

# Woodrow Wilson, Alice Paul, and the Woman Suffrage Movement

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Historians have traditionally argued that Woodrow Wilson's attitude toward the woman suffrage movement was one of benign neglect.<sup>1</sup> Since the president believed that the extension of suffrage to women was the prerogative of the individual states, he refused to recommend a federal constitutional amendment to Congress throughout his first term in office. Although the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) eventually persuaded him to endorse the constitutional amendment in 1918, he remained a reluctant reformer who was prodded into action only by a groundswell of public support of woman suffrage.

But in a 1981 article, Christine Lunardini and Thomas Knock attempted to revise this traditional approach.<sup>2</sup> They contended that Wilson's attitude toward woman suffrage was transformed not only by NAWSA's gentle persuasion but also by political pressure from the militant National Woman's Party (NWP). They emphasize, however, that Wilson's personal commitment to social justice and progressivism, as well as political expediency, led him by 1918 to play a vital part in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

While Lunardini and Knock deserve credit for placing Wilson's activism after 1918 in its proper perspective, they incorrectly attribute his change in attitude to an ideological commitment to social justice. His motives were in fact far less

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1959), ch. 21, 23.

<sup>2</sup> "Woodrow Wilson and Woman Suffrage: A New Look," *Political Science Quarterly* 95 (Winter 1980-81): 655-71.

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altruistic. In 1917, Woman's Party propaganda stressed the inconsistency between Wilson's strident advocacy of democracy abroad and his administration's indifference to democracy at home. Wilson first attempted to silence this embarrassing criticism through manipulation of the press and public opinion. The president underwent his sudden conversion into a suffrage advocate only after these attempts failed. By 1918, support for the amendment resolved the contradiction that had threatened the integrity of his administration, and had become a necessary, if unintended, consequence of Wilson's democratic war aims.

#### Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party

NWP leader Alice Paul was born in Moorestown, New Jersey, in 1885, the daughter of Quaker parents. After receiving her master's degree in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania in 1907, she traveled to England to do settlement work. In London, she joined the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), the militant wing of the British suffrage movement. Under the tutelage of WSPU leader Emmeline Pankhurst, Paul learned lessons in militant activism that would dramatically alter the woman suffrage campaign in the United States.

By 1917 Woodrow Wilson was well acquainted with Alice Paul, at least by reputation. Upon her return to America in 1910, she completed her Ph.D. degree and continued to pursue her interest in woman suffrage. In 1913, she became the chairman of the National American Woman Suffrage Association's Congressional Committee. Unlike NAWSA strategists, however, she became convinced that concentration on suffrage by state constitutional amendments was a waste of time. Consequently, in April 1913 she formed the militant Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (CU) to work for a federal suffrage amendment. The CU's strategy, based on partisan politics and coercion, was anathema to NAWSA, and in 1914 the two groups went their separate ways.

Paul's political theory was founded on a single premise: electoral survival determines political behavior. From that departure point, she reasoned that politicians could be convinced of the political expediency of suffrage in less time than it would take to convert each congressman to the principle of woman suffrage. Central to Paul's concept of a suffrage pressure group was the importance of publicity and public opinion. Her organization used publicity in two ways: to "sell" the suffrage issue to the American people; and to coerce politicians to support the federal amendment.

In an effort to force the majority party to act on the amendment, the Congressional Union and, after 1916, the National Woman's Party, campaigned against all Democratic candidates in the 1914 and 1916 elections. Although this maneuver caused some consternation within the party and some embarrassment to the president, few if any Democrats were defeated solely because of the militants. Undaunted, Paul remained committed to her two principles. She believed that the president's support was vital to the suffrage movement's objec-

tive, and that political pressure was the only method that would ensure his support. In December 1916, Paul began to formulate a new plan of attack. She decided to picket the White House. Paul explained her strategy in this way: "If a creditor stands before a man's house all day demanding payment of his bill, the man must either remove the creditor or pay the bill."<sup>3</sup> As another militant later noted, "at first Wilson tried to remove the creditor; later he paid the bill."<sup>4</sup>

On 10 January 1917, Alice Paul's pickets appeared at the White House gates. The women carried banners that asked: "*MR. PRESIDENT, HOW LONG MUST WOMEN WAIT FOR LIBERTY?*"<sup>5</sup> At first Wilson was courteous to the pickets, tipping his hat in passing and once even inviting them into the White House on a cold day. With America's entry into World War I, however, Wilson's casual acceptance of the suffragists was soon altered.

Woman's Party strategists led by Alice Paul welcomed Wilson's new status of world leader. As one woman activist observed, "his own statements of faith in democracy and the necessity of establishing it throughout the world left him open to attack."<sup>6</sup> Paul decided to mount the attack on the administration's weakest point: the hypocrisy of waging a war for democracy abroad while denying the vote to women at home. Most woman suffrage associations, including NAWSA, supported the war effort. They hoped to convince the president and Congress that as patriotic citizens they were entitled to the ballot. Paul's group, however, remained a single-issue organization throughout the war. NWP members used Wilson's war goals to point out his hypocritical attitude toward woman suffrage, but refused to lend their services in any way to the war effort. "We will not bargain with our country for our services," a NWP official stated. "We will not say to our government: 'give us the vote and we will nurse your soldiers,' but we will insist on suffrage now."<sup>7</sup>

Throughout May and June 1917, Woman's Party pickets carried banners that bore excerpts from Wilson's writings on democracy. One sign, taken from the president's war message, read: "*WE SHALL FIGHT FOR THE THINGS WE HAVE ALWAYS HELD NEAREST OUR HEARTS—FOR DEMOCRACY.*"<sup>8</sup> On June 20, suffragists greeted a Russian delegation from the Alexander Kerensky government with a banner that proclaimed: ". . . *TELL OUR GOVERNMENT THAT IT MUST LIBERATE ITS WOMEN BEFORE IT CAN CLAIM FREE RUSSIA AS AN ALLY.*"<sup>9</sup> After the Russians had passed, a group of

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Inez Haynes Irwin, *The Story of Alice Paul and The National Woman's Party* (Fairfax, Va.: Denlinger's Publishers, 1977), 202.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>5</sup> Doris Stevens, *Jailed For Freedom* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), 66; *New York Times*, 12 January 1917.

<sup>6</sup> Stevens, *Jailed For Freedom*, 84–85.

<sup>7</sup> *New York Tribune*, 1 March 1917. This policy met with criticism from the press. See, for example, *Chicago Tribune*, 22 June 1917.

<sup>8</sup> Stevens, *Jailed For Freedom*, 84; National Woman's Party Press Release, 22 June 1917, Woodrow Wilson Papers, microfilm, reel 209, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>9</sup> *The Suffragist*, 30 June 1917, 6–8.

enraged bystanders, led by Mrs. Dee Richardson, attacked the pickets. Mrs. Richardson reportedly scratched and clawed her way to the suffragists. Leaping astride one unwary picket, shrieking “You dirty yellow traitor,” the irate woman snatched the banner from the picket and hurled it to the mob. The crowd quickly destroyed the banner, while the police packed Mrs. Richardson away in a paddy wagon.<sup>10</sup>

Shortly after the rioters were dispersed, Major Pullman, District of Columbia police superintendent, called on the White House. After a conference with Wilson’s secretary, Joseph P. Tumulty, Pullman announced that there would be no change in police policy regarding the pickets. The superintendent guaranteed that the suffragists would be allowed to display their banners “unless the police department is requested to alter its policy by White House officials.”<sup>11</sup> By the next afternoon, however, the Wilson administration had apparently changed its mind. Police arrested two pickets for obstructing the sidewalk and ordered that the picketing of the White House cease. A Washington newspaper reported that the police had received a tip either from the White House or from the district attorney to arrest the suffragists.<sup>12</sup>

Alice Paul was pleased with the newspaper coverage of the banner incident and ensuing arrests. Every major newspaper on the East Coast carried reports of the riot, often on the front page. While some newspaper stories cast the pickets in an unfavorable light, most reporters used lengthy quotes from the women to “flesh out” their copy. In a press release on 22 June 1917, Paul commented:

It is those who deny justice, and not those who demand it, who embarrass the country in its international relations. . . . The responsibility, therefore, is with the government and not with the women of America, if the lack of democracy at home weakens the government in its fight for democracy 3000 miles away.<sup>13</sup>

The suffragists’ cause was also furthered when newspapers published pictures of the pickets’ arrest for obstructing the sidewalk. The photographs of the two women, surrounded by a mob of rowdies, cast doubt on the validity of both the charges and the arrests.<sup>14</sup> Even NAWSA’s condemnation of the NWP actions could not dim the glow of publicity that the pickets prompted. Moreover, Paul’s strategy received praise from a leading American radical, Max Eastman. In a telegram to Paul, Eastman effused: “Magnificent. Perfect from every point of view. Endless admiration.”<sup>15</sup>

Although Wilson declined to comment on the June suffrage riots, the subsequent publicity disturbed the administration greatly. Eight days after the Rus-

<sup>10</sup> *Washington Times*, 21 June 1917.

<sup>11</sup> *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 20 June 1917.

<sup>12</sup> *Washington Times*, 22 June 1917.

<sup>13</sup> National Woman’s Party Press Release, 22 June 1917, reel 209, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 June 1917.

<sup>15</sup> *Washington Times*, 21 June 1917.

sian envoy incident, Mrs. Ellis Meredith, head of the Woman's Bureau of the Democratic National Committee, wrote to Wilson's secretary Joseph P. Tumulty:

As long as they [the pickets] can get on the front page of the papers they will keep up their present tactics . . . Mr. Creel [chairman of the Committee on Public Information (CPI)] tells me he can get the Associated Press and the other two news organizations to suppress anything concerning them, but that the relations between himself and the local press are not such that they will relegate the stories about the women to a line or two in police news.<sup>16</sup>

Mrs. Meredith went on to suggest that, by taking away the militants' "meal ticket" with the press, they would "dwindle and fade into obscurity."<sup>17</sup>

#### CENSORSHIP AND PRESS MANIPULATION

The groundwork for press censorship and administrative public opinion management had been laid in April 1917 with the creation of the Committee on Public Information. Wilson had taken care to point out that CPI censorship duties would apply only to information directly affecting the conduct of the war. As early as April 25, he had reassured a nervous newspaperman that he would not permit censorship legislation or CPI activities to act as a shield against criticism of his administration: "I can imagine no greater disservice to the country," he wrote, "than to establish a system of censorship that would deny to the people of a free republic like our own their undisputable right to criticize their own public officials."<sup>18</sup>

In the weeks that followed the Russian envoy incident, however, Wilson's views on censorship and free speech underwent a startling transformation. In spite of the June 21 arrests, NWP members had continued to picket the White House unmolested by the police. In late June, the police superintendent warned Alice Paul that arrests would begin again unless the pickets were immediately withdrawn. Undaunted, thirteen pickets arrived at the White House the next day and were promptly arrested.<sup>19</sup> The superintendent and arresting officers conferred for several hours before announcing that the women were charged once again with obstruction of the sidewalk. Alice Paul concluded that the resumption of arrests was an indication that her strategy was working. Wilson had apparently hoped that by ignoring the pickets, they would grow frustrated

<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Ellis Meredith to Joseph P. Tumulty, 28 June 1917, reel 209, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Woodrow Wilson to Arthur Brisbane, 25 April 1917, case file 3896, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress. The text of this letter was written by Joseph P. Tumulty and copied almost verbatim by Wilson. See memorandum by Tumulty to Woodrow Wilson, 20 April 1917, box 47, Joseph P. Tumulty Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>19</sup> The date of this arrest is uncertain. Both Alice Paul and Doris Stevens place this event in the last week of June 1917. See Stevens, *Jailed For Freedom*, 93; and Alice Paul, interview by Amelia Fry, 1976, transcript, Oral History Project, University of California at Berkeley, 213.

and leave. When this failed, he sought to silence them by engineering their arrest. Wilson's hard line approach, however, played directly into Paul's hands.

Throughout the early days of July, picketing and arrests continued. When the first suffragists were sentenced to lengthy jail terms in mid-July, the injustice of the situation so angered one Wilson political appointee that he requested an interview with the president to tender his resignation. Collector of the Port of New York Dudley Field Malone charged in a meeting with the chief executive on July 18 that the women were jailed as a result of "carefully laid plans by the District Commissioners of the City of Washington," who were Wilson appointees. Malone also told Wilson that

newspaper men of unquestioned information and integrity have told me that the District Commissioners have been in consultation with your private secretary, Mr. Tumulty, and that the Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. [William Gibbs] McAdoo, sat in a conference when the policy of their arrests was being determined.<sup>20</sup>

Malone also pointed out the difficulty of the administration's position if he were "compelled to remind the public" that the commissioners were Wilson appointees, and subject to his instructions. Although the president protested his ignorance of the matter, he pardoned the jailed suffragists within twenty-four hours of his interview with Malone.

Given the close relationship between Wilson and his secretary, and more importantly, McAdoo (also his son-in-law), it is unlikely that the president was in fact ignorant of the conspiracy to which Malone alluded. It is also improbable that Wilson granted his pardon strictly because of his professed sympathy for the pickets. Only hours after his interview with Wilson, Malone met with the suffragists' attorney to discuss plans for an appeal of their conviction. Chairman of the CPI George Creel joined the men as an uninvited guest. Although there is no record of their talk, the plans of Malone and the National Women's Party probably found their way to Wilson through Creel.<sup>21</sup> Thus informed of the plan to appeal and conscious of Malone's threat to make public what he considered an administrative conspiracy, Wilson deemed it wise to end the matter with a quick pardon.<sup>22</sup>

The Wilson administration, however, did not intend to "pardon" Dudley

<sup>20</sup> *The Suffragist*, 28 July 1917, 4; and Stevens, *Jailed For Freedom*, 159–160.

<sup>21</sup> *New York Times*, 19 July 1917. Creel's official relationship to the president was confirmed in an undated directive from Wilson, possibly in response to criticism of CPI activities. Wilson stated that: "I would suggest that Creel say that the Committee on Public Information was created by me, [and] that Mr. Creel is my personal representative. . . ." George Creel Papers, vol. I, Library of Congress.

<sup>22</sup> District Commissioner Louis Brownlow's recollection of the arrests and Wilson's reaction is in agreement with the above conclusions. Brownlow relates that Wilson was enraged by the arrests, and told the commissioner that "we have made a fearful blunder, that we never ought to have indulged these women in their desire for arrest and martyrdom, and that he had pardoned them and wanted that to end it." The president then ordered Brownlow to refrain from arresting the pickets without notifying the White House first. Louis Brownlow, *A Passion For Anonymity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 74–82.

Field Malone as quickly. Malone had been a Wilson supporter for many years, and after his campaign work in the West during the 1912 election, had been appointed collector of the port of New York, an important patronage position. Malone had many influential ties within the Democratic party, and Wilson was doubtlessly concerned when the collector began to make speeches criticizing the administration's handling of the pickets. Accordingly, a few days before his outburst to the president, Malone became the target of a Secret Service investigation. Secret Service agents shadowed the collector from July 15 until the end of August 1917, and their weekly reports were sent to Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo. Agents noted both the time Malone spent at work and the time he spent in Washington, where he engaged in pro-suffragist activities. They also recorded his arrival and departure dates at the Shoreham Hotel in Washington from 1913 through August 1917.<sup>23</sup> On 7 September 1917, McAdoo sent a condensed version of these reports to President Wilson.

Whether the investigation was instigated by McAdoo or the president himself, the agents' reports clearly indicate that Malone's suffrage activities and charges of administrative conspiracy disturbed Wilson. It is also noteworthy to compare Malone's suffrage work before and after his meeting with Wilson and the onset of the investigation. During the four-week period of surveillance, Malone abruptly ended his association with the suffragists. While there is no evidence that the administration applied political coercion to this wayward Wilsonian, it is curious that such an ardent spokesman for the pickets would retreat into virtual anonymity within a fortnight of the onset of a Secret Service surveillance.<sup>24</sup>

After the presidential pardon took effect on July 20 and the eleven militants were released from jail, Alice Paul announced in a press statement that picketing of the White House would continue. "Picketing has accomplished just exactly what we wanted it to accomplish," she stated, "and picketing is going to end in forcing the issue."<sup>25</sup> Paul was closer to the truth than she realized. The cumulative effect of picketing, arrests, and the subsequent publicity, intensified by Malone's accusation to Wilson of administrative conspiracy, forced the president to deal with the suffragists—but not with the suffrage amendment.

Wilson's secretary, Joseph P. Tumulty, received a letter on July 20 that would

<sup>23</sup> Secret Service Reports, dated 30 July, 3 August, 6 August, 13 August, and 27 August 1917. See also a copy of a condensed version of the above reports, 7 September 1917. (The original was sent to Woodrow Wilson at the direction of Secretary McAdoo.) Box 187, William Gibbs McAdoo Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>24</sup> After 28 July 1917, Dudley Field Malone's name ceased to occur in stories concerning the woman suffrage movement. Neither Doris Stevens nor Inez Irwin mention him in their memoirs after the above date, nor do the newspapers listed in footnote 29. By the fall of 1918, Malone was tentatively reinstated in the good graces of the Wilson administration. Apparently his overtures failed to win over Edith Wilson, but Secretary Tumulty, more politically astute than the first lady, urged the president to forgive Malone, but to treat the collector in such a way as to emphasize that "he was still under probation." Memorandum, Joseph P. Tumulty to Woodrow Wilson, 7 October 1918; Joseph P. Tumulty to Edith Wilson, 30 September 1918, Joseph P. Tumulty Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>25</sup> *Evening Sun* (Baltimore), 20 July 1917.

provide the president with a weapon to use against National Woman's Party agitation. Arthur Brisbane, editor of the *Washington Times*, echoed the plan suggested in June by Mrs. Ellis Meredith, Woman's Bureau chairman. Brisbane wrote to Tumulty:

Mr. [Frank] Noyes of the [Washington] *Star* has just discussed with me the wisest manner of dealing with the suffragette problem. His desire is that the newspapers, by a pact and agreement, refrain from giving the suffragette ladies any publicity . . . I told Mr. Noyes that I wanted to do exactly one thing, namely whatever *you* as representing the person most directly interested might think wise.<sup>26</sup>

Although he offered to omit all reference to suffragist agitation from the *Times*, Brisbane noted that the women might become suspicious of an "evident conspiracy of silence."

Tumulty submitted Brisbane's letter to Wilson for appraisal. In an undated memorandum to his secretary, Wilson proposed a compromise plan:

There is a great deal in what Mr. Brisbane writes about entire silence on the part of the newspapers. . . . My own suggestion would be that nothing that they do should be featured with headlines or put on the front page but that a bare colorless chronicle of what they do should be all that was printed. That constitutes part of the news but it need not be made interesting reading.<sup>27</sup>

Wilson's intentions were carried out by at least one editor. Brisbane sent to Tumulty the following instructions that he had issued at the *Times*:

Please have nothing about the picketers *or* what they do in prison or anything else on the front page of the paper. Tell the news in two sticks, not farther forward than the fourth page until further notice, no matter what happens or what they do, and a small head over the two sticks, *never* a display head.<sup>28</sup>

While there is no conclusive evidence about the extent of compliance with Wilson's scheme by other editors, a random check of newspaper coverage of three significant dates indicates that editors were loathe to pass up a good story, even if their actions angered the president.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the Wilson-Brisbane scheme indicates a startling change of opinion on censorship by the administration. To assess Wilson's complicity in a scheme to manipulate news of a non-

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Brisbane to Joseph P. Tumulty, 20 July 1917, reel 209, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>27</sup> Memorandum by Woodrow Wilson to Joseph P. Tumulty, undated, reel 209, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>28</sup> Arthur Brisbane to Joseph P. Tumulty, 9 November 1917. Case file 1215, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>29</sup> The following newspapers were checked for their coverage of significant suffragist events for 20–23 June 1917 (White House riots), 18–20 July 1917 (arrests and riots), and 14–18 August 1917 (arrests and riots): *Evening Star* (Washington), *Washington Times*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *New York World*, *New York Tribune*, *New York Herald*, *Baltimore Sun*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. None of these newspapers refrained from front page coverage of the above events, despite the efforts of Creel and the Wilson administration.



military nature, several threads must be woven together to bring forth the pattern of events.

First, one must recall Mrs. Ellis Meredith of the Democratic National Committee and her letter to Tumulty on June 28. Mrs. Meredith had been assured by George Creel, CPI chairman, that Tumulty could rely on the Associated Press and the two other wire services to suppress news of the Woman's Party pickets. Frank Noyes, *Washington Star* editor and Associated Press correspondent, had suggested to Brisbane the creation of a pact of silence on the suffrage demonstrations. It is probable that Noyes was Creel's contact at Associated Press. At Creel's instigation, Noyes had organized the pact, drawing Brisbane into the group in July. Creel, then, was the link between the White House and the press. Through his position as head of the governmental censorship agency, he had access to both editors and to press correspondents. Creel could implement a scheme of censorship that would have proved awkward for Wilson to initiate alone.

Thus, the wartime censorship agency had assumed a new and unconstitutional function by July 1917, that of censoring material critical of the Wilson administration but not critical to the war effort.<sup>30</sup> In light of his previous statements on freedom of speech and press, Wilson may have found the inherent hypocrisy of the situation uncomfortable. As he explained to Louis Wiley, editor of the *New York Times*: "The matter of censorship is growing daily more difficult and more important, because there are certain hostile and disloyal elements in the press of the country which are taking advantage of the present situation and are doing the most dangerous and hurtful things."<sup>31</sup> In a note to Creel three months later, the president declined to meet with representatives of a free speech group, stating that "it would be extremely difficult to state correctly and wisely my views about free speech right now."<sup>32</sup>

Woman's Party pickets continued to carry banners to the White House throughout August. When on August 14 pickets unfurled a banner addressing "KAISER WILSON," an angry mob of sailors and government workers attacked the suffragists. Rioting continued the next day; the Woman's Party headquarters was vandalized, with several pickets injured and over \$1,000 in damages incurred. Police made no effort to halt the riots or to apprehend the members of the mob. Six pickets, however, were arrested for obstructing the sidewalk.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> These findings refute the thesis proposed by Steven Vaughn in his treatment of the CPI's wartime censorship activities. For a more benign view of Creel and his committee, see Steven Vaughn, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

<sup>31</sup> Woodrow Wilson to Louis Wiley, 23 July 1917, box 185, William Gibbs McAdoo Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>32</sup> Memorandum, Woodrow Wilson to George Creel, 5 November 1917, reel 355, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>33</sup> *The Suffragist*, 18 August 1917, 4; *Washington Post*, 15 August 1917; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 15 August 1917; *Chicago Tribune*, 15 August 1917.

Riots continued for four more days, and daily the police shouldered their way through the mob to arrest the handful of pickets for blocking the walkways. The injustice of the situation angered some bystanders, however. Representative Charles A. Lindbergh (R-Minn.) wrote to Wilson his impression of the August riots, commenting that the mob was composed of office-workers from the State, War, Navy, and Treasury Departments' executive divisions.<sup>34</sup> Lindbergh also charged that the police, though sufficient in number to have quelled the riot, "actually encouraged it by rough-handling anyone who . . . sympathized with those who were being attacked." The congressman also observed that there were "just enough designing persons in this mob to give it direction and positive control," and concluded that

mob violence was being used as a brutal subterfuge to avoid a fair . . . test of the Right of Petition in the form that picketing takes. It is impossible to see, Mr. President, how you could escape from direct responsibility in these things.<sup>35</sup>

Another congressman, John M. Baer (R-N.D.), was also alarmed by the violence and injustice done to the pickets. On August 17, Baer introduced a House Resolution that called for a Congressional investigation of the White House riots.<sup>36</sup> The resolution was never acted upon, however, since the riots abruptly ceased on the day it was introduced. Whether Wilson was in fact responsible for the riots or their cessation, as Representative Lindbergh had charged, is impossible to determine. Nevertheless, the spectacle of government employees attacking gray-haired women at the White House gates implicated the Wilson administration's policies, if not its personnel.

The August suffrage riots made front page headlines in many East Coast newspapers, indicating that few editors were willing to bury a good story, even at the president's request. *Washington Times* owner and editor Arthur Brisbane, however, wanted both a lead story on the riots and presidential approval. Brisbane sent a letter to Treasury Secretary McAdoo two days after a telephone conversation with him. "I should like yourself and the President to know," he assured McAdoo, "that in the *Washington Times* . . . there is a newspaper that wants to interpret the work that this Administration is doing, . . . and to give unlimited publicity whenever it can be of use."<sup>37</sup> Brisbane added that he had instructed the *Times* managing editor "to make sure that any matter interesting to you received prompt publication . . . and *AS YOU WANT IT*."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Charles A. Lindbergh to Woodrow Wilson, 27 August 1917, reel 209, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress. For background on Lindbergh and the suffrage movement, see Bruce L. Larson, *Lindbergh of Minnesota: A Political Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 205–206.

<sup>35</sup> Larson, *Lindbergh of Minnesota*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *New York Herald*, 18 August 1917. See also Resolution 130, 17 August 1917, introduced by Representative John Baer of North Dakota, quoted in Stevens, *Jailed for Freedom*, 351–53.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur Brisbane to William Gibbs McAdoo, 18 August 1917, box 185, William Gibbs McAdoo Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. Emphasis in original.

Brisbane enclosed the noon and final editions of the 18 August 1917 *Washington Times* in his correspondence to McAdoo. The noon edition carried a front-page story of the suffrage riots written from a distinctly critical point of view. The article stressed the defiant attitude held by the National Woman's Party, and praised Major Pullman for handling with "commendable restraint" a problem "filled with complications and danger."<sup>39</sup> In the evening edition, a front-page story covered the trial and subsequent sentencing of the pickets arrested four days earlier. Again, the coverage was biased in favor of the police. The reporter pointed out the weak defense presented by the pickets, and ridiculed the women's charge that the police had "framed-up" the crowd in order to arrest the pickets for obstructing the sidewalks.<sup>40</sup>

Brisbane's correspondence with McAdoo, coupled with the *Times* coverage of the suffrage riots, is indicative of the newspaperman's efforts to ingratiate himself with the Wilson administration. The White House was fully aware of the editor's obsequious behavior, and made use of his self-serving nature whenever possible.<sup>41</sup> Given the failure of the scheme to suppress news coverage of the militants, the Wilson inner circle welcomed Brisbane's offer of self-censorship.

It is unrealistic, however, to assume that Brisbane acted without administrative prompting or guidance. Although the subject of McAdoo's telephone conversation with Brisbane on August 16 is unknown, the editor's subsequent letter and enclosures suggest that the call concerned the suffrage riots.<sup>42</sup> The White House was embarrassed by the daily outbreak of the rioting, especially since the pickets carried banners bearing presidential statements on democracy and free speech. It is reasonable to conclude that McAdoo informed Brisbane of the administration's predicament, and solicited his help in the form of censorious press coverage. Seen in this light, Brisbane's letter proffering "unlimited publicity . . . AS YOU WANT IT" was not an offer of the *Times* services, but rather an assurance of services rendered. Whether Brisbane acted alone or with McAdoo's prompting, it is clear that the Wilson administration openly or covertly approved of purposeful distortion of news that concerned the militant

<sup>39</sup> *Washington Times*, 18 August 1917 (noon edition).

<sup>40</sup> *Washington Times*, 18 August 1917 (final edition).

<sup>41</sup> In June 1917, Brisbane had offered to sell a 6,000 acre tract of land to the government for one dollar. In July of the same year he proposed to Joseph P. Tumulty that the secretary run for the Senate as soon as his "present term of incarceration is ended." See Arthur Brisbane to Joseph P. Tumulty, 4 June 1917, reel 361, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress; Arthur Brisbane to Joseph P. Tumulty, 9 October 1917, box 44, Joseph P. Tumulty Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>42</sup> McAdoo's telephone call to Brisbane was mentioned in a letter to the secretary from a New York suffragist, Mrs. Norman Whitehouse. Although Mrs. Whitehouse does not relate her impressions of the conversation, she apparently believed that Brisbane and McAdoo were close friends. In her letter to McAdoo, she wrote: "We asked his [Brisbane's] good offices in obtaining your assistance in our campaign." Mrs. Whitehouse was chairman of the New York State Woman Suffrage Party, a NAWSA affiliate, and heartily opposed the NWP activities. Mrs. Norman Whitehouse to William Gibbs McAdoo, 17 August 1917, box 185, William Gibbs McAdoo Papers, Library of Congress.

suffragists. Thus, presidential public opinion management encompassed not only suppression of the news but manipulation of news coverage as well.

#### CONTINUED AGITATION AND WILSON'S CONVERSION

Arrests continued throughout the fall, and by October longer jail sentences were handed down. After Alice Paul was arrested for carrying a banner emblazoned with Wilson's Liberty Bond slogan ("*THE TIME HAS COME TO CONQUER OR SUBMIT*"), she was sentenced to seven months in the District jail. Ironically, it was there that Paul implemented the plan that would at last convince the president to submit. Her plan was based on a tactic used to great effect by British militant suffragists: Paul and the other suffrage prisoners would refuse to eat. After several days, prison officials began to forcibly feed the women three times a day by naso-gastric tubing. In an effort to discredit her leadership, the officials also transferred Paul to the psychiatric ward and placed her in solitary confinement.<sup>43</sup> Although denied her right to consult an attorney or receive visitors, Paul managed to smuggle notes describing her treatment to Woman's Party members outside the jail. In her messages, she demanded to be treated as a political prisoner, a strategy calculated to provoke public sympathy for the alleged "victims of political oppression" and thus to embarrass the Wilson administration.

National Woman's Party members publicized the poor jail conditions endured by the militants throughout the fall of 1917. A "Prison Special," comprised of suffragists dressed in prison uniforms, toured the United States, and party organizers mailed form letters describing the plight of the imprisoned pickets to thousands of Americans. As a result, numerous letters critical of the government's treatment of the militants poured into the White House. The treasurer of the Woodrow Wilson Independent League protested to Wilson that:

It is absolutely essential that the American people be united at this time. But unity is not to be obtained by dragging women to filthy jails for the crime of bearing banners upon which are inscribed the words from the President's lips!<sup>44</sup>

Another Wilson Democrat, on learning of Paul's intention to "permit herself to be starved to death for the suffrage cause," urged the president to act on the suffrage amendment immediately.<sup>45</sup>

Without doubt, the National Woman's Party protests concerning the treatment of the jailed militants generated a great deal of publicity that proved embarrassing to the White House. The validity of the Woman's Party charges, however, requires further comment. As public protest over prison conditions

<sup>43</sup> *The Suffragist*, 3 November 1917, 8-9; and 10 November 1917, 4-5, 7.

<sup>44</sup> John R. Haynes to Joseph P. Tumulty, 13 November 1917, reel 110, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Frances Doyle to Joseph P. Tumulty, 10 November 1917, reel 110, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

mounted, District Commissioner Louis Brownlow asked two suffragists to tour the jail facilities and report on their findings. On September 25, Mrs. Beulah Amidon issued a preliminary report that denounced the treatment of the incarcerated militants. Brownlow quickly consulted the president and was instructed to conduct a full investigation of the prison.<sup>46</sup> Although Brownlow would claim many years later that the prison's conditions were excellent, his first acts were to relieve the prison superintendent of his duties and to supervise the installation of new bedding in the suffragists' quarters.<sup>47</sup>

In November, the investigatory commission, comprising a district commissioner, three physicians, and several members of the Board of Charities, issued its report. The investigators found that the prison was sanitary and that the food was "all that could be expected." Although the report stated that the National Woman's Party charges of ill treatment were unfounded, it unwittingly testified to one case of injustice. While the investigation was in progress, Alice Paul was held in solitary confinement in the psychiatric ward. The investigators noted in their report to Wilson that "there is no evidence of nervousness on the part of [Paul]; [she] seemed perfectly calm, but very determined."<sup>48</sup> A lengthy statement by Paul on the benefits reaped by the NWP from the publicity of picketing and imprisonment was also included in the report. The clarity and logic of her strategy, coupled with the investigators' remarks on her condition, point out the flagrant attempt by prison officials to undermine Paul's effectiveness by questioning her mental stability.

By November 1917, many Americans were alarmed at prison conditions and angered by Wilson's apathetic attitude toward the federal suffrage amendment. After hearing a NWP organizer speak on the pickets' hunger strike, the president of the Democratic Club in Alameda, California, telegraphed Wilson that "the speech did much harm."<sup>49</sup> Even Secretary Tumulty wrote to Wilson that "it is my opinion that the time is soon coming when we will have to seriously consider this matter."<sup>50</sup>

Tumulty's advice was apparently heeded. One night during the third week in November, a late-night visitor awakened Alice Paul in her cell. An associate of Paul's later identified the man as David Lawrence, a journalist with close ties to the Wilson administration.<sup>51</sup> Lawrence denied that he was an emissary from the

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum attached to a letter from Gilson Gardner. The Gardner letter contained Mrs. Beulah Amidon's report. See Gilson Gardner to Louis Brownlow, 25 September 1917, forwarded to Woodrow Wilson, reel 204, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>47</sup> Louis Brownlow to Woodrow Wilson, 27 September 1917, reel 204, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress. For Brownlow's later favorable account of prison conditions, see Brownlow, *A Passion For Anonymity*, 74-82.

<sup>48</sup> Report on the District Jail (Occoquan Prison), District Commissioner W. Gwynn Gardiner to Woodrow Wilson, 9 November 1917, reel 210, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>49</sup> Telegram, Mrs. S. G. Harrison to Woodrow Wilson, 18 November 1917, reel 210, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>50</sup> Memorandum, Joseph P. Tumulty to Woodrow Wilson, 9 November 1917, reel 210, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>51</sup> Editorial, "A Dramatic Celebration," *Milwaukee Leader*, 18 November 1917. (A copy may be

White House, but betrayed an intimate knowledge of Wilson's views on the suffrage issue. During the interview, Lawrence reportedly asked Paul if she would agree to abandon the picketing in exchange for a guarantee from the administration that the suffrage amendment would pass through Congress by 1919. The reporter outlined the course that the administration would pursue: pushing the amendment through one house of Congress next session; and if sustained on its record in the 1918 elections, passing it through the other house in early 1919. What Paul replied to Lawrence's offer is unknown, but her answer can be surmised from the following events.

Alice Paul's sentence was commuted on 28 November 1917. On her release, she was asked by the press if picketing would continue. She replied: "The attempt to suppress legitimate propaganda has failed. . . . We hope that no more demonstrations will be necessary. But what we do depends entirely upon what the Administration does."<sup>52</sup> On 9 January 1918, Woodrow Wilson announced his support of the federal woman suffrage amendment. The next day, the Nineteenth Amendment passed the House and was approved by the Senate in June 1919. Lawrence had proved an extraordinary prophet.

In 1918, Woodrow Wilson acted with zealous determination to assure the passage of the woman suffrage amendment. But what conclusions can be drawn about Wilson's actions in 1917? First, it is clear that the Lunardini-Knock thesis is flawed. Wilson did not advocate the amendment out of a personal commitment to social justice and progressivism. His support was instead motivated by a grudging recognition of political reality. Wilson realized by late 1917 that in order to maintain the integrity of his demands for democracy abroad, he would have to acknowledge the right of women to democratic participation at home.

Second, the Wilson administration used the official wartime censorship agency to pressure editors to suppress or distort news of the militant suffragists. Presidents had traditionally attempted to shape public opinion, but had confined their efforts to securing positive press coverage of favored issues. In 1917, Wilson broke with this pattern and urged influential newspapermen to ignore, downplay, or distort the news of the militant crusade. The president, eager to deflect criticism of his administration, found in his wartime censorship powers a handy weapon to be used against domestic dissent. This shift from positive to negative presidential public opinion management constituted an ominous por-

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found in reel 210, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Library of Congress); Stevens, *Jailed For Freedom*, 226. Although David Lawrence denied that he was an emissary from the president, NWP charges to the contrary were strong enough to convince the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage. In January 1918, this organization issued a formal apology to Alice Paul for accusing her of "circulating a falsehood" about the incident. The *New York Times* reported that "the apology resulted from a denial of a story by the antis' that an emissary of the Administration had visited Miss Paul in prison. . . ." *New York Times*, 27 January 1918.

<sup>52</sup> *New York Times*, 28 November 1917.

tent for the future of American democracy.<sup>53</sup>

It is more difficult to draw conclusions about Wilson's part in the July arrests, the August riots, and the November meeting in prison with Alice Paul. It could be argued that the allegations of Port Collector Malone and Representatives Lindbergh and Baer were motivated by personal or political animosity, and that Lawrence's late night visit was as apocryphal as the midnight ride of Paul Revere. These arguments are weak in themselves. Malone was a Wilson supporter; Lindbergh was an eyewitness to the White House riots; Baer, though a Republican, was hardly a crank; and Lawrence was admitted at midnight to a jail that had turned away all other reporters arriving at conventional times. More important were the effects of the three men's actions. Malone's interest in the pickets' treatment resulted in Secret Service surveillance of himself, and his accusations led to an immediate pardon of the suffrage prisoners. Baer's investigation caused the cessation of rioting. Lawrence's visit was followed by an end to the picketing that Wilson desired, and by the presidential support Alice Paul demanded. Were these results merely coincidental?

A strong chain of circumstantial evidence links high officials in the Wilson administration, including Wilson himself, to an attempt to subvert the militant suffrage campaign. Charges of a conspiracy to undermine the militant cause were levied at the president throughout 1917. Whether the riots, arrests, and late-night visitations were planned by the administration or not, Wilson was accused of planning them and was forced to deal with the charges to salvage the credibility of his war aims. While it seems that the accusations against Wilson were justified, the truth may never be known about this matter. No one can doubt, however, that Alice Paul's tactics placed Wilson in an untenable position. The president, in order to maintain at least the appearance of integrity and consistency, made a political rather than a principled decision to support the woman suffrage amendment. Wilson had styled himself as the apostle of world democracy. In 1917, he learned that democracy, like charity, must begin at home.

<sup>53</sup> An excellent study of presidential public opinion management is David Hilderbrand, *Power and the People: Executive Management of Public Opinion in Foreign Affairs, 1897-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).