



## HIDDEN YEARS

In her autobiography, Margaret was not always completely honest about her life. Though she leads the reader to believe that her commitment to birth control followed immediately upon her years in Hastings, this was not the case. In between there were long stretches of time spent in socialist and anarchist activities, years in which she learned the propaganda techniques that were later to stand her in such good stead.

This period of radical activism began when she moved back to New York early in 1911. Bill, who had long been interested in radical politics, originally attended political meetings regularly. Because he was tremendously energetic, he soon became part of the inner circle of the Socialist Party. Once, he even ran for alderman on the Socialist ticket, making an unexpectedly good showing, though he lost the election.

During his sojourn in Hastings, however, he was not involved in politics, since he was eager to catch the commuter train and get home to his family. With their return to New York, he began to go to Socialist meetings again. Because his mother lived with them in the apartment on West 135th Street, she was able to care for the children.

Margaret occasionally got a well-paying job taking care of a newborn baby, but when she was free, he took her along because he couldn't bear to be away from her, even for a minute. To his delight, he found that she reveled in politics. During their courtship he had seen

her through Mary's eyes as a "conservative Irish girl", now he found she was more her father's daughter. When the group got into such heated discussions that they drowned out her low voice Bill would shout "Listen to my Peggy! Listen to her! She has something to say!" Rather to everyone's surprise, she did.

At home they would continue the discussions, discovering that they both were torn between anarchist left-wingers who believed in "direct action" or quick violent strikes to right the workers' wrongs, and followers of comparatively conservative labor leaders, like Eugene Debs and Morris Hillquit, who believed in the slower "political action" or legislation, instead.

Indeed, when William Haywood, the extreme left-wing leader of the Industrial Workers of the World came to town, it was Bill Sanger who invited him to speak at the Socialist local, over Debs' and Hillquit's objections.

Bill and Margaret found themselves attending so many meetings that Grant, now a shy and nervous boy of three, asked them one night

Are you going to a meeting again?

Yes

A soshist meeting?

Yes

I hate soshism!

They also started having get-togethers at home. The first person to be invited was William Haywood, whom Margaret described as "an uncouth, stumbling, one-eyed giant with an enormous head." He had lost one eye in a mine explosion and was almost universally referred to as "Big Bill." Melvin Dubofsky, author of a history of the I W W, describes him

Big Bill looked like a bull about to plunge into an arena. He seemed always glancing warily this way and that with his one eye, head tilted slightly as though to get a better view of you. His great voice boomed, his speech was crude and so were his manners, his philosophy was that of the mining camps where he had spent his life. But I soon found out that for gentleness and sympathy he had not his equal.

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Others came to the Sangers' house, too, among them Jessie Ashley, Big Bill's lover Dubofsky describes them

Jessie and Bill were the oddest combination in the world—old Bill with his one eye, stubby roughened fingernails, uncreased trousers and shoddy clothes for which he refused to pay more than a minimum, Jessie with her Boston accent and hornrimmed glasses, a compromise between spectacles and lorgnette from which dangled a black ribbon, the ultimate word in eccentric decoration

Jessie was one of the most conspicuous of the many men and women of long pedigree who were revolting against family tradition She was the daughter of the president of the New York School of Law and one of the first women lawyers in New York A Socialist in practice as well as in theory, she spent large portions of her income getting radicals out of jail Nevertheless, her appearance at strike meetings were [sic] slightly uncomfortable, class tension rose up in waves

Emma Goldman and her lover Alexander Berkman also came Emma, a fiery anarchist, was a short, strong, stocky woman who believed that violent deeds would make people noble and good So did Emma's lover, Alexander Berkman, who had tried to assassinate Henry Clay Frick, the head of the Carnegie Steel Company, during the unsuccessful Homestead Strike of 1892 Berkman served fourteen years in jail for the attempt, emerging from prison a hero-martyr

Indeed, Berkman was such a hero that Emma became jealous, though her jealousy didn't stop her from defending him Just before a lecture given after he came out of jail, she heard that a fellow radical was going to criticize him She strode into the lecture hall in a wide coat underneath which a bull whip was tied securely about her powerful body At a crucial moment she leapt onto the platform and horse-whipped the speaker while the audience cheered

Berkman's martyrdom greatly impressed Margaret She spent long evenings talking with him in the little Russian restaurants that dotted Second Avenue, smoking endless cigarettes and sipping tea

She also spent long evenings discussing the emancipation of women at Emma's home on East Thirteenth Street Emma, a highly educated woman, made her living by writing and selling an anarchist magazine

called *Mother Earth*, as well as by lecturing on Shakespeare, Russian literature, free love, and the problems of women. *Mother Earth* might be filled with typical epithets about "capitalist monsters" and "exploited wage-slaves," but Emma's lectures, especially those on women's problems, could be extremely sound.

Like Margaret, she had been a nurse working particularly among the poor, so she knew firsthand the need for birth control. She had also attended one of the first international conferences on birth control—the Paris Neo-Malthusian Conference in 1900—and regularly distributed leaflets on contraception at her lectures.

Margaret undoubtedly received her first concrete ideas on the subject from Emma, who distributed her leaflets without interference from the police because, as she boasted, "They just didn't expect me to be bothering with such things." Emma, too, was the first person to direct Margaret to the writings of Havelock Ellis, the great English pioneer of sexual reform, though Margaret always pretended she had stumbled on Ellis herself.

Margaret met many of the other leading radicals of the day through Bill Sanger. Among these were Leonard Abbott, a formerly conservative New Englander, who was founder of the Free Speech League, Gilbert Roe, a lawyer and one-time partner of Robert La Follette, Progressive Senator from Wisconsin, Lincoln Steffens, the muck-raking journalist, Clarence Darrow, the most famous liberal lawyer of his time.

This group founded the Modern School, an anarchist school in which the historian Will Durant, a Catholic turned anarchist, was a teacher. When Stuart was enrolled there at eleven, he was in school for the first time in his life. According to him: "Since it was an anarchist place they let us do anything we liked, so I did nothing. I just fiddled around or played ball all day." One morning, however, he woke up: "I don't want to be a dumbbell. That means I'll have to learn to read and write." He insisted on being transferred to the Wood School in Long Island, a Christian Science school where Mrs. Wood herself took him in hand. In a year he was steeping himself in Frank Merriwell and the other boys' books he had missed.

Characteristically, Margaret barely noticed what was happening to her children. She declared she was seized with a mysterious "nervous malady" whenever she had to take care of them, and clutched at the first outside interest that came along.

A fine opportunity arose when she met Anita Block. Anita, a Bar-

nard graduate and ardent Socialist, was editor of "Woman's Sphere," a section of the Socialist newspaper, the *Call*. She telephoned Margaret one night to say that a speaker scheduled for a labor meeting was unable to come. Would Margaret take her place? Margaret had never made a public speech and was terrified. Quaking, she faced the audience of ten. She started to speak on labor relations but found she just didn't know enough, so she switched to her favorite topic, sex and reproduction. The audience was delighted and asked for more, with the result that at the next meeting seventy-five people came, and Anita asked Margaret to do a series of articles on similar subjects to enliven her page.

Though the pay was small, Margaret took the rather simplistic material about frogs, birds, and bees she had used in her Hastings talks, expanded it, and plunged. On October 29, 1911, she started a Sunday series called "How Six Little Children Learned the Truth," branching out from there into the need for contraception with typical socialist invective about "the deprived childhoods of children whose mothers are forced to abandon them to earn money" and carrying on with, "Why should these countless fathers and mothers surrender to these few monster exploiters—to this Capitalistic system which bases its existence on the fiendish exploitation, and ultimate murder, of these children?"

In another article, called "Impressions of the East Side," she bewailed the fact that the only way that poor women knew how to limit their families was to line up on Saturday nights at five-dollar-quack abortionists, often as many as forty waiting their turn.

The *Call* series led to a better financial offer. She formally joined the Socialist Party, and the Womens' Committee unanimously elected her "organizer" or chairman at the dazzling salary of fifteen dollars a week. For this fifteen dollars she was to run around to other locals and urge them to give up their rooms once a week to women, to arrange street-corner meetings, supervise press releases, and start naturalization classes for immigrants.

Her noontime street-corner meetings proved particularly successful. Working men and women often stopped to hear her out of mere curiosity, expecting a shrill termagant like Emmaline Pankhurst or Carrie Nation. Instead, they saw a petite redhead with wide violet eyes who spoke in a rather frightened, gentle voice as she distributed Socialist leaflets.

But her most important contribution was teaching naturalization

classes From 1881 to 1925, over two and a half million Jewish immigrants alone fled countries where they had been impoverished and tormented, to become victims of one of the most cunning sales spiels in history—spiels that told them freedom and gold were waiting for them in America, when actually the idea was to make money for ship owners by filling the steerages of their ships The immigrants made their way across Europe by wagon, train, or foot, their samovars and featherbeds strapped to their backs, honestly believing that all they had to do when they got to the States was to stoop down and pick up the gold

The peak year for such immigration was 1906 It was just after the Russian pogroms of 1903 and 1905 in which hundreds had been slaughtered, imprisoned, or raped, for merely marching to Moscow holding up a picture of the "Little Father," their Czar, as they tried to present a limited-suffrage petition to him

These immigrants arrived in New York at an inspection station romantically named Castle Garden, speaking no English, and with hardly a cent in their pockets (It is estimated that the average amount of money they had was eight dollars ) Often they stayed at Castle Garden for weeks, half-starved, awaiting clearance The majority became Socialists as a matter of course, for while they might not know exactly what socialism or "political action" meant (since they had had no political rights at all back home), at least it seemed to promise escape from the endless grinding work which was all they could find, once they settled on New York's lower East Side

In 1897, while Margaret was still at Claverack, a Yiddish daily paper called the *Forward* had been founded in New York Most of the new immigrants had never seen a newspaper, but the women had learned to read a little Yiddish from the "Ladies Bible," and when they recognized a few familiar words, they painfully worked through the rest, they in turn often taught their men

One of the most popular features of the *Forward* was the "Bintel Brief" or bundle of letters into which they could pour out their hearts and receive in return advice from "worthy editor" Abraham Cahan

Many of their early letters show their passionate concern with socialism

I am a Socialist and my boss is a fine man I know he's a Capitalist but I like him Am I doing something wrong?

I am a Socialist and I am going with an American girl She

wants to go to dances and balls and affairs and I would like to know if you think it's alright for me to go too

My son is already twenty-six years old and doesn't want to get married He says he is a Socialist and he is too busy Socialism is Socialism but getting married is important too

Then there were letters from skilled men and women, carpenters or dressmakers, who endlessly tramped the streets looking for work only to be confronted with signs saying curtly "No foreigners need apply," just as a generation earlier the Irish had been confronted with "No Irish need apply" It was for these people that the naturalization classes Margaret gave twice a month were so vital It was a proud day when these immigrants could speak enough English to get their "citizen papers" and prove they were foreigners no more

Meanwhile, Margaret kept up her articles for the *Call* She soon grew bold enough to venture more explicitly into the field of human reproduction, talking about eggs and ovaries and sperms For girls like those who wrote to the "Bintel Brief" "Is it a sin to use face powder?" "Shouldn't a girl look beautiful?" this was heady stuff indeed The series was called *What Every Girl Should Know* and drew many letters of praise and gratitude But when Margaret announced that her next articles would be on venereal disease, she ran into trouble

The *Call* was notified by the post office that, if it ran such articles, the entire issue would be suppressed for violating the Comstock Law So where her column was to have appeared, the paper left a large blank space that said only

WHAT EVERY GIRL SHOULD KNOW  
BY ORDER OF THE POST OFFICE—NOTHING

Margaret had never heard of the Comstock Law and was furious when her material did not appear She flounced into the office and called Mrs Block cowardly and spineless Mrs Block told her to look up the law for herself She did and found it had very sharp teeth—teeth that would some day bite her hard

The Comstock Law was passed by Congress in 1873 Its main purpose was to close the mails to "obscene, lewd and lascivious" material, particularly the erotic postcards from abroad which, during the confused post-Civil War period, were flooding the country Anthony Com-

stock, its sponsor, made his point by putting on an exhibition of erotic postcards in the senate building, something sure to draw large, curious crowds. But at the last minute he added a rider, branding all information relating to contraception as lewd and lascivious and making anybody giving out such information, even a doctor, subject to a heavy fine plus one to ten years in jail. The bill was pushed through the House and Senate on the last day of a lame-duck Congress, along with 260 other bills that many Congressmen later admitted they hadn't even read.

Comstock was a man obsessed. Born on a Pennsylvania farm of a pious Fundamentalist family where everyone, including the hired hands, had to attend a daily prayer session, as well as drive twenty miles each way in open wagons to attend four Sunday services, he saw everything connected with sex as sinful. His favorite Bible quotation was "Whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery in his heart," and he yearned to save souls by keeping them from all temptation.

Once his harsh law was passed, he got the courts to convict owners of dress shops who left naked wax dummies in their windows before redressing them, on the premise that "bare dummies can cause lustful thoughts." He ran an uncompromising campaign against the painting called "September Morn," which showed a chastely posed nude rising from the waves.

He reserved a special fury for doctors who gave contraceptive information. No one could stop them from doing this in their offices, but let a doctor be caught sending a letter through the mail and Comstock was ready to pounce. For this purpose he frankly used decoys. He would write a suspect a letter signed with a woman's name—a letter that told a story of disease, poverty, and despair. If the doctor replied compassionately with a few simple birth-control suggestions, Comstock had his evidence and used it without mercy. He obtained five-year sentences plus large fines for several such doctors.

Comstock was so wily, not only had he gotten his harsh law passed, but he had gotten himself appointed as a special agent of the post office, with the power to see that it was strictly enforced. Still better, he had fixed things so that, instead of taking a salary, he kept a substantial portion of the fines for himself.

One doctor fought back. Comstock was a big man but this doctor was



bigger. When Comstock arrived personally to arrest him, the doctor grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and threw him down the stairs. Comstock bided his time. Many years later he dragged this tired man into court, having trapped him through a decoy letter. By then, the doctor was old and ill. Comstock saw to it that he got ten years in prison at hard labor.

When this outrageous case was reported in the papers, people decided things had gone too far. In 1902 a petition with seventy thousand signatures was presented to President Grover Cleveland, asking him to use his influence to repeal or at least modify the law. Cleveland was ready to try, until his Methodist wife dissuaded him. The law stood firm.

After Margaret read all this, she understood the *Call* position. Besides, the post office later withdrew its objections to her article on venereal disease, and not only was it printed, it eventually became a pamphlet given to the soldiers of the First World War.

Margaret's enthusiasm for Socialism and the *Call* soon faded. In 1912 the New York laundry workers went on strike. When she spoke at a meeting asking them to support a "political action" measure to try to improve their wages and working conditions through legislation rather than through repeated strikes, she was heckled by a woman who stood up angrily and said, "Oh! that legislative stuff! Don't you know we women might be dead and buried if we waited for politicians to right our wrongs?" Always a nervous speaker, this rebuff hurt her so much she complained that her meetings were not well-attended and asked to resign as organizer. The party agreed and figured out a way for her to do this. She would ask for a five-dollar raise, the party would refuse, and she could use the excuse to get out of her job, though she could still retain her party membership.

Because she was in one of her restless stages and couldn't sit still, she decided to switch her allegiance to the I W W, if only because she felt more of a kinship with its members who were the outcasts of the working class—the unskilled loggers of the Northwest, the men without skills, or those with only the minimum needed to pick fruit, dig a ditch, or tend a machine in a factory or mill. In a sense, Margaret felt she was an outcast, too. She had never forgotten the priest who had ordered her out of line, or the children who had ostracized her even after she had been confirmed in the Church. She was shocked when she learned how, in one Tennessee mine explosion, 207 unorganized work-

ers died because safety devices were lacking and there wasn't a thing the rest could do about it. When the men protested, the company simply fired them or hired company police to beat them down, while the mass of the public called them "revolutionaries who should be happy to have any jobs at all." Public conscience hadn't been stirred until the infamous Triangle Waist Company fire of March 1911.

The Triangle Waist Company was a factory housed in the top floor of a dilapidated ten-story loft at 22 Washington Place, New York. The company made ladies' shirtwaists, and even on a Saturday, the factory was going full blast. In mid-afternoon over three hundred workers, mostly women, were working at their machines, the floor around them littered with oily rags and odd pieces of material from the cut patterns. Suddenly, the oily rags and floor litter caught fire, and the fire became a raging blaze that spread through the top floors. The panicked women tried to escape by the stairs, but the employers had locked the heavy stair doors to limit the times workers could go to the washrooms. The women, their flimsy clothing now in flames, began to jump out of the windows instead.

Firemen were summoned but were slow in arriving, the safety nets they spread to catch the hysterical women were either too small or too few. More than two hundred women, some of them girls of thirteen or less, burned to death or died as they crashed from the high windows to the pavement below. They were buried in a mass grave. Thousands followed the cortege, yet legal technicalities enabled the owners of the factory to go scot free.

Only a short time before, when some of the Triangle workers had tried to join the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, they had been fired. The owners used "poor business conditions" as an excuse, though they quickly filled the place of these employees. When the other workers attempted to go on strike as a result, the strike was squelched by hired thugs who beat up the male pickets. Prostitutes, hired to mingle with the female pickets, shouted obscenities, which were labeled "disturbances of the peace," and used as a pretext to arrest some of the pickets. Even then, public sympathy and the courts sided with the owners. The presiding magistrate, in sentencing one picket, cried out, "You are on strike against God!" Only after some wealthy women, with the support of the clergy, bombarded the newspapers with letters that could not be ignored did public conscience become aroused.

It was in the excited after-the-fire atmosphere that the I W W was born

I W W stood for Industrial Workers of the World "Big Bill" Haywood, who composed their constitution, believed that only a world organization could be successful against capitalists. He called the deaths of the Tennessee miners and the Triangle shirtwaist-makers "murder with the connivance or deliberate negligence of the capitalist class." He went on to say that the way to fight back was with "any militant direct action they had the power to enforce," including wrecking machines or tearing up railroad tracks so factory deliveries could not be made. He reasoned that direct action was necessary because unskilled or migratory workers who had no financial reserves could not follow the same slow procedure the skilled craft unions used. With bankruptcy a constant threat, they would have to resort to quick direct force whenever possible.

But fighting capitalists through an international union was not the only goal of the I W W, they were also ready to fight the Church and the U S flag. The Church, Haywood explained, was an institution designed to offer "pie in the sky" as a substitute for food on earth, one of his slogans was "Pie in the sky—it's a lie." As for the flag, a red one was substituted for the Stars and Stripes with the poetic slogan "Live and die beneath the scarlet standard high."

All of this had a strong appeal both to Margaret and to the homeless derelicts who often slept on the floors of the I W W halls, making them feel comparatively confident and unafraid for the first time in their lives.

Margaret probably joined the I W W in 1912, but she did not start to work for them immediately. Bill, always fearful for her health, rented a little summer cottage in the Cape Cod seaport town of Provincetown, Massachusetts, a favorite inexpensive gathering place for artists and intellectuals. There Margaret basked in the sun for hours each day, while the children swam or played in the sands.

While their five-year age difference kept Grant and Stuart apart, Grant made up for it by his closeness to Peggy, to whom he clung as to a life-raft. They played and thought together to such an extent that they usually started their sentences with "we." This closeness was especially comforting because Margaret was usually off somewhere, leaving them in charge of neighbors or anyone she could find.

Her favorite "somewhere" was a cottage where she could find her

friends, Bill Haywood, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman. In this circle Berkman was known as Sasha, the Russian pet name for Alexander. The group met at Emma and Sasha's place where the discussions centered on marriage versus free love.

Emma held out strongly for free love. She called marriage "a vicious institution which made women into sex-slaves just as capitalism made men into wage-slaves." She thought marriage "institutionalized" women and made them "kitchen-minded" instead of "world-minded." Emma admitted that she had once been foolish enough to get married, but that was before she knew better. She had quickly gotten out of it and decided to have lovers only. She told Margaret that if she also was to become emancipated, she must repudiate marriage and go her own way.

These diatribes upset Bill so much that when he came up weekends he frequently refused even to go near Emma's house. Certainly he was an anarchist, but only to a point. On free love he drew the line. He wanted no one but his Peg.

Bill also opposed Emma's insistence on the morality of assassination. She defended it on the grounds that it was moral as long as the person assassinated was a tyrant who oppressed the working people or was in a position to oppress the working people. She boasted how the half-crazed Pole, Czolgosz, who had shot President McKinley in 1901, testified he had done so after hearing a lecture on assassination by Emma Goldman.

Margaret drank this all in uncritically. Freedom for her was an irresistible word. It called up pictures of Isadora Duncan and her "free dance," Amy Lowell and her "free verse," Edna Millay and her "free life" that burnt the candle at both ends. If freedom was making each of these her own woman, it would make Margaret her own woman, too. All it would do, Bill Sanger argued, was make him sick.

Yet there was a marriage of tempestuous quarrels and tempestuous reconciliations. They both knew that Margaret was miserable staying home, though what could she do? She was not qualified to work as a trained or registered nurse in a hospital, and without connections, well-paid private duty was hard to come by. When Bill Haywood and the I W W came along, it was only natural for her to grasp at them eagerly, as they offered her a sympathetic cause, excitement, and maybe some money besides, as Fishel's mortgage payments were slow in coming, and sometimes didn't come at all.

The I W W excitement came sooner than expected, in the form of the Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile mill strike

The Lawrence strike was one of the first of its kind It started on January 11, 1912, a gray, raw New England day January 11 was Friday, a payday, the first payday since the Massachusetts legislature had passed a law reducing the working hours for women and children from 56 to 54 hours a week As the majority of Lawrence's thirty-five thousand workers were women and children, the mill couldn't operate without them, so this meant reducing the hours for the men, too

Not long before this, the hours had been reduced from 58 to 56 a week, but the owners had continued to pay the same wage This time, when the employees were told of the law calling for a second reduction, they asked the owners if they would hold the wages steady, but the owners refused to answer Now without warning the workers found their paychecks lowered in proportion to the two hours less work

Accurate figures do not exist, but the best estimates place the average weekly wage at Lawrence in 1912 at eight dollars and seventy-six cents a week for men and six dollars for women and children At this rate, at least two members of a family had to work in order to maintain themselves at the lowest level of decency This usually meant the father and mother or the father and any child over the age of fourteen "At the age of 14," wrote Melvin Dubofsky, "Lawrence's typical immigrant child would leave school no matter what his grade or academic standing, and substitute a 6 45 a m to 5 30 p m mill-day for his 9 00 to 3 00 school-day "

As for housing in Lawrence, all the houses belonged to the mill-owners, and the contractors who built the wooden tenements had jammed them so close together that vermin ran back and forth from one to the other The rooms were so small that the men built shelves outside the kitchen windows from one house to another so that their wives could store extra food on the outside shelves This way the women could open the windows and simply reach out and take the food in

Tuberculosis and pneumonia were rife In fact, chest infections eventually killed almost seventy percent of the Massachusetts mill-hands, while during the same years, they killed only four percent of the Massachusetts farmers A reformer who visited Lawrence said "I have rarely seen in any American city so many shivering men without overcoats as I have seen in that cloth-producing town "

The wage reduction for the two hours of less work each week

amounted only to about twenty-five cents, but under such conditions it was crucial Bread was selling at a nickel a loaf, so twenty-five cents meant five less loaves

Then, too, the Lawrence workers were mostly newly arrived Poles, Germans, Italians, and Russians, who, like the New York Jews, spoke almost no English Some of them had come off the boats with the words "Lawrence, Massachusetts" printed on paper bands around their foreheads so that the authorities could direct them But they did know an envelope containing twenty-five cents less when they saw one On January 11 a Polish woman was the first to receive one of these thinner envelopes, and she called out angrily, "Short pay!" When the others received their envelopes, they took up the cry "Short pay! Short pay!" echoed through the corridors as they walked off the job Within a few days twenty thousand workers joined them They had no plan, they merely stood around talking and shivering, resolved not to go back until the cut was restored

There were two obstacles to a strike First, the various ethnic groups were divided by language barriers Second, they had no cash reserves At this point, Bill Haywood and other I W W leaders volunteered to take over They immediately organized each group separately and sent out a call to their fellow-nationals throughout the country for funds, with this money they set up soup kitchens Then they used their radical connections to solicit funds from all the other labor organizations, including Socialist groups, they spent these on shoes, fuel, medical assistance, and at least part of the rent (Mill-owners didn't dare start wholesale evictions even when no rent was paid, for fear that many of the workers might leave town Then when the mills started up again, they would be left with hardly any workers ) Yet the mill-owners, who had never before been confronted with this kind of thing, refused to sit down at the bargaining table since they were sure the workers would soon have to give in

Haywood was an excellent newsmaker He saw to it that the owners' refusal to bargain was well-publicized, causing more funds to pour in When in desperation the owners arrested two Italian labor leaders on a trumped-up charge of murdering a fellow striker, thousands of dollars arrived

Still, funds dropped sharply as week after weary week dragged on It was then, on February 6, 1912, that some Italian Socialists in New York came up with a plan they were sure would get both new publicity

and help fill the treasury. It was a scheme that had succeeded in France, Italy, and Belgium, but had never been tried in America. The idea was to send some of the strikers' children to friendly families outside of Lawrence where they would be fed and cared for until the crisis had passed. The scheme took on at once. The *Call* in particular ran a stirring article asking for volunteer families, and within two days hundreds of letters came in.

Margaret was excited at the idea of helping with what she romantically thought of as a Children's Crusade. Representing herself to the strike committee as a trained nurse, she offered, for a reasonable fee, to help investigate health conditions in the homes of the volunteering New York families, choose the best ones, and then go to Lawrence with three other I W W 's to select the most needy children and escort them down. In Lawrence she looked over the 119 children who had been selected for a trial and gave them the simple medical examination she was qualified to give. On February 11, all was in order.

The plan was to ride by morning train from Lawrence to Boston, march singing through Boston while they made the necessary change from one station to another, then continue their ride down. In New York, they would march from Grand Central Station to Union Square, New York's soapbox center, where speeches would be made for the benefit of the press by Bill Haywood and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a fiery orator called the Rebel Girl. Then the children would march a third time to a point from which they would be distributed to the waiting families.

But the walk through snowy Boston took much more time than had been expected, they missed the New York train and had to wait several hours for another. They were due at Grand Central Station at 3 o'clock. When that time came and no children had arrived, the crowd of almost five thousand radicals gathered to greet them were sure the owners had used their company police to stop them from leaving. As other trains arrived without children, the crowd became frightened. It was a bitterly cold day with temperatures close to zero. A brass band played and the crowd waved red flags to keep themselves warm. Finally, at almost seven o'clock, the train chugged in, Margaret and the children stepped out beaming while the cameras rolled.

The crusade was a great success and got a great deal of newspaper coverage. In fact, it got too much. When another exodus was announced, the owners of the mills decided to stop it, come what may. On

February 17, 1912, they posted an order saying that no children could leave Lawrence without their parents' written consent. Then on February 22, when consents had been received, they had the city marshal forbid their departure under any circumstances.

This proved the mill-owners' undoing. For the plan this time was to send the children to Philadelphia as well as to New York, and when a group of Philadelphia Socialists came to Lawrence to fetch them and were told they could not go, a real brawl occurred at the railroad station. The local police closed in on the women and children, clubbed them, and dragged them from the trains. The owners got such a bad press that public-spirited women such as Mrs. Amos Pinchot, wife of the Governor of Pennsylvania, and Mrs. Howard Taft, wife of the President of the United States, became actively interested. In fact, when a congressional committee was created to investigate the mistreatment of the children, Margaret was called to testify, Mrs. Taft was in the audience. Margaret told how emaciated the children were, how the examining doctor found almost all had enlarged tonsils and adenoids, and how she had taken notes on their clothing. In the bitter New England winter only 4 out of 119 had underwear, only 20 were wearing coats, and none had on woolen things of any kind.

This testimony, plus the lack of violence on the part of the strikers, turned the tide in their favor. A week later the owners gave in on the extra twenty-five cents, and all went back to the mill.

Margaret wrote some articles for the *Call* about the strike, saying "Scratch beneath the skin of the patriot and you find the blood of the exploiter." But then, just as suddenly as she had resigned as a Socialist organizer, she resigned as secretary of the I W W strike committee, saying that she had to find a way of earning more money.

That way came through her sister Ethel, whom she had convinced to leave Corning and come to New York. Ethel's marriage to Jack Byrne had become a shambles. Byrne, Ethel found, could hold neither his liquor nor a job, with their two children, the couple had to live as non-paying guests in the home of Jack's parents, a home in which the strictest kind of Catholicism was practiced and where they forgave their son everything and his wife nothing. Ethel had stuck it out for a few years, even though Margaret kept writing her quoting Emma Goldman's philosophy "It is only individuals that count, not families."

Finally, Ethel had left her children with their grandparents and come to New York where she had been accepted at the nurses-training



school of New York's prestigious Mt Sinai Hospital and emerged with the diploma Margaret had coveted so much

Now Ethel, remaining at Mt Sinai as a staff nurse, was able to make important connections She often heard through her patients about wealthy women who still preferred to give birth at home and were prepared to pay well for someone to serve as a midwife, then stay on for a month or so as baby nurse As often as she could, she got Margaret the double job

Working as a midwife again, Margaret found she enjoyed it as much as ever, in no time she was working for the Visiting Nurses Association of the lower East Side as well

The Visiting Nurses Association was a group of public nurses sent out by the Henry Street Settlement to take care of poverty-stricken women They went into the homes of women too ill to look after themselves, rubbed their backs, changed their beds, cooked simple meals, and quieted the children But their main task was to see their patients through the ordeal of childbirth in tenements where conditions were, if possible, more horrible than in Lawrence

In one teeming district made up of the few blocks between Fourteenth Street and East Broadway, five hundred thousand people were living in buildings designed for one hundred, they crowded in seven or eight to a room, sleeping on wooden doors unscrewed from hinges each night and stretched across chairs, or horizontally on beds, or on the bare floors With no knowledge of birth control, a fertile woman could get pregnant practically every year, increasing the floor and door sleepers at an alarming rate As a result, when a woman didn't have the price of an abortionist, she would try to abort herself, using a steel knitting needle, an umbrella tip, or a soda bottle cap—any instrument sharp enough to bring on the terrible cramps and severe bleeding that emptied her womb

On a hot summer afternoon in 1912, Margaret was hastily summoned to the fetid room of a woman named Sadie Sachs Sadie, twenty-seven and pregnant again, had tried to abort herself and was hemorrhaging badly, Margaret could do nothing except run to fetch a doctor After hours of work he was able to stop the flow Margaret tells in her autobiography how, as the doctor was leaving, Sadie called to him despairingly "Another thing like this will finish me, I suppose?" The doctor did not answer, but continued walking away "Then tell me how to prevent it," Sadie pleaded "Tell me the secret, please!" The doctor

turned on his heel and answered brusquely "Oh, so you want to have your cake and eat it too, do you? The secret is, tell Jake to sleep on the roof "

Sadie now pleaded with Margaret "You tell me the secret then Oh, please, PLEASE " But Margaret knew few "secrets " She knew about condoms, but that meant persuading a husband to wear one, a difficult task in a neighborhood where buying condoms would mean admitting to having frequent relations with his wife, a subject simply not talked about Besides, condoms cost money, desire was immediate, and to a husband, nine months was very far away Margaret also knew about douching, but how could a wife douche when no "nice woman" could possibly be seen sneaking through the halls to the only toilet, douche bag in hand? The oldest method of all, withdrawal, was popularly supposed to be bad for the health, and a woman had troubles enough without asking for *that*

Evidently Jake chose neither to sleep on the roof, nor use a condom, nor withdraw One night a few months later Margaret was called back to the same room Sadie Sachs, pregnant again, had once more tried to abort herself This time she was hemorrhaging so badly Margaret did not have time to fetch a doctor She died within minutes, and as Margaret folded Sadie's thin hands across her breast and drew the sheet over her pale face, Jake walked up and down the room pulling at his hair like an insane man, crying "Oh my God! Oh my God!"

As Margaret tells the story in her autobiography

I left him pacing desperately back and forth, and for hours myself walked and walked and walked through the hushed streets When I finally arrived home and let myself quietly in, all the household was sleeping I looked out my window and down upon the dimly lighted city Its pains and griefs crowded in upon me, a moving picture rolled before my eyes with photographic clearness women writhing in travail to bring forth little babies, the babies themselves naked and hungry, wrapped in newspapers to keep them from the cold, six-year-old children with pinched, pale, wrinkled faces, old in concentrated wretchedness, pushed into gray and fetid cellars, crouching on stone floors, their small scrawny hands scuttling through rags, making lamp shades, artificial flowers, white coffins, black coffins, coffins, coffins inter-

minably passing in never-ending succession The scenes piled one upon another on another I could bear it no longer

As I stood there the darkness faded The sun came up and threw its reflection over the house tops It was the dawn of a new day in my life also The doubt and questioning, the experimenting and trying, were now to be put behind me I knew I could not go back merely to keeping people alive

I went to bed, knowing that no matter what it might cost, I was finished with palliatives and superficial cures, I was resolved to seek out the root of evil, to do something to change the destiny of mothers whose miseries were vast as the sky

The trouble with Margaret's story, which ends with a description of her stripping off her nurse's uniform, throwing her nurse's bag across the room, and deciding to devote herself immediately to the cause of birth control, is that it didn't happen quite that way Almost four years were to pass before she dedicated herself entirely to birth control—four very busy years in which she was to write more articles for the *Call*, march in picket lines, start a newspaper of her own, escape to Europe as a fugitive from justice, and see her beloved daughter Peggy die

During these four years, she learned more about newsmaking techniques She started in the spring of 1913 by marching in the picket lines of the Paterson, New Jersey, silk strike

On February 12, 1913, fifteen hundred men and women of the Duplan Silk Company of Hazelton, Pennsylvania, marched out and called for I W W help By February 23 the strike had spread to the much larger silk mills of Paterson By now over eleven thousand workers were involved, and Bill Haywood sent Jessie Ashley and Margaret Sanger down to Hazelton to organize the picket lines Each took turns marching at the head

On the morning of April 7, Margaret and some other pickets were arrested Margaret complained loudly to the magistrate about her unlawful arrest, for the benefit of attending reporters, and was fined five dollars She refused to pay Sentenced to five days in jail instead, she declared she would be happy to go to jail and was furious when a sympathizer stepped forward and paid her fine, going to jail, she figured, would make far better news

Three days later she was arrested for picketing again As the arrest-

ing officer led her off, a bystander made what the newspaper accounts called a "wisecrack" at her. She demanded that the officer also arrest the wisecracker, but he refused. Margaret jeered to the officer, "Then I'll slap your face instead," and proceeded to move toward him but he caught her arm and held her back as she swung.

In court she called her swing "direct action," insisting that "There is no law or court today where 'political action' rules." She was released, this time without a fine, but she got bad publicity from her attempted slap. Haywood regretfully concluded that her usefulness at Hazelton had ended. He transferred her to Paterson instead.

In Paterson the strike was being mercilessly put down by the militia of the state and city governments. Margaret marched up and down the picket lines lecturing on birth control to the strikers, then helped bring a group of Paterson children to New York to be distributed to waiting families as she had done during the Lawrence strike. But bringing the children did not generate the same public appeal as it had before. Things began to look hopeless. The public was apathetic, the mill-owners were strong, and I W W funds were running extremely low.

At this point John Reed, a writer and arrested picketer, came up with an idea which he was sure would raise a lot of money. He would write a pageant of the strike and stage it at Madison Square Garden with real strikers as the actors. The date was set for June 7, 1913. The Garden was rented with money supplied by Mabel Dodge, a wealthy friend of Reed's, and fifteen hundred strikers were brought in from Paterson. They first paraded by daylight from the railroad station to Washington Square and next by torchlight up Fifth Avenue to the Garden, while a brass band played the "Marseillaise." Then they reenacted the strike. The *Call* described it as a moving and powerful spectacle, but the benches of the vast Garden were empty. When it was over they found they had lost two thousand dollars.

Broke and dispirited, the workers had no choice but to go back to the mills with none of their demands met. Despondent, too, Margaret gave up working for the I W W and gladly went off to Provincetown when Bill sent her there to rest.