

speak on 4 February 1912 under the auspices of the Grand Free Lecture Course, a cultural organisation sponsored by prosperous members of the local community. The obituary of Mary Darrow Weible, one of the leading sponsors who died in 1965, referred to Sylvia Pankhurst as 'a guest of real significance' for the group and conjured up the atmosphere amongst their social circle around this time as 'at a peak of elegance when entertaining was done in a formal manner in one's home. They were the days of the old opera house when one attended the theatre in evening clothes.'¹²⁰ The format would have been familiar to Sylvia who delivered a lecture in Fargo's Grand Theatre, wearing her 'light coloured evening dress', after an informal gathering held in her honour at Darrow Weible's house.¹²¹ It was at this gathering that there began 'an informal discussion of the need for a Suffrage organization in the State', during the course of which, Sylvia later told Hardie, 'I suggested we should form one then and there.'¹²² Despite the attendees' privileged backgrounds, Sylvia felt that 'many of them [were] Socialists' and there is evidence that Darrow Weible was attracted by socialist ideas around this time: in 1917, she would shelter Max Eastman from a local mob who, violently objecting to his socialist and anti-war stance, intended to lynch him.¹²³ Faced with like-minded individuals, Sylvia's suggested guidelines for the new organisation they titled the Votes for Women League of North Dakota are instructive. She advised a non-party stance that operated on the basis of asking electoral candidates for their views on equal suffrage and campaigning against those who were opposed. This, as Sylvia informed Hardie, was 'a very extreme step here. This has only been done in New York as yet and only by one Society who are closely in touch with the English W.S.P.U.'¹²⁴ Sylvia was referring to Stanton Blatch's WPU and its importation of militant tactics, although the course that Sylvia herself proposed in Fargo was subtly different from the WSPU's non-party approach, as she advised simply a non-alignment approach which targeted hostile individuals rather than whole political parties. If all candidates were opposed, she recommended organising a campaign: 'send out much literature, organize street meetings, conduct a canvas of voters.'¹²⁵

After leaving Fargo the following day, Sylvia returned to Wisconsin and telegraphed Mary Swain Wagner of the American Suffragettes of her intention to return to Milwaukee where she planned to stay for at least another week to help there with the referendum campaign, as it was reported that Sylvia 'is thoroughly interested in the situation here

and believes she can do much good for the cause of equal rights.'¹²⁶ She planned to hire a hall in downtown Milwaukee where meetings would be held 'both afternoon and evening during the week and that '[b]ooks and literature on equal suffrage will be sold.' Concerned that 'the Wisconsin women are not alive to the situation, Sylvia insisted that 'there is a good deal of solid, hard work in front of the agitators if they wish to arouse the women to the present contingency.'¹²⁷ Although Sylvia was unable to put this into practice, as she was called away to speak in Chicago, she was consistently advocating a version of militancy which prioritised street-based campaigning in an effort to win popular support for women's suffrage. She had outlined this as early as March 1911 in Kansas when she commented on how 'English women' would campaign for women's suffrage there:

We would establish headquarters in your capital, divide the state into districts with sub-headquarters in each and begin a series of demonstrations. We would hold daily meetings, parade the streets, chalk the sidewalks, have torch light processions, hold home meetings much like your weekly house prayer meetings, and resort to every possible means of awakening and holding public interest.¹²⁸

This was precisely the kind of emphasis she tried to achieve within the WSPU when she returned to England two months later, persuading the organisation to call a series of demonstrations 'in all the principal parks and open spaces around London' which 'were worked up by open air speeches, chalking, canvassing and poster parades', and hiring a headquarters in East London to appeal for popular support in that area.¹²⁹ These endeavours were counter to the political trajectory of the WSPU leadership, as Sylvia later recalled:

There was an outcry in the Union [WSPU] that propaganda meetings were useless, the one thing essential being the destruction of private property to arouse the public, and the terrorizing of Cabinet Ministers. Both in speaking and organizing, I set to work to combat this view, and to secure the extension, not the slackening, of propaganda work.¹³⁰

Sylvia's emphasis on building a popular campaign challenged, above all, the WSPU leadership's approach to the relationship of suffragism to the