Bills', assisted by the Liberal Frederick Handel Booth.¹⁵

In the spring of 1912, labour and suffrage militancy escalated with the miners' and dockers' strikes and the onset of a concerted campaign of property destruction by militants of the Women's Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U.). Many socialists and suffragists rallied against the 'don't shoot' prosecutions of opponents of the deployment of the military during strikes and the forcible feeding of suffrage hunger-strikers.¹⁶ This intensified political contention stimulated parallel debates in the socialist and suffragist movements over the efficacy of 'industrial' or 'militant' versus 'political' or 'constitutional' methods of agitation. Militancy was supposedly embodied in the figures of the 'syndicalist' and the 'suffragette', but there were, in fact, two, three, many militancies on offer, from the highly symbolic non-violent protests undertaken by the Women's Freedom League (W.F.L.) to more diffuse forms of labour and political opposition advocated by various socialist parties and sects.¹⁷ These debates

¹² Malone, 'Campaigning Journalism'.

¹³ *Shield*, November–December 1911, pp. 78–9; The National Archives (P.R.O.), HO 45/10576/178486/28, 31; National Vigilance Association resolutions from South Wales, 13 Dec. 1911, and Scotland, 22 Feb. 1912.

¹⁴ T.N.A. (P.R.O.), HO 45/10576/178486/43: Troup minute, 7 May 1912.

¹⁵ A. G. Gardiner, *Pillars of Society* (1913), p. 339.

¹⁶ Ian Christopher Fletcher, "'Prosecutions ... are Always Risky Business': Labor, Liberals, and the 1912 "Don't Shoot" Prosecutions", *Albion* XXVIII (1996), 251–78.

¹⁷ For suffrage 'militancies', see Laura Mayhall, 'Defining Militancy: Radical Protest, the Constitutional Idiom, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1908–1909', *Journal of British Studies* XXXIX (2000), 369. See also Sandra Holton, 'In Sorrowful Wrath: Suffrage Militancy and the Romantic Feminism

ran through the pages of the socialist and suffragist press, amid discussions of Hilaire Belloc's 'servile state' and H.G. Wells's 'great state', the significance of political democracy for workers' and women's emancipation, and the prospects of labour-socialist and labour-suffrage alliances. Electoral and legislative campaigns continued alongside militant protest. For example, the defeat in March of the Conciliation Bill, a private member's bill crystallizing a carefully crafted compromise on women's suffrage, led the non-militant and non-party National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (N.U.W.S.S.) to establish one month later an election fighting fund for Labour, the only parliamentary party committed to opposing any franchise reform that excluded women.

This may provide us with a clue about suffrage backing for the 'White Slave Traffic' Bill, for it presented a compelling political opportunity in the wake of the Conciliation Bill defeat. The N.U.W.S.S. was the first suffrage organization to press for enactment of the bill; its weekly, the *Common Cause*, had already noted the blocking of the bill a few days before Stead's death.¹⁷ The N.U.W.S.S. president Millicent Garrett Fawcett had long been a social purity advocate as well as 'constitutional' suffragist and was quick to take up the bill.¹⁸ At the end of her "In Memoriam" to Stead in the *Common Cause*, she observed that '[i]t is blocked just as the Bill of 1885 was, but we are not where we were then. We are in a better position', because of Stead.²⁰ In an appreciation written around the same time, Fawcett, a stern critic of suffrage militancy, paradoxically observed that in his 'chivalric campaign' Stead had understood that 'in order to rouse the torpid conscience of the House of Commons, shock tactics were necessary'. She went on to note that, with the new bill before parliament, '[t]he House of Commons shows its old indifference and supineness . . . [The Bill] is always blocked. The Government, while expressing entire approval of it, declines to take it up; it needs behind it the electoral force which it would receive if women had votes.'²¹ She thus adumbrated a major theme of the unfolding agitation, the inseparability of the enfranchisement of women and the suppression of white slavery.

Although the subject of the bill was aired in suffrage speeches and meetings, it probably received the most valuable publicity in the press. On its front pages, the *Common Cause* reproduced a photographic portrait of Stead and then G. F. Watts's painting, 'The Minotaur', which had been inspired by Stead's 1885 crusade into the labyrinth of white slavery.²² Inside, a steady stream of articles detailed the history of

¹⁷ (continued) of Emmeline Pankhurst', in *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Harold L. Smith (Amherst, 1990), pp. 7–24.

¹⁸ *Common Cause*, 11 Apr. 1912, p. 2.

¹⁹ David Rubinstein, *A Different World for Women. The Life of Millicent Garrett Fawcett* (Columbus, 1991), chs 8, 15. Her 'militant' counterpart, the W.S.P.U. leader Emmeline Pankhurst, also had a background in social purity and welfare work in local government. See June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst. A Biography* (2002), chs 4–5.

²⁰ *Common Cause*, 25 Apr. 1912, p. 37. See also *Why I Went to Prison by W. T. Stead. Pass the Criminal Law Amendment (White Slave Traffic) Bill as a Memorial to W. T. Stead. Mrs. Fawcett's Appeal. An Explanation of and a Plea on behalf of the Bill by Joseph King, M.P.* [1912], p. 13.

²¹ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 'W. T. Stead', *Contemporary Review*, May 1912, pp. 609–10, 611.

²² *Common Cause*, 25 Apr. 1912, p. 33; 2 May 1912, p. 49.

the bill and reported on the gathering effort to pass it.²³ Towards the end of May, the *Common Cause* carried the announcement of the formation of the Pass the Bill Committee and two weeks later an appeal for funds.²⁴ The N.U.W.S.S. also issued its own leaflet on the 'White Slave Traffic'.²⁵ By early June, in 'The A.B.C. of Women's Suffrage', the topic of white slavery had been worked into a critique of anti-suffragist arguments that women voters would try 'to make people moral by compulsion'. The likelihood that such legislation would end up an unenforceable 'dead letter', and the necessity of dealing with the 'cause' rather than the 'consequences', was recognized. The 'best' men and women demanded the same reforms, and 'good' men in particular were united with women in opposing white slavery. Offering Josephine Butler's success among 'working men' as proof of 'the essential decency of the average man', the 'A.B.C.' argued that enfranchised women would use their political 'influence' to mobilize 'indifferent' men against the few 'bad' men. Significantly, this argument proceeded from an assumption that the fundamental similarity of men and women trumped differences between them deriving from the latter's 'political and social subjection'.²⁶

The militant suffragist press supported the proposal to pass the bill as a memorial to Stead. Both the *Vote*, the W.F.L. weekly, and *Votes for Women*, the Women's Social and Political Union weekly, immediately devoted column space to the campaign. The *Vote*'s obituary gave equal emphasis to Stead's support for suffrage militancy and his own militancy against white slavery.²⁷ In a leading article, 'Search-lights', the W.F.L. president Charlotte Despard accused the Commons of playing the 'male game of politics' in the face of '[r]evelations' from 'the darkness' of women disappearing into white slavery's 'underworld' and suffering from disease due, ultimately, to their 'economic subjection'.²⁸ In another leader, 'Who Pays?', the W.F.L. activist Nina Boyle pursued the notion that women paid for men's abuse of power, in wars, revolutions, and strikes, in high taxes and low wages, in the double sexual standard and sexually transmitted disease. Drawing on charged racial and sexual stereotypes, she concluded with the examples of 'Black Peril' assaults on white women in South Africa in retaliation for white men's sexual assaults on black women, and the 'traffic in womanhood' organized by 'immigrant Russian and Polish Jews' in retaliation for christian assaults on Jewish women.²⁹ At a W.F.L. meeting, the writer and suffragist

²³ *Ibid.*, 2 May 1912, pp. 53, 60; 9 May 1912, p. 76; 16 May 1912, p. 88.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 23 May 1912, p. 108; 6 June 1912, p. 142.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23 May 1912, p. 105. For a subsequent version of this leaflet, see Fawcett Library, N.U.W.S.S. Pamphlet Collection, 'White Slave Traffic', March 1913.

²⁶ *Common Cause*, 6 June 1912, p. 132.

²⁷ *Vote*, 27 Apr. 1912, p. 29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4 May 1912, p. 44.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1912, p. 92. The simultaneous 'black peril' panic in South Africa and Rhodesia reflected its colonial locations, with concerns about white slavery subordinated to fear of African men's relations with white settler women. By contrast, the *Common Cause* separated its references to white slavery and black peril, emphasized white South African women's critique of 'white peril' (white settler men's sexual liaisons with, and sexual assaults against, African and 'coloured' women), and highlighted the appointment of three white women to an official commission of inquiry. See *Common Cause*, 27 June 1912, pp. 182, 197; 25 July 1912, p. 276; 15 Aug. 1912, p. 333; 22 Nov. 1912, p. 570; Jock McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue. Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902–1935* (Bloomington, 2000);

Laurence Housman argued that parliament had failed to legislate against white slavery even though women were disproportionately affected by such 'problems of civilisation': 'Political questions had taken precedence over this, but if women had direct voting power that Bill would have been treated differently.'³⁰

The W.S.P.U.'s *Votes for Women* had also taken early notice of the blocking of the bill, 'for want of which hundreds of girl victims are shipped abroad every year, while their procurers go scot-free'.³¹ Two front page cartoons took up the white slavery agitation. In 'The Englishwoman's Home', female firefighters used a hose streaming 'votes for women' to battle swirls of flame and smoke labelled 'sweated workers', 'white slaves' and 'child victims'.³² 'Set the White Slaves Free!' showed a svelte suffragette facing H. H. Asquith and David Lloyd George as two uniformed but unkempt gaolers, standing in front of a heavy prison-cell door denoting the 'white slave problem'. As the woman calls for the key to open it, Asquith fiddles with such keys as 'chivalry' and 'waiting and seeing' while Lloyd George hides the right key, 'votes for women', behind his back.³³ However, *Votes for Women* cautioned that the bill was only 'a step in the right direction'.³⁴ It claimed that the women's suffrage agitation had created the 'vitality in the air' evident in several London meetings on white slavery.³⁵ In the course of a wide-ranging talk at a W.S.P.U. meeting, the Labour M. P. George Lansbury, a socialist and suffragist, declared that the blocking of the bill was 'monstrous', that 'A House of Commons which, we are told, takes care of women's interests will not even take care of the interests of little girls', and that suffragettes should remember the noble example of John Brown's sacrifice in the struggle against slavery.³⁶ Although *Votes for Women* presented white slavery as a business of drugging and kidnapping innocent girls, simultaneous coverage of sweated labour and women strikers reminded readers of wider social and industrial forces shaping prostitution.³⁷

Not all advocates of women's emancipation supported the bill. The *Freewoman*, a 'feminist' and 'humanist' weekly edited by the ex-suffragette Dora Marsden, had been exploring problems of sexuality, morality, and the relations between men and women since its first issues appeared in the autumn of 1911.³⁸ Even as it called attention to the problem of prostitution, it criticized the W.S.P.U.'s sensational exploitation of

²⁹ (continued) Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914* (2 vols, 1982), II, ch. 1.

³⁰ *Vote*, 1 June 1912, p. 110.

³¹ *Votes for Women*, 19 Apr. 1912, p. 463.

³² *Ibid.*, 5 Apr. 1912, p. 421.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3 May 1912, p. 481.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 484.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 10 May 1912, p. 507.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 477, 508. See also the letter from James Connolly praising the 'outlaws' of the W.S.P.U. and describing his work among 'the poor women slaves of the mills and factories' of Belfast, *ibid.*, 19 Apr. 1912, p. 460.

³⁸ For thought-provoking accounts of the *Freewoman*, one of the few radical Edwardian periodicals to receive critical attention, see Les Garner, *A Brave and Beautiful Spirit. Dora Marsden 1882-1960* (Aldershot, 1990), ch. 4; Lucy Bland, 'Heterosexuality, Feminism, and *The Freewoman* Journal in Early Twentieth-century England', *Women's History Review*, IV (1995), 5-23; Maroula Joannou, 'The Angel of Freedom: Dora Marsden and the Transformation of *The Freewoman* into *The Egoist*', *Women's History Review*, XI (2002),

the plight of prostitutes and sweated workers in the suffrage cause.³⁹ The conformist and repressive politics of social purity had no appeal for the libertarians and sex radicals among the weekly's contributors and readers. In 'Champions of Morality', after indulging in an anti-Semitic description of trafficking as 'largely in the hands of the Jews', C.H. Norman criticized in detail the clauses of the bill. But the real objects of his attack were the 'persecuting faddists' of the National Vigilance Association, whom he accused along with the home office and even the 'Puritan Labour Party' of an inhumane attitude to prostitutes and hypocritical avoidance of the economic causes of prostitution: 'Nothing but a revolution can sweeten the air of England, and destroy the putrescence of conventional morality.'⁴⁰

In less than two months the 'pass-the-bill-campaign' had united many social purity and suffrage activists, and David Lloyd George was obliged to admit the 'strong feeling' behind the bill.⁴¹ In defining the white slavery agitation in terms that resonated with the suffrage cause, the suffragist press played a key part in this mobilization.⁴² Bending to pressure, by all accounts from the Women's Liberal Federation, the government gave facilities for the bill. In the Commons debate of 10 June, Arthur Lee spoke of 'England' as 'a great clearing-house and depot and dispatch centre of the white slave traffic, and the headquarters of the foreign agents'. Frederick Handel Booth called the bill 'puny', however, and the Radical J. C. Wedgwood declared that 'at the bottom of this prostitution question is the poverty question'. The home secretary Reginald McKenna countered that '[p]overty . . . is one of the great causes of prostitution, but are we to wait until we get rid of the poor before we pass any preventive measures dealing with a great social evil'.⁴³ In the end the bill received its second reading without a division.

This was a remarkable change of fortune, given the long legislative queue, and the radical press offered a range of opinion about its significance. The N.U.W.S.S.'s *Common Cause* called attention to the work of the Ladies' National Association, particularly the hundreds of resolutions from suffrage and other organizations it delivered to the government.⁴⁴ Responding to concerns raised in the Commons' debate, the *Common Cause* acknowledged that only two of the bill's clauses dealt with the procurers and bullies of white slave fame, and that its two other clauses might 'merely lead to the further harrying and blackmailing' of prostitutes. It worried about 'the danger, when an agitation results in the passing of a small measure, that this may delay more

³⁸ (continued) 595–611; Lucy Delap, '“Philosophical Vacuity and Political Ineptitude”: The *Freewoman's* Critique of the Suffrage Movement', *Women's History Review*, XI (2002), 613–30; Cary Franklin, 'Marketing Edwardian Feminism: Dora Marsden, *Votes for Women*, and *The Freewoman*', *Women's History Review*, XI (2002), 631–42.

³⁹ *Freewoman*, 15 Feb. 1912, pp. 241–2; 22 Feb. 1912, pp. 264–6; 29 Feb. 1912, pp. 286–8; 14 Mar. 1912, pp. 324–6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 6 June 1912, pp. 45–6.

⁴¹ Hansard, *Commons Parl. Debs*, 5th ser., XXXIX, col. 294 (6 June 1912).

⁴² Although one Ladies' National Association activist lamented that the misinformed public believed that white slavery 'has something to do with atrocities on the Congo, or something of that kind!' See *Shield*, June 1912, p. 123.

⁴³ Hansard, *Commons Parl. Debs*, 5th ser., XXXIX, cols. 577, 580, 604–5, 611 (10 June 1912).

⁴⁴ *Common Cause*, 13 June 1912, p. 150.

fundamental reforms'. Prostitution, whose abolition required far-reaching changes, would 'be but slightly checked by this Bill'.⁴⁵

The militant press took a rather different line in its commentary. *Votes for Women* described the government's move as 'a concession', intended to 'cool the ardour of the militants' and 'disarm Liberal women'. It admonished Liberal critics of the bill, counter posing their previous 'denunciations of . . . Chinese Slavery' to 'this far more horrible and injurious slavery of women'. Taking issue with the suggestion in the Commons' debate that the bill dangerously increased police powers, it called instead for women police and concluded, '[a]las, the present White Slave Bill is inadequate to save and free these slaves! We must have Votes for Women before that can be done.'⁴⁶ Headlining its comment 'A Tardy Repentance', the *Vote* scorned the notion that the Commons' action was 'proof of its chivalry' and warned of amendments that might 'emasculate' the bill.⁴⁷ In 'The Trend of Legislation', Nina Boyle attributed the progress of the bill to the work of suffragists and 'conjectured' that the government was trying to 'wrest from women's hands a dangerous and effective weapon, and subsequently to pose as benefactors to those disarmed'. She also used Frederick Handel Booth's descriptions of his fellow parliamentarians' apathy and even absence from sittings to score against their claim to represent the people.⁴⁸ Charlotte Despard's leader, 'The Great Conspiracy', argued that 'silence' and '[o]ld watchwords', coupled with measures like the bill, were obfuscating the problems of women and labour. Agitators 'exhaust themselves in words' and 'large ideas' like democracy 'are played with', but 'the House of Commons will be no more democratic than it has been. Still the Cabinet – a little junta of men put in power, not by the nation, but by the more distinguished men of their party – will arbitrarily decree what shall and shall not be dealt with by the People's Representatives.'⁴⁹ A far cry from the romance of reform, such rhetoric disclosed the deepening identification of some suffragists with trafficked women as the churning political situation seemed to endlessly defer enfranchisement.

The *Freewoman's* scepticism, particularly C. H. Norman's attack on the social purity movement, provoked letters from Katherine Vulliamy of the Pass the Bill Committee and other critics who urged the importance of reformers doing something rather than nothing.⁵⁰ Undeterred, Norman offered a far-reaching 'Alternative Bill' criminalizing the economic exploitation of workers by employers, investors, partners, managers, and even government officials.⁵¹ This piece of mock legislation nevertheless crystallized a whole range of issues raised by the white slavery panic and the pass-the-bill-campaign, from the moral and social causes of prostitution to the politics of law and legislation.

The socialist press also offered a critical interpretation of the bill's second reading. Although many socialists sympathized with the suffrage struggle, the press had been

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 20 June 1912, pp. 166, 171–2.

⁴⁶ *Votes for Women*, 14 June 1912, p. 594. An article by John Cameron Grant, 'The White Slave Traffic', argued that antisuffragist support for the bill was a stratagem of the 'Anti Reformer' to offer a concession rather than meet the demand of the 'Reformer' (p. 595).

⁴⁷ *Vote*, 15 June 1912, pp. 133–4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 135–6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 29 June 1912, pp. 174–5.

⁵⁰ *Freewoman*, 13 June 1912, pp. 75–6, 79; 20 June 1912, pp. 96–7; 27 June 1912, pp. 118–19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20 June 1912, p. 84.

caught up in the 'don't shoot' prosecutions and the dockers' strike and did not initially cover the campaign. Now this lack of attention began to change. Using melodramatic language to describe '[t]he ghouls who fatten on the shame and infamy of women, who lure their victims abroad by specious promises and grow wealthy by their utter ruin and early death', Tom Grooms observed in the *Clarion*, Robert Blatchford's independent weekly, that 'the Bill before Parliament may do something to stop the exportation of these white slaves, but it will be the exportation only'. While apparently accepting the claim that 'syndicates' controlled trafficking, he suggested that a steady flow of 'victims' was supplied by 'firms with Royal warrants' paying low wages to their women workers.⁵² There was opposition to feminism in some circles, most notoriously the social democratic 'old guard' that dominated the new British Socialist Party (B.S.P.). Mentioning the legislation for the first time, the B.S.P. weekly *Justice* commented that it 'deals with effects and not with causes' and even offered rare praise of Booth, a Liberal from the employer class, for his criticisms of the bill.⁵³

Labour unrest and suffrage militancy did not abate during the summer of 1912. The prolonged stoppage on the docks finally ended in defeat but not before the strikers and their families had been reduced from defiance to misery. No sooner had the last of the springtime's suffrage prisoners been released than even more spectacular forms of militancy by arson and axe were attempted in England and Ireland. The results of several three-cornered by-elections pitting official Labour and unofficial socialist candidates against Liberal and Unionist candidates gave mixed signals about the prospects of the old progressive alliance and new labour-socialist-suffrage combinations. Moreover, violence in Belfast shipyards and a great Unionist demonstration at Blenheim were signs of popular and parliamentary mobilization on the right.

The white slavery and women's suffrage agitation became more tightly entwined, with Sylvia Pankhurst noting that one of the old slogans from the Peterloo era being resurrected for a W.S.P.U. Hyde Park rally, 'Let Us Vote like Men and Not be Sold Like Slaves', was 'peculiarly appropriate today, in view of the horrible white slave traffic'.⁵⁴ Parliament at the committee stage in late June and early July gave new impetus to the pass-the-bill campaign. Enlarging the bill to six clauses and removing 'White Slave Traffic' from its title, the standing committee made substantive changes including limiting the power to arrest procurers on suspicion, without a warrant, to police sergeants and officers of higher rank.⁵⁵ The *Common Cause* urged women to attend committee meetings at Westminster and support the bill's parliamentary friends.⁵⁶ It covered a large Kensington Town Hall meeting on 10 July which approved a resolution opposing 'weakening amendments' and calling for the bill's enactment during the session. In moving the resolution, Lady Bunting of the Pass the Bill Committee made the point that '[l]aw cannot do everything but something

⁵² *Clarion*, 14 June 1912, p. 4.

⁵³ *Justice*, 15 June 1912, p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Daily Herald*, 13 July 1912, p. 2.

⁵⁵ W. Alex. Coote, 'The White Slave Traffic Bill', *Englishwoman*, August 1912, pp. 130–4; J. Howard Whitehouse, 'Parliament and the White Slave Traffic Bill', *Contemporary Review*, November 1912, pp. 668–72; *Shield*, August 1912, pp. 17–18; September–October 1912, p. 152; *Pass the Bill. The Criminal Law Amendment Bill, 1912. For the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic* [1912].

⁵⁶ *Common Cause*, 11 July 1912, pp. 228, 230.

can be done by legislation. It can make the traffic in human beings difficult.' The socialist suffragist Ethel Snowden went further in seconding the resolution, arguing that 'governments and institutions are the last people in the world to understand the trend of public opinion; they act only when public opinion is strong enough to compel them to act'.⁵⁷ When the *Common Cause* distanced itself from the bill's provision for the flogging of procurers, letters from readers indicated that not all suffragists agreed with this stand.⁵⁸

The militant suffrage press also devoted space to the fate of the legislation. *Votes for Women* was quick to announce that the bill was 'already being watered down' and predicted that the amendment limiting the power of arrest would make it 'a dead letter'. It contrasted concerns about wrongful arrest of men under the bill with the fact that any constable could arrest a woman 'who may be perfectly innocent and respectable' for solicitation.⁵⁹ *Votes for Women* published a long article on the morrow of the standing committee's completion of its work. According to Mildred E. Mansel, the bill's fate provided 'an object-lesson' for women about what they could expect from 'a man-made Parliament responsible to men only', a lesson 'more effective as Suffrage propaganda than volumes of spoken arguments'. Its first clause on power of arrest represented '[t]he whole crux of the question'. Pointing to the power of the police to detain would-be burglars without warrant, she suggested that parliament was more solicitous of property-holders than endangered women. There was a 'wider issue raised by these deliberations': 'It is impossible not to see that the whole tone of the proceedings in Committee demonstrates the fundamental difference of the point of view of the average man and woman, or certainly of the feminist in matters affecting the sexes.' Parliamentarians tolerated 'vice of a certain kind' and were unwilling to contemplate a serious effort to eliminate 'the social evil'. While avowing that '[w]omen do not believe that morality will be brought about by an Act of Parliament', Mansel claimed that it was mainly men's acceptance of prostitution that allowed it to continue. She concluded by arguing that men were incapable of solving social problems without women, and that women had to be enfranchised to work effectively with men: 'Meanwhile, this masquerade of a Bill is inflaming women's hearts with a new and well-founded indignation.'⁶⁰ Weeks later, *Votes for Women* warned again that women's lack of representation in the deliberations on the bill meant that it would 'probably fail . . . to achieve its purpose'.⁶¹

The *Vote* attributed the amending of the bill to a 'coward panic' on the part of men.⁶² In a leader, 'The Rallying Point', Charlotte Despard addressed the 'crisis in the woman's movement' occasioned by the exclusion of women from the terms of the government's Manhood Suffrage Bill and declared the W.F.L.'s support for Labour candidates in upcoming by-elections. She chose the 'white slave', the 'woman-worker', and the 'mother' to figure the subordination of women, and

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 18 July 1912, p. 257.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 25 July 1912, p. 263; 1 Aug. 1912, p. 298.

⁵⁹ *Votes for Women*, 28 June 1912, p. 631.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1912, p. 695.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13 Sept. 1912, p. 801.

⁶² *Vote*, 13 July 1912, p. 202.

among the deficiencies of man-made legislation she noted that the Criminal Law Amendment Bill 'barely touches the real criminal'. Her vision of emancipation through enfranchisement foresaw not only a liberal revolution in women's individual opportunities but also a moral reformation of public life: 'Acts of Parliament, we are told, cannot stamp out vice. Public opinion can. Woman, the worker, the citizen, the mother, put in her own place, will so mould public opinion that forms of vice which are now tolerated by even good men and women will become impossible.'⁶³ C. Merivale Meyer's 'The Sham of the White Slave Traffic Bill' acknowledged 'the utter hopelessness of expecting even-handed justice' when 'the one sex which governs the world is the sex whose nauseating and unbridled lust has brought the whole traffic into being'. She traced '[t]he insincerity of the whole Parliamentary attitude' betrayed in debate to a 'mental and moral outlook . . . rendered oblique owing to the pernicious influence of their education and the habits of their life'. Parliament would not produce 'a modern *Theseus*', for its members were identical with the wealthy and powerful men whose sexual demand was supplied by the traffic. The 'experiment' of the bill had demonstrated that women needed the vote 'to force men to do justice'.⁶⁴ A cartoon with the title 'Who Let the Cat Out of the Bag?' showed a cat wearing a 'double moral standard' bow and carrying a 'white slave traffic bill' mouse in its teeth out of the Palace of Westminster gate.⁶⁵ Although it suggested that the bill was politically dead, a companion article did indicate that eliminating the restriction of the power of arrest without warrant would make it 'an effectual instrument of protection for innocent victims against the infamous agents of this vile traffic, who use every imaginable wile by which to ensnare these poor women and girls'.⁶⁶

In hewing to its independent 'humanist' line of discussing sex, marriage and divorce, and the economics and politics of freedom, the heterodox *Freewoman* deepened its criticisms of the limited horizons of the suffrage movement. In a leader, 'Ideas, or No Ideas?', Dora Marsden argued that neither militants nor non-militants had developed a programme or philosophy to address the aftermath of women's enfranchisement. She instanced participation in the pass-the-bill-campaign as symptomatic of 'a movement dangerous in proportion to its uninformedness': 'The White Slave Traffic Bill is . . . a tinkering business, with advantages almost infinitesimal, and with very distinct and threatening disadvantages.'⁶⁷ M.P. Willcocks responded to this condemnation by claiming that suffragism and feminism had a far-reaching programme of political reform, yet agreed that the bill was 'a cynical farce' in an exclusively male-ruled state.⁶⁸ A few weeks before her weekly ceased publication, Marsden delivered a final furious blast which mixed in all too typical Edwardian fashion anarchism, anti-capitalism and anti-Semitism. Entitled 'The Slave', her leader addressed the illusions of 'white-labour emancipationists, women and men', who confused rights and the vote for real power. The Labour party came in for special scorn: 'these Britons get up and lie down in

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 13 July 1912, p. 210.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 Sept. 1912, p. 337.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 14 Sept. 1912, p. 351.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

⁶⁷ *Freewoman*, 11 July 1912, p. 143.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 July 1912, p. 175.

slavery'. While anti-parliamentary tendencies in the popular movement held promise, she still felt obliged to reveal 'the true secret of the absurdity of Parliamentarians and political reforms': the abject relation of parliament to the military, police, and administrative apparatuses of 'Government' and the monopoly interests served by them. The notion that '[t]he Englishman is the Slave' of state and capital was a long way from the romance of parliament and the people united to put down white slavery.⁶⁹

The socialist press's coverage of the bill's progress was uneven, with the B.S.P.'s *Justice* remaining silent on the issue throughout the summer. What coverage there was revealed sharpening divisions over the measure. The *New Age*, A. R. Orage's heterodox independent weekly, which was elaborating a guild socialist position to supersede both political socialism and industrial syndicalism, sounded like the *Freewoman*. Asserting that white slavery was 'a peculiarly dangerous subject for legislation', it warned that the bill 'does nothing but add to the powers of the police': 'It ignores the causes, economic or otherwise, of prostitution: it ignores the medical diagnosis of prostitution as feeble-mindedness: it revives and extends the old passion for punishment.'⁷⁰ In the *Clarion*, Mary Tattersall gave 'a certain measure of approval' to the bill in her 'Woman's Outlook' column, 'although it does not but amount to a ... patching of a particularly weak spot in our social system'. She noted that '[w]omen of all minds and degrees' were inquiring into the economic causes of prostitution.⁷¹ With male parliamentarians looking exclusively after the interests of their male constituents, she described the work of the standing committee as 'a mere discussion as to the merits and demerits, the woes and tribulations of people who are quite able to look after themselves', and its amendments 'as gradually altering the intention and scope of the Bill'.⁷² The rebel *Daily Herald* reported the 'killing' of the bill and, in a melodramatic trope redolent of the days of Stead's crusade, sought to arouse indignation by telling the tale of a kidnapped English girl in a Belgian brothel, '[t]ied on a bed ... in a veritable frenzy of raging despair'.⁷³ In the pages of its 'Women and Citizenship' section it subsequently rehearsed the debate over economic exploitation, sexual domination, and the causes of prostitution.⁷⁴

Occasionally, this shifting between the discursive registers of the 'sexual' and the 'social' became deranged. Inspired by two recently published *exposés*, Fenner Brockway, the young editor of the *Labour Leader*, penned 'Stop the White Slave Traffic!'⁷⁵ After highlighting the coercion of white women in both the west and the

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 12 Sept. 1912, pp. 321–3. Attacked by suffragists and anti-suffragists alike, the journal was put out of business by commercial distributors refusing to carry it.

⁷⁰ *New Age*, 11 July 1912, p. 248.

⁷¹ *Clarion*, 21 June 1912, p. 3.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 12 July 1912, p. 3.

⁷³ *Daily Herald*, 8 July 1912, p. 2. See also reports of pass the bill campaign and standing committee meetings, *Ibid.*, 9 July 1912, p. 2; 12 July 1912, pp. 2, 6; 18 July 1912, p. 3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 Sept. 1912, p. 2; 23 Sept. 1912, p. 2.

⁷⁵ One of these *exposés* was Mrs Archibald Mackirdy and W. N. Willis, *The White Slave Market* (1912). Mackirdy was the pen name of Olive Christian Malvery, the well-known Edwardian woman journalist of the everyday and the exotic, and she had already pledged to donate a portion of her earnings to the W.S.P.U. See *Votes for Women*, 12 July 1912, p. 672; Judith R. Walkowitz, 'The Indian Woman, the Flower Girl, and the Jew: Photojournalism in Edwardian London', *Victorian Studies*, XLII (1998–9), 3–46.

east, he made a vague call for 'international action' as well as specific recommendations for long prison terms and 'regular floggings' for the 'beasts' who 'outrage the body, damn the soul, and leave their victim to die from horrible disease'. While acknowledging 'the danger of placing more power in the hands of the police', Brockway argued rather disingenuously that the suppression of trafficking would eliminate the 'possibility of wrongful arrest' and went on to suggest that the surveillance of traffickers and rescue of women was a relatively straightforward matter. Turning to the wider problem of prostitution, Brockway argued that its 'economic motive . . . can at least be abolished' by socialism. The accompanying cartoon depicted a Gothic scene in which a dark-haired maiden is pinned to the rocks and menaced by a dragon with 'white slave traffic' inscribed on its scales. Coming to her rescue through the brambles was a flaxen-haired knight on whose armour is inscribed 'economic freedom'.⁷⁶ Here was a strong assertion of the 'Puritan' current of the I.L.P.'s ethical socialism. The *Labour Leader* subsequently received a brief flurry of letters from readers, including one offering 'warm support' and another confessing to be 'somewhat amazed' that Brockway had endorsed flogging.⁷⁷

Revelations of white slavery and the social evil in the United States and the British empire seemed to proliferate in the press, reflecting editorial investment in the newsworthiness of such stories.⁷⁸ Significantly, politically ambiguous uses of race shadowed the construction of the white slavery agitation as the successor of the nineteenth-century anti-slavery cause. Speakers and writers continued to recall the charge of 'Chinese slavery' levelled by Liberals against Unionists during the 1906 general election. According to Joseph Clayton, the contrast was between a party-political concoction and a genuinely popular-political movement that could not be manipulated by the Liberals or resolved without women's suffrage.⁷⁹ For Winifred Mayo, the point of comparison was that '[t]he horrors of white slavery are far greater than those attendant upon "Chinese Slavery"'.⁸⁰ On the *Daily Herald's* 'Women and Citizenship' page, the W.F.L. activist Nina Boyle made similar invidious distinctions in response to Sir Roger Casement's investigation of the abuse of indigenous people in the Putumayo region of Peru:

It seems it is quite sufficient to be a coloured man to enlist the sympathy of British philanthropists, parliamentarians, politicians and other public persons. Not

⁷⁵ (continued) It received generally positive reviews in the suffrage press: *Common Cause*, 25 July 1912, pp. 276–7; *Vote*, 13 July 1912, p. 209; *Votes for Women*, 26 July 1912, p. 698. For criticisms of Mackirdy and Willis's support for flogging and state regulation of brothels, see *Common Cause*, and for criticisms of their racism, see *Shield*, Aug. 1912, pp. 143–4. The *New Age* ridiculed the book as 'an evilly sensational epitome of this evilly sensational world', and noted the irony of the authors' call for greater police power even though their 'novel' included tales of police corruption. *New Age*, 1 Aug. 1912, pp. 329–30. For Mackirdy's outraged response, threatening a lawsuit and noting that reviews in other papers had suggested her book 'would push through the Bill', see *New Age*, 8 Aug. 1912, p. 359.

⁷⁶ *Labour Leader*, 22 Aug. 1912, p. 539.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 29 Aug. 1912, p. 564.

⁷⁸ For the U.S., see *Vote*, 28 Sept. 1912, p. 382; *Votes for Women*, 14 June 1912, p. 595. For Ceylon and India, see *Common Cause*, 8 Aug. 1912, p. 307; *Vote*, 14 Sept. 1912, p. 352. For 'A Barry Girl's Privations in South America' and 'Warnings at Home', see *Vote*, 10 Aug. 1912, p. 278; 28 Sept. 1912, p. 382.

⁷⁹ *Daily Herald*, 9 July 1912, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Labour Leader*, 12 Sept. 1912, p. 596.

one word, however, has been published in your paper, nor in other journals, nor has anything been disclosed in the parliamentary discussions on the Criminal Law Amendment (White Slave Traffic) Bill about the atrocities committed on persons of young girls and women, entrapped to provide amusement and indulgence for some men and profits for others.

According to Boyle, 'Negrophile philanthropists' and other members of the public were indifferent to trafficking, even though it was 'infinitely more shocking than the Congo or Putumayo atrocities'. As a consequence, the 'modest Bill ... has had the eyes picked out in committee and its usefulness destroyed'.⁸¹ Boyle's crude race-baiting reflected the unforged links in the chains of equivalence between struggles and, consequently, the perceived competition for public and parliamentary attention. It betrayed a deep ambivalence over any genuine equation between the claims of white women and those of colonial subjects and people of colour.

The autumn of 1912 was a turning point in the Edwardian crisis, as formations on the left disintegrated while the threat from the right began to take definite shape. In the middle of October the W.S.P.U. revealed a split in its leadership. With Emmeline and Frederick Pethick Lawrence taking *Votes for Women* with them, Christabel Pankhurst launched a new weekly, the *Suffragette*. A less spectacular but no less significant split between old-guard social democrats and a younger generation of militant socialists and syndicalists reduced the British Socialist Party. With no certainty of success, suffragists lobbied for women's suffrage amendments to the Home Rule and Manhood Suffrage Bills. In a quixotic by-election bid, the Labour member George Lansbury resigned his East End seat and stood unsuccessfully as an independent suffragist. A formidable and disciplined Right showed itself in Ulster, where hundreds of thousands of unionists signed a Solemn League and Covenant on 28 September, and in parliament, where the opposition surprised the government in a snap division on a clause of the Home Rule Bill and delayed the work of the Commons for a week in November.

Soon after the autumn sitting began, the home secretary responded to 'manifestations of opinion in the country' by announcing that the government intended to press for the restoration of the bill's original clause empowering police constables to arrest without warrant suspected procurers.⁸² This commitment met the demand of the broad social-purity and suffrage forces supporting the bill and roused hopes for its enactment by the end of the session. The first day of the report stage saw the Commons return clause one to its original form. By a very narrow majority, the members also increased the severity of clause two by granting the court discretion to order the flogging of male procurers on first offence. According to McKenna, flogging would be useful against 'quite a number of young men almost entirely of foreign origin' whose presence indicated that 'London has become the dumping ground from countries all over the world'.⁸³ Several more days were taken up on

⁸¹ *Daily Herald*, 15 Aug. 1912, p. 2. The letter, reprinted in *Vote*, 24 Aug. 1912, p. 312, was a broadside aimed at the mainstream rather than militant press.

⁸² Hansard, *Commons Parl. Debs*, 5th ser., XLII, col. 781 (14 October 1912); The National Archives (P.R.O.), HO 45/10576/178486/158: Criminal Law Amendment Bill 1912 deputation transcript, 14 Oct. 1912; *Criminal Law Amendment Bill, 1912. Memorandum by the Conjoint Committee* (1912).

⁸³ Hansard, *Commons Parl. Debs*, 5th ser., XLIII, col. 769 (1 Nov. 1912).

the bill, climaxing with another debate on the flogging of pimps and bullies on 12 November. Arthur Lee asked his fellow members to imagine 'not merely foreigners, not merely debased Englishmen, but dozens of Negroes in the West End of London running white English girls on the streets'. Another member invoked the example of the flogging of Africans: 'You may say in that case you are dealing with a Kaffir. You are dealing with the brutal nature of the Kaffir, and here you are dealing with the brutal nature of the white man and you should deal with them in the same way.' Conceding defeat, Booth reminded his listeners that he had taken part in Stead's crusade as a young man and declared that the new measure did not 'touch the fringe of the question'.⁸⁴ The bill received its third reading, again without a division, even as the Pass the Bill Committee marshalled its supporters at a grand public meeting in the London Opera House.

The Lords took up the bill two weeks later, with Viscount Haldane, the lord chancellor, counselling his fellow peers that the white slave traffic 'attended with the most disastrous consequences to the State'. Lord Willoughby de Broke opined that 'it is most damaging to the prestige of this country in India that any black man should be able to have access to any white woman of that description who is plying this trade under the British flag'. The Lords completed its work in relatively short order, although not before Earl Lytton, brother of the suffragette Lady Constance Lytton, had suggested that branding was better than flogging.⁸⁵ In the Commons, Lee urged enactment of the bill before white slavers could take advantage of 'Christmas shopping, when an unusually large number of young girls are about the streets'. Vainly resisting the bill being 'pressed forward by panic', Wedgwood called the measure 'the outcome of hysterical hypocrisy' and 'a corrupt policeman's further endowment act'.⁸⁶ Enlarged to seven clauses and authorizing the flogging of procurers (but not men and women who subsisted on prostitutes' earnings), the bill received the royal assent on 13 December.⁸⁷ Social purity stalwarts like Lady Bunting of the Pass the Bill Committee expected that more steps would follow and that 'Sir Galahads will multiply in our midst'.⁸⁸

This final phase of the legislative process sharply posed the question of suffragist support for a flawed measure. The *Common Cause* was encouraged by the restoration of clause one, but pointed out in connection with clause two that flogging was 'brutalising' and 'degrading' to all involved.⁸⁹ It subsequently reported that the report stage was being conducted 'on the whole wisely' and noted the failure of an amendment which would have forced single prostitutes out of their flats and into living arrangements with bullies.⁹⁰ In recounting the London Opera House meeting, the *Common Cause* twice referred to Lady Barlow's lone 'protest' against flogging. This attention to her dissent was underscored by descriptions of the 'fervour of its speeches and the ardent concurrence of the audience'. Significantly, the report concluded with the

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, cols 1901, 1908, 1949 (12 Nov. 1912).

⁸⁵ Hansard, *Lords Parl. Debs*, 5th ser., XII, cols 1181, 1212 (28 Nov. 1912).

⁸⁶ Hansard, *Commons Parl Debs*, 5th ser., XVI, cols 700, 705, 724 (11 Dec. 1912).

⁸⁷ *Shield*, January 1913, p. 14.

⁸⁸ M. H. L. Bunting, 'The White Slave Crusade', *Contemporary Review*, January 1913, p. 52.

⁸⁹ *Common Cause*, 8 Nov. 1912, p. 530.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14 Nov. 1912, p. 547.

observation that 'the great majority' of those present were suffragists.⁹¹ There is a hint of disenchantment here, but events were overtaking the N.U.W.S.S. The defeat of the women's suffrage amendment to the Home Rule Bill on 5 November was a worrying sign of what lay ahead for the Manhood Suffrage Bill.

By contrast, the white slavery agitation was one of the pivots by which the W.S.P.U. and the W.F.L. turned towards working-class women. In a cartoon, 'Liberalism Begins at Home', *Votes for Women* depicted the W.S.P.U. as a helmeted woman warrior wielding her sword to protect another woman, bound by ropes inscribed 'voteless women', 'sweated labour', 'white slaves', and 'child victims', while the tearful inkpot of the Liberal press waved its quill-arms in an attempt to stop the war over Macedonia between the Ottoman empire and the Balkan states.⁹² At the W.S.P.U.'s Albert Hall meeting announcing the split, Emmeline Pankhurst argued not only that white slavery justified suffrage militancy but also that 'legal developments' concerning white slavery showed the necessity of women's suffrage. Without the power of the vote to 'establish a single moral code' women would remain vulnerable to 'the vicious sections of the population inside Parliament as well as outside it'. George Lansbury claimed that parliament was 'only tinkering with the question' and warned that 'you can pass all the White Slave Traffic Bills you like, but the real thing to do with prostitution, destitution . . . is to remove the cause that led to them'.⁹³ The new W.S.P.U. weekly, the *Suffragette*, believed that the government would secure passage of the bill 'in its original form' so as to avoid provoking the suffragists, but the measure would not be enforced and trafficking would continue. Sensitive to the humanitarian case against flogging, it put forward the alternative of 'a longer term of imprisonment for these beasts of prey'.⁹⁴ While the strengthening of the bill represented the government's 'abject surrender', the still 'imperfect' and 'partial' nature of the bill necessitated 'a moral and a legislative revolution' based on women's suffrage.⁹⁵ The *Suffragette* was 'glad' when the bill was further amended to make women, like men, liable for living on the earnings of prostitutes, and scorned those in the labour movement who worried about police power only when men (rather than women accused of solicitation) were its targets.⁹⁶ With parliamentary consideration of the Manhood Suffrage Bill coming on, the W.S.P.U. activist Flora Drummond announced plans for a deputation of women workers (explicitly contrasted to 'rich women' and 'ladies') to seek out the prime minister and the chancellor of the exchequer and demand suffrage in order to deal with the 'three terrible evils' of sweated labour, white slavery and sexual assaults on children.⁹⁷ The W.S.P.U. now asked working women to 'stand up for your sisters' in their own collective interest.⁹⁸ In 'Burnt Letters', a leader refuting criticisms of the new tactic of damaging the contents of letter-boxes, Christabel Pankhurst argued that

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 22 Nov. 1912, p. 564.

⁹² *Votes for Women*, 11 Oct. 1912: This was the last issue as the organ of the W.S.P.U.

⁹³ *Suffragette*, 25 Oct. 1912, pp. 16–7.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 Nov. 1912, pp. 46–47.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 Nov. 1912, p. 63.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29 Nov. 1912, p. 95.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13 Dec. 1912, p. 135.

suffrage was the key to the pay disparities between the 'enfranchised class' of male workers and the exploited class of female workers. One of militancy's goals was to 'abolish White Slavery'.⁹⁹

The *Vote* also gestured towards working women with a cartoon entitled 'The Scylla and Charybdis of the Working Woman' depicting a woman sailing between cliffs of 'sweated labour' and the 'white slave traffic'.¹⁰⁰ In a leader, 'The Game of Grab', Nina Boyle saw no evidence of 'any opportunity, any opening' for women. Apart from 'the scattered, few, chivalrous souls', men pursued sectional interests and party advantage.¹⁰¹ While admitting some W.F.L.ers were 'distressed' by the inclusion of flogging in the bill, she dodged the issue: 'We do not intend to go into this question, seeing that, in the first place, we have not been consulted, and in the second, many urgent matters claim our immediate attention. The infliction of flogging . . . is a question in which possibly we may be justified in leaving men to deal with their own sex by their own methods.' The drawback of the alternative of 'sentences of life-long segregation' was that some of 'those who are worse than wild beasts' might eventually be released.¹⁰² Boyle herself applauded the Commons for strengthening the bill's 'emasculated' clause one and including flogging in clause two.¹⁰³ With the Commons debating what to do with women traffickers, the *Vote* called for the same punishment for women and men as 'moral lepers' who should be banished from society.¹⁰⁴ Then, with the bill going to the Lords and Mrs Bramwell Booth of the Salvation Army claiming she had information about a trafficking case on the high seas, the *Vote* again chose to pit white English women against men of colour under the heading 'Modern Don Quixotes':

Under strong pressure from an angry public, the Government has consented to an inquiry into the Putumayo atrocities – committed by foreigners under a foreign Government on Negroes and Peruvian natives, and only technically within British jurisdiction. Terribly strong feeling has been aroused; much expense is being incurred; the doughty Sir Roger Casement – the modern *preux chevalier* and righter of wrongs – has been sent hither and thither; and there will be quite a row, whether the law can reach the directors or not. . . . The Barbadoes natives enticed to the rubber area will be avenged; the fifteen young English girls now on their way to Buenos Ayres in the charge of a foreign 'agent', will, we venture to suggest, never be heard of again. . . . What is the Government, which can make such a fuss about Negro men, going to do about these English girls? What is the House of Commons going to do? . . . What is Mr. Handel Booth doing?¹⁰⁵

Pursuing another line of criticism while the Lords considered the bill, the *Vote* took issue with 'consistent attempts in the House of Commons and out of it' to conflate the particular problem of white slavery, defined as 'the system of entrapping

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1912, p. 114.

¹⁰⁰ *Vote*, 5 Oct. 1912, p. 397.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 19 Oct. 1912, p. 438.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 9 Nov. 1912, p. 18.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 16 Nov. 1912, p. 38.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 23 Nov. 1912, p. 58.

innocent girls by fraud, and exporting or imprisoning them for immoral profits', and the general problem of prostitution and its varied causes and conditions. Ordinary prostitutes shared in their earnings, while white slaves 'are made to furnish profits which they themselves never handle'. Attributing white slavery to sweated women's labour under capitalism obscured men's depraved sexual conduct: 'what amazes us, and strikes fear into us is the conspiracy of silence . . . in regard to the root cause, the offender, the source of the profits – the "consumer"'.¹⁰⁶ To underline the futility of half-measures like the bill, the *Vote* published a Gertrude Colmore short story recounting a conversation in a train compartment among several passengers, including a parliamentarian and a clergyman, about how to stop trafficking. The end of the story reveals the identity of the anti-suffragist woman who nevertheless claims that only women's suffrage will abolish the trade: '“I'm a procuress, and I know.”'¹⁰⁷ While the *Vote* noted 'an exodus of White Slavers from Great Britain to the Continent' and the formation of a white slavery unit at Scotland Yard, no claim of victory accompanied the passage of the bill.¹⁰⁸

Newly independent, *Votes for Women* re-affirmed the Pethick Lawrences' ethical rather than class-conscious suffragism. Women were 'a subject race' because of their 'bondage to fear'; one result of women's intimidation and inaction was 'that girls should be sold and exported like bales of merchandise'.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, the bill 'continues to arouse controversy among advocates, real and pretended, of reform'. In the absence of women's suffrage and recognition of the human equality of men and women, proffered solutions 'have a strong tendency to press unjustly on the victims while the slaver goes free'.¹¹⁰ The overlap of the Criminal Law Amendment and Home Rule Bills in parliament allowed *Votes for Women* to forge a rhetorical chain of associations between (anti-)slavery, suffrage, Ireland and women. An essay eulogizing the radical American abolitionist John Brown resonated with the notion that suffrage was part of a broader movement for women's emancipation and that militancy was a morally justified response to illegitimate legal authority.¹¹¹ This spiritual ideal of militant sacrifice re-appeared in fictional form in 'The Death of the Duchess', a Beatrice Harraden short story which traced the fate of an aristocratic anti-suffragist who was overwhelmed by white slavery revelations, suddenly recognized the justice of the suffrage cause and was inspired to speak up at an Irish home rule meeting in the Albert Hall when suffragette hecklers were manhandled, and consequently met her own death at the hands of stewards.¹¹² *Votes for Women* went on to contrast the home rulers' refusal to support the suffrage demand of 'white women' with Daniel O'Connell's solidarity with enslaved black people in 1830.¹¹³ Indeed, the rejection of the women's suffrage amendment to the Home Rule Bill 'on Guy Fawkes' night' prompted *Votes for Women*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 30 Nov. 1912, p. 74.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 7 Dec. 1912, p. 96.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 Dec. 1912, p. 131.

¹⁰⁹ *Votes for Women*, 25 Oct. 1912, p. 56.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1 Nov. 1912, p. 66.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 8 Nov. 1912, p. 89.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 15 Nov. 1912, p. 103.

to denounce all the parliamentary parties and the Commons as a whole: 'The House of Commons as a body of honourable men is a myth; it has no more substance in fact than the legends of King Arthur or the tales of the Arabian Nights. The real House of Commons is a collection of well meaning but impotent men, who, when they are not coerced by their constituencies, are driven like sheep by the Party Whips.'¹¹⁴

Emmeline Pethick Lawrence condemned the Criminal Law Amendment Bill after its third reading: 'It is a poor Bill, an absolutely inadequate Bill, and in some respects a bad Bill. It will not stop the White Slave Traffic. It does not attack the root of the evil. It hardly touches the great financial interests that are at stake. It is not sane legislation.' The punishment of flogging was worse than useless. White slavery was 'a great commercial organisation' that arranged and directed the kidnapping and coercing of women into a system of prostitution on a global scale. She nevertheless believed that it could be smashed: 'People sometimes say that you cannot make men and women moral by Act of Parliament. But nobody has ever said and nobody could ever attempt to maintain that you cannot kill a trade by Act of Parliament. The traffic in Negro slaves . . . was killed by legislation.' Women's suffrage would give women 'power over legislation', the only means to 'overthrow the White Slave Traffic as an organized financial concern'. While she recognized that trafficking was 'a comparatively small part of a very great evil', largely supplied by poor women unable to live on their low wages, 'yet to put an end to the organized traffic in white women slaves is worth fighting for. And one part of the problem having been dealt with, it would be easier to attack the rest.'¹¹⁵

Pethick Lawrence wrote two more articles about the connexion between white slavery and the demand for the vote. Once again making the analogy between the 'Black Slave Traffic' and the 'White Slave Trade', she argued that the suffrage 'crusade' was 'a Holy War first and a political agitation second'. Downplaying the notion of women as political actors and bearers of political rights, she explained the mobilization of women in maternalist terms: 'One of the very finest ideals that women have to live for is that of race-development. This is essentially women's business.' Men in 'Puritan times' and since had only been able to devise 'penal laws', while what was needed was 'constructive legislation'.¹¹⁶ She called for the uplifting of women workers, the 'financial security and independence' of wives and mothers, and the incorporation of women into the 'administrative system' of the poor law, the police, and the courts, but these measures were predicated, first and foremost, on the enfranchisement of women.¹¹⁷

If the suffragist press was struggling to settle accounts with the parliamentary romance surrounding the bill in the last months of 1912, the socialist press tended to focus on the bill's controversial policing and flogging clauses as examples of class legislation. Nevertheless, political differences and the fact that most of the socialist papers published interventions by women as well as men generated a range of views.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 Nov. 1912, p. 88.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 22 Nov. 1912, p. 114. For recognition that the bill had been strengthened during the report stage, see *ibid.*, 8 Nov. 1912, p. 94.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29 Nov. 1912, p. 137.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1912, p. 146.

Justice had declined to comment on the bill during the summer, but made up for this silence with a steady stream of front page attacks on the pass-the-bill-campaign and the course of parliamentary debates in the autumn. It began by reporting that the British Socialist Party executive had adopted a critical position on the bill. The 'hideous, abominable and intolerable state of things' with regard to sexual exploitation did not justify 'the establishment of a "police de mœurs"' susceptible to corruption and other abuses.¹¹⁸ Equally opposed to reform, *Justice* went on to attack Labour parliamentarians for acquiescing in the bill:

The White Slave Traffic Bill gave the Labour Party a splendid opportunity not only to oppose the establishment of a shameful system of corrupt police authority, but also to launch a trenchant indictment against the system that makes the White Slave Traffic inevitable. All working women are slaves to-day; and we have no hesitation in saying that the lot of the British girl decoyed into foreign brothels is not a whit worse, and is frequently far better, than that of tens of thousands of the women and girls employed in the mills and factories out of which the prurient prudes who are instigating this White Slave campaign make their profits.¹¹⁹

This critique was deepened in the wake of the Labour member Will Crooks's enthusiasm for flogging during the report stage debate. While the 'hysterical Puritanism' of the Commons was unsurprising, Labour's support for police power could not be excused on the grounds of trafficked women's working-class origins. Moreover, if traffickers were fit subjects for flogging, so were the employers whose 'system of industrial slavery' underpinned the sexual slavery of women.¹²⁰ But when *Justice* reiterated its comparison between the condition of women in brothels and in factories, it came dangerously close to recycling the old racist *diché* about the supposedly better material position of chattel slaves in relation to wage labourers. *Justice's* parliamentary correspondent was only able to commend one Labour member, George Barnes, for resisting 'the "flogging" mania'.¹²¹ The 'atrocious' bill's third reading called forth rhetorical hyperboles from *Justice* that seemed to echo from its popular-radical origins in the nineteenth century. By reviving flogging and encouraging police misconduct, the Commons had 'struck a deadly blow at that personal liberty which has always been regarded as one of the heritages of Englishmen. We shall soon be reduced to the position of subjects of our gracious ally the Czar'.¹²² Taking full advantage of the excesses of debate in the Lords and shifting even more from a class to a populist register, *Justice* delivered another radical, anti-aristocratic condemnation: 'These lords, spiritual and temporal, and the class they represent, are really responsible for the universal slavery of men and women which makes this particular evil possible.'¹²³

Unlike the B.S.P., the Independent Labour Party counted as members several leading figures of the parliamentary Labour faction. The *Labour Leader* announced

¹¹⁸ *Justice*, 26 Oct. 1912, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 Nov. 1912, p. 1.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9 Nov. 1912, p. 1.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 16 Nov. 1912, p. 1.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 7 Dec. 1912, p. 1.

that Labour had resolved to support the bill on the report stage despite concerns about increased police power and noted that the I.L.P. and suffragist Philip Snowden had drafted an amendment dealing with sexual coercion in employment.¹²⁴ The *Labour Leader* claimed that it had 'no delusions' about the efficacy of the bill, for '[i]t scarcely touches the fringe of the problem of prostitution': 'a Bill to ensure for every woman worker a living wage would do far more to end the traffic than any other immediate proposal'. Still, it accepted the reality of an 'open trade in women conducted on an international scale by an army of procurers' and urged enforcement of the law.¹²⁵ By contrast, the *Labour Leader's* parliamentary correspondent offered a harsh judgement of the bill as amended by the Commons: 'for if . . . its establishment of the policeman as the protector of public virtue is comic opera, its resuscitation of torture and bodily defilement as a method of reforming the criminal classes is a grave public danger and shame'. He held up Labour members for special criticism, given the historic relationship between the rise of the labour movement, the reaction of bourgeois humanitarianism, and the consequent decline of flogging. Apart from reversing this reform of the law, the bill promised only 'to drive down to lower depths the awful life with which it deals'. If '[p]rostitution arises out of the contact of destitution and great riches', what was needed instead was a measure to redistribute wealth between the classes, something Liberalism would not do.¹²⁶ Commenting on the Lords' 'fury of virtue' in their debate on the merits of flogging, the parliamentary correspondent explained that this was welcome relief for aristocrats from the unhappy task of granting political and social reforms to the people.¹²⁷

The *Clarion* and the *Daily Herald* were more pluralistic than the party papers of the B.S.P. and I.L.P. Throughout the autumn the *Daily Herald* reported fairly extensively on pass the bill meetings and the parliamentary debates.¹²⁸ Moreover, the controversy inspired Will Dyson to create two cartoons. In 'The Cure for Social Sores', one frame depicted an obese parliamentarian dozing in the Commons while the discussion considers social reform, and the second showed the awakened member sitting up and voicing his approval of the much more attractive proposition of flogging.¹²⁹ A protest against flogging procurers in place of dealing with social misery, 'Want – Privileged Procurer' represented a skeleton in the top hat, high collar, vest and cape of a gent in the act of enticing a thin and discouraged young woman from the street into a brothel while a bobby stood in the distance with his back turned.¹³⁰ Numerous exchanges on the *Daily Herald's* women's page, on economic exploitation and sexual inequality in the causes of prostitution, the reform of marriage and state endowment of motherhood, the danger of wrongful arrest faced by men and women, flogging for

¹²⁴ *Labour Leader*, 31 Oct. 1912, p. 697.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 Nov. 1912, p. 714.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 721.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 12 Dec. 1912, p. 795.

¹²⁸ *Daily Herald*, 7 Oct. 1912, p. 5; 9 Oct. 1912, p. 1; 12 Oct. 1912, p. 1; 14 Oct. 1912, p. 6; 15 Oct. 1912, p. 5; 25 Oct. 1912, p. 5; 1 Nov. 1912, p. 1; 2 Nov. 1912, p. 5; 7 Nov. 1912, p. 3; 8 Nov. 1912, p. 1; 13 Nov. 1912, p. 1; 29 Nov. 1912, p. 5; 10 Dec. 1912, p. 4; 11 Dec. 1912, p. 5; 13 Dec. 1912, p. 4.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 Nov. 1912, p. 8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 Nov. 1912, p. 8.

women as well as men, and the fate of prostitutes under morals legislation, revealed the wide range of suffragist, feminist, socialist, social-purity, and libertarian opinion.¹³¹

The *Clarion* published two acute critics of the bill and the white slavery agitation. The rebel feminist Rebecca West, who had previously written for the *Freewoman*, concluded an article on the declension of Irish nationalism with a warning that women's suffragists could fall into the same narrow parliamentarism as their home ruler contemporaries. If suffragism separated from the broad questions of women and labour, and political power came without social change, '[t]hen in desperation it might turn to silly, violent legislation like the flogging clauses of the White Slave Traffic Bill, which propose to make the world a better place for women by making good men degrade themselves by torturing bad men. In fact, the women might fail as badly as the men.'¹³² In a second critique, West turned from the suffragists to the bill and its implications. Resisting the temptation to simply denounce hypocritical support for the measure, she considered the mass sexual misery which intertwined men and women of the wealthy and working classes and its displacement in episodic campaigns against prostitution. West did not deny the existence of trafficking, but criticized the uninformed approach of those who sought to suppress it:

Is there a White Slave Traffic? I think so, and you think so, and so does the House of Commons. But where it is carried on, and to what extent, none of us really know. Those of who have an ideal of a Parliament as a research laboratory in which social questions will be weighed and analysed and finally understood will feel indignant that the House of Commons started to legislate on this subject without having the slightest expert evidence as to what it was legislating about.

Parliament relied on 'facts' from social purity advocates, whom West characterized as 'bodies of sectarian, Puritan, and even remarkably vulgar . . . bias', when what was required was an investigation by a royal commission. She approved the power to arrest without warrant suspected procurers as no more intrusive than what 'innocent women, particularly of the working classes' had to endure in connexion with the policing of solicitation in the streets. She made great play of the notion that a naive constable might interfere with a form of prostitution 'protected by the law', as in the case of 'a South African millionaire of sixty-three with his titled bride of nineteen', when all he was empowered to do was stop 'ignorant and poor' women from 'being carried off to South Africa' by arresting their procurers on the quayside. The real solution, however, was to insure women had 'a full measure of knowledge and economic freedom. But that is rank Feminism and Socialism.' She condemned the punishment of flogging for its perversity and lack of any deterrent value, not least because it did not apply to female traffickers. West believed that imprisonment for life was the right sentence, '[b]ut that would need a great campaign behind it—to convince . . . Parliament that an offence against the human body and soul should

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 12 Sept. 1912, p. 2; 23 Sept. 1912, p. 2; 10 Oct. 1912, p. 10; 14 Oct. 1912, p. 2; 17 Oct. 1912, p. 2; 18 Oct. 1912, p. 2; 22 Oct. 1912, p. 2; 26 Oct. 1912, p. 2; 28 Oct. 1912, p. 2; 31 Oct. 1912, p. 2; 5 Nov. 1912, p. 2; 6 Nov. 1912, p. 4; 14 Nov. 1912, p. 2; 27 Nov. 1912, p. 2; 12 Dec. 1912, p. 2; 16 Dec. 1912, p. 2.

¹³² *Clarion*, 15 Nov. 1912, p. 5.

be punished with the same deliberation, dignity, and severity as an offence against property.¹³³

The *Clarion* also published a swinging attack by the comic writer Neil Lyons, 'White Slaves and Nasty Nonsense'. The occasion was his wife's receipt of a Ladies' National Association pamphlet on white slavery. It was Lyons, however, who disputed the allegations of daylight abductions of young middle-class women and an extensive white slavery system flourishing in London. He invoked his own knowledge of prostitutes and pimps to counter the claims of what he variously called the 'National Association of Purifying Ladies' and the 'Amalgamated Puritans'. Like West, he appealed to his readers: 'the Peril simply does not exist... You know of your own knowledge that these statements are mere sensational fiction.' While conceding 'glimmerings of truth' in social purity activists' conception of white slavery, he doubted that flogging would be applied to those 'Peers of the realm, Army officers, and Clergymen' who owned buildings in London and received rental income from the prostitutes living in them.¹³⁴ According to Lyons, the 'two practical causes' of prostitution were female poverty and male desire and '[t]he cure... is a purely economic one'. The most exploited women were those who worked for low wages and supplemented them by prostitution. These victims were, in Lyons's anti-Semitic scenario, forced to work for 'Mr. Hoggenheim by day' and service 'his innumerable nephews by night'. Decent wages and a less puritanical popular culture would enable young men and women to escape poverty and commercialized sex and instead marry early and for love. Merely repressive measures would weigh heavily against 'the White Slave and her Bully', but the capitalist nature of society insured that 'the Organized Exploiters who sit in Parliament or in the Cabinet', not to mention the 'distillers, publicans, property owners, music-hall shareholders, purchasers of sweated millinery, etc' would be unaffected. In a nice reworking of the fate of the artisan under capitalism, Lyons foresaw that 'the independent prostitute' would give way to 'the organized brothel' as 'the Flogging Act' produced the very system it sought to eliminate. In an interesting shift from the moral to the psychological, he concluded somewhat adventurously by suggesting that the pamphlet was 'what modern mental pathologists would call the "rationalisation of a complex"'. The outlook of social purity activists was dominated by 'certain fixed ideas about whipping, drugging, organized procurement, etc'.¹³⁵ Of course, what was absent from Lyons's psychological account was an explanation of this complex's collective nature and its political and cultural underpinnings.

Like *Justice*, the *New Age's* radicalism had a masculinist bias and it only intervened in the white slavery controversy when the bill became practical politics. Nevertheless, it occupied a position analogous to the defunct *Freewoman*. A lengthy 'Notes of the Week' on the eve of the report stage in the Commons attacked the 'social freemasonry' of religious and social purity groups behind the bill and its 'romantic conception' of the forces of law and disorder as 'St. George against the Dragon'. In seeking a deeper explanation of the bill's success, the *New Age* argued that cultural

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 22 Nov. 1912, p. 4. Internal evidence indicates this essay was written before the amended bill received its third reading in the Commons.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29 Nov. 1912, p. 5.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 6 Dec. 1912, p. 5.

changes brought about by capitalism were creating mass alienation and apathy in both the working and owning classes, and in the resulting social 'gulf' groups like the Charity Organisation Society were inserting themselves as a simulacrum of society. The decline of marriage, the rise of prostitution, and the repressive solutions of moral entrepreneurs were symptoms of economic crisis: 'in the White Slavery Bill and kindred legislation we . . . see only the appearances and disguises of purity or morality or sexual decency; beneath the appearance is the wage-slave driver's whip urging women into the mills and factories and sweating dens of the capitalists'. Imagining the world in terms of 'sensational stories', the 'puritan evangels' were fundamentally unaware of social realities. Meanwhile, the 'public irresponsibility' of the two great classes was leading to 'a future slave-state'.¹³⁶

A second 'Notes of the Week' on the eve of the bill's third reading centred on the retrogressive resort to flogging and pointedly condemned the rhetoric and reasoning of representative parliamentarians as well as influential newspapers. According to the *New Age*, the uproar over white slavery was not based on any significant change in 'social and sexual' life. Prostitution continued to serve largely the 'lusts' and 'greed' of 'the wealthy' and 'the governing clique'. Here misogyny entered the analysis, with the notion that 'Parliament, Press, and public' had become 'sex-infatuated' with women's supposedly moral nature, while women, 'more cruel, more brutal, more vindictive, more barbaric than men', were in fact exerting powerful pressures on the state in their own interests and at the expense of men's.¹³⁷ These commentaries stimulated an extensive correspondence, with the ex-suffragist Beatrice Hastings eventually getting the last word.¹³⁸ Hastings's piece was notable for the way her sexological discussion of flogging and flagellation as 'sexual vice' sat uneasily with her political criticism of the government's bad faith in pushing the bill through the Commons and her surmise that 'things will go on much as before the Act'. While there seemed to be a palpable relationship between perversity and politics, Hastings saw the task of enlightened individuals like herself as one of 'spread[ing] psychological information'.¹³⁹

Unlike romance, politics during a crisis is an open-ended struggle, with new fronts emerging in a contingent and constantly shifting conjuncture. Surprise rather than compromise is the order of the day. Indeed, barely a month after the Criminal Law Amendment Act became law, an adverse ruling by the Speaker on the proposed women's suffrage amendment to the Manhood Suffrage Bill led the government to withdraw the whole bill in January 1913. This blocking of the parliamentary road to democracy would transform the political situation once again, including the way women's suffrage, socialism, and white slavery were articulated together.

The late Edwardian era was a period of great social and constitutional reform under the Liberal government of Asquith and Lloyd George. It was also a time of party strife and popular unrest bordering, in Ireland at least, on ungovernability. The

¹³⁶ *New Age*, 24 Oct. 1912, pp. 601–4.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7 Nov. 1912, pp. 1–3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 14 Nov. 1912, p. 45; 28 Nov. 1912, p. 92; 5 Dec. 1912, pp. 116–7; 12 Dec. 1912, pp. 139–40. For the redoubtable socialist and anti-feminist Belfort Bax's contribution, see *ibid.*, 21 Nov. 1912, p. 69. To his credit, Bax noted the 'Xénophobism' of 'our patriotic parliamentary heroes who pose as champions of virtue'.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19 Dec. 1912, pp. 152–3.

controversy surrounding the passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, a relatively minor measure that none the less regulated intimate sexual life and touched on the hierarchies of gender, class, and race, offers a revealing perspective on parliament and the radical press during the Edwardian crisis.¹⁴⁰ While the coverage and commentary in particular socialist, suffragist, and radical papers waxed and waned, the press as a whole constituted a dialogical field encompassing a range of overlapping as well as conflicting positions on the bill. One feature of this crisis of legitimacy which can be distinguished fairly clearly in the chatter of the press was disenchantment with the parliamentary romance of dragon-slaying reform. More often than not, allusions to classical heroes, chivalrous knights, and 'modern Don Quixotes' suggested that parliament was inadequate or inimical to the quest for political equality and social justice.

For socialists and suffragists the pass the bill controversy cohered around several themes, chief among them the very possibility of enacting legislation in a semi-democratic parliament that could make a tangible, progressive impact on the moral and social realms. The legislative process still shaped the unfolding controversy, of course, with one issue tending to frame each phase. In the weeks preceding the bill's second reading, it was the masculine indifference of parliament to women's plight. During the bargaining of the committee stage, it was the political treachery of parliament. As the bill neared the point of enactment, what came to the fore was the legal and moral backwardness of parliament in resorting to punishment by flogging. At times the press depicted parliament as a rather idiosyncratic and inward debating club of the political establishment, at other times as a body controlled or simply displaced by ostensibly more powerful forces emanating from the criminal underworld, the capitalist labour market, or the panicked public. While socialists and suffragists were divided over the bill, many would have agreed that parliament, unreformed and unrepresentative, was a profound obstacle to their larger political projects.

Indeed, the radical press sought to appropriate the white slavery agitation for educative and organizing purposes and prevent other, adversarial forces, such as the bill's anti-suffragist supporters, from using it to their own ends. What underlay the episode was a crisis of representation operating at two levels: firstly, the struggle between parliament and the extra-parliamentary movements to recognize and represent women subjects in the political realm and, secondly, the struggle among socialists and suffragists over how to position such a subject in the social movement. Thus the radical press is a useful optic for tracking the effort to forge a chain of equivalence between the labour and women's movements, with women's claims to economic independence and political equality serving as the key link. This was not a debate between socialists and suffragists so much as between those in both movements who wanted to extend the democratic chain between women and workers and those who wanted, so to speak, to shorten it by emphasizing either the class- or gender-belonging of women workers/working women.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Victor Bailey and Sheila Blackburn, 'The Punishment of Incest Act 1908: A Case Study of Law Creation', *Criminal Law Review* (1979), 708–18, for legislation supported by the social purity movement and enacted without controversy early in the Edwardian protest cycle.

As we have seen, however, that chain was not endless. The divide between metropole and colonies, the nation and the world, marked the end. The white slave, understood as an innocent woman, a degraded prostitute, or an exploited worker, belonged to the nation. The *Jewish* procurer, the *foreign* bully, the *Chinese* indentured labourer in South Africa, and the *native* victim of rubber concerns in Congo and Peru were beyond the pale. Perhaps not surprisingly in an age of empire, even many socialists and suffragists who claimed the legacy of nineteenth-century antislavery could not identify with colonial subjects and people of colour. Here, in the rhetoric of race shared by Edwardian political adversaries, we reach the limits of opposition by journalism.