

Nation: Planned Parenthood

Did Mother of Free Love Urge Selective Breeding?

By John Elvin

Planned Parenthood founder, radical socialist, feminist and birth-control advocate Margaret Sanger is said to have made a valuable contribution to humanity. Why, then, do some call her 'Hitler in a skirt'?

Margaret Sanger, the feminist champion credited with creating the term "birth control," arrived in the world at a time when sexual activity meant the begetting of children. She left it, after a highly controversial lifelong crusade, a world more accepting of

sexual intercourse as recreation.

Sanger was born Margaret Higgins in 1883 in Corning, N.Y., the daughter of a socialist stonecutter. She died Margaret Slee, the high-living widow of a wealthy capitalist, at Tucson, Ariz., in 1966. But it is as Sanger that this social activist



Sanger, at left, in 1917: Heroine or villainess, she remains a social enigma.

remains both revered and reviled.

In addition to her marriages to socialist leader William Sanger and industrialist J. Noah Slee, biographers say she spent time in the company of a great many "voluntary mates." She urged the "conscious, careful selection of a lover, that is the mate, if only for an hour, for a lifetime, maybe." She practiced what she preached, contending that celibacy leads to "insanity, nervousness, sex perversion and homosexuality."

But it is her advocacy of selective parenthood for which she is best known. Sanger claimed to believe that the random production of children should be curtailed because it was antithetical to "the child's right to be wanted." That's a very motherly, caring and catchy phrase, but the evidence suggests Sanger was pure social engineer, a "scientific socialist" itching to slam the throttle of her ideas full speed ahead. She despaired that, due to "hazardous methods of human reproduction," children are not created through "scientific methods which have been successfully applied to plants and the selective breeding of animals."

Sanger and those who dote upon her say it was her nursing career among the poor in New York City's Lower East Side that sparked her crusade. Sympathetic feminist biographers tell us it was the shock of ministering to women who had attempted to perform abortions on themselves that prompted her to open America's first birth-control clinic in Brooklyn, a cutting-edge gesture that led to her arrest and incarceration.

Some confusion exists about her claim to have completed formal nurse's training at two professional institutions; researchers have found no proof. If she served as a nurse or as an aide, she soon abandoned the down-and-dirty side of health care for more theoretical realms.

Sanger moved in a circle of socialists, radical intellectuals, eugenics promoters and other controversial characters. In his book, *Bad Choices: A Look Inside Planned Parenthood*, pro-life leader Douglas R. Scott notes that Sanger considered her crowd to be the elite and "preferred that government be run by an aristocracy — a privileged minority or upper class." She advocated intelligence tests for legislators and made it clear she thought many of those of her day would fail such a test. She declared Congress and state legislatures nests of the "mentally and constitutionally unfit."

For all her criticisms of governing bodies, though, Sanger was a strong advocate of federal and state birth-control clinics where "women may get ad-

vice and where they may get proper attention." This was her core cause, and in its service she published magazines and books, led public crusades and organized various conventions of fellow advocates. These efforts eventually led to the consolidation of the groups into the Birth Control Federation of America.

As the title of one of her publications, *Woman Rebel*, would seem to indicate, Sanger never was a particularly happy sort.

Her biographers note that she was addicted to the pain-killer Demerol, obsessed with colonic irrigation, numerology, astrology, psychics, sex and off-beat religion.

She was not an easy person to understand, and biographers pro, con and neutral have disputed her meanings and

intentions for years. Some have assumed — not exactly without cause — that her use of the phrase, "A Race of Thoroughbreds" as the motto of a magazine she edited indicated that she espoused a "master-race" concept. The phrase appears to have originated with her crony, eugenicist Edward A. Kempf. She certainly used the phrase as her own, indicating a point of view one critic terms a mix of "racism and snobbery." One's rose-colored glasses must be very darkly tinted to miss the message in her statement that the "non-Aryan people" of the United States are "a great biological menace to the future of civilization."

Defenders say this sort of talk was the intellectual vogue of the time, presumably meaning that it was forgivable as political necessity in furthering her concerns. Her advocates do not appear to suggest that such forgiveness therefore would extend to contributors to the magazine she edited, such as Ernst Rudin, Hitler's director of sterilization who helped launch the Nazi Society for Racial Hygiene.

Several of Sanger's associates had open praise for Hitler's racial policies, including author Lothrop Stoddard, who wrote in 1940 that sterilization laws were "weeding out the worst strains in the Germanic stock in a scientific and truly humanitarian way." But this was not a popular line of thinking in the United States at the time, and in 1942 the name was changed on the advice of public-relations counselors who thought "Birth Control Federa-

tion" hinted, however erroneously, of a Nazi front. The recommended new name was Planned Parenthood Federation, or PPF — one to which Sanger is said to have objected mightily.

In her many books, Sanger often invoked an antiwelfare theme, complaining that such government caretaking programs were an obstacle to an effort "to weed out the feeble and unfit." Another comment on welfare was that "funds that should be used to

raise the standard of our civilization are diverted to the maintenance of those who should never have been born."

And whom, exactly, should never have been born? Sanger suggested, for openers, "the least intelligent and degenerate classes" include those guilty of "insanity, epilepsy, criminality, prostitution,

pauperism and mental defect"

For the betterment of society, she proposed that the government license parenthood — "No woman shall have the legal right to bear a child [and] no man shall have the right to become a father, without a permit for parenthood," she stated in her proposed "American Baby Code."

Further, Sanger advocated that "illiterates, paupers, unemployables, criminals, prostitutes, dope fiends" be segregated to "farms" where they could be reeducated regarding "moral conduct," not to mention her suggestion that they experience "immediate sterilization."

Another of her proposals was that the U.S. government "set a sensible example to the world by offering a bonus or a yearly pension to all obviously unfit parents who allow themselves to be sterilized by harmless and scientific means." Such a program, she contended, would eliminate "the diseased and the moron." So, who's Sanger calling a moron? She cited intelligence tests showing that, in the World War I era, 47.3 percent of American men of draft age "are morons" and therefore a larger presence of "morons" in society could be assumed — "nearly one-half the entire population."

One researcher sums up Sanger's attitude as "Don't help the poor, just eliminate them." Others even less respectful of her ideas have termed her "Hitler in a skirt" and in turn referred to Hitler as "Sanger with a mustache."

It certainly should be noted that the

modern Planned Parenthood "finds these views objectionable and outmoded," according to a statement which characterizes Sanger as "a passionate opponent of racism and anti-Semitism." The group contends that quotations from Sanger often are taken "out of context, and exaggerated and distorted ... in order to discredit Sanger and the organization she founded."

Despite this rousing defense, many people of varying racial, religious and political persuasions are not entirely at peace with Sanger and PPF's claims above. A cultural myth that birth control is a genocidal plot aimed in the direction of the African-American population has existed since the days of black-nationalist leader Marcus Garvey.

One Sanger declaration that aggravates the situation goes: "We do not want word to get out that we want to exterminate the Negro population." While defending this as another case of a quotation taken out of context, PPF today admits at least that Sanger believed ethnic groups should "keep to their own."

PPF denies that Sanger was a eugenicist — advocating purification of the "stock" through scientific means. But Scott, who heads Life Decisions International, an antiabortion-activist group, points to her book, *Pivot of Civilization*. It describes birth control as "really the greatest and most truly eugenic method.... As a matter of fact, birth control has been accepted by the clear-thinking and far-seeing eugenicists themselves as the most constructive and necessary of the means to racial health."

While the failure of PPF to separate from Sanger's radical ideas concerning eugenics remains a matter of some controversy, other issues are being raised about the organization — including not only its general approach to family planning but the fact that it receives millions in federal tax dollars.

So what hath Sanger wrought? Today, PPF, the organization that awkwardly acknowledges her clay feet but keeps her on a pedestal nonetheless, is the 12th-largest charitable organization in the United States. The group boasts that thanks to its good work, "Family planning prevents 1.2 million unintended pregnancies and half a million abortions every year."

"They are like a doctor who runs a mortuary on the side," contends Scott. "They say they are going to prevent your pregnancy, but when they don't ... they'll give you an abortion," he tells *Insight*. He says the group is "the largest abortion provider in the United States." Though not all its clinics per-

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form abortions, all provide referrals.

Is this a big business? PPF has an annual budget of \$487 million, 35 percent of which comes from tax dollars. It has 938 clinics throughout the United States and plans to double that number by the year 2000. Government funding comes primarily through Title X of the Public Health Service Act, which finances free and sliding-scale family-planning services. Planned Parenthood competes for the grant money with other contractors offering similar services, but comes off with the lion's share.

Tracking the current amount of Title X grants is difficult because funds are consolidated with other public-health programs in block grants. In 1992, the figure was \$110 million for family-planning clinics — and that amount has risen because of increased congressional appropriations in 1992 and 1994. Family-planning activities also are funded by Medicaid and other government sources.

A not-for-profit and tax-exempt organization, PPF benefits from philanthropy and corporate donations. Contributors include foundations such as Rockefeller, Mellon, Ford, Carnegie, Pew, MacArthur and Packard. Direct-mail fund-raising is responsible for generating millions more in contributions, according to Scott, who recently

launched a boycott of the top corporate contributors to PPF. He claims success in persuading some 41 of these corporations against further donations.

AT&T, for example, gave "\$50,000 a year for 25 years," Scott says. "But AT&T stopped giving money; they were the first big company to stop in response to the project that we started. And I just heard that Grand Metropolitan, the big conglomerate out of London that owns Burger King, Pilsbury, things like that, just ceased giving them money. It's been very successful."

In a way there is an ironic twist to this defunding. Sanger, believing that benevolence toward the "unfit" simply helped perpetuate society's problems, said: "Organized charity itself is the symptom of a malignant social disease." Philanthropies and charities, she said, "are silly at best and vicious at worst."

A fact sheet published by PPF makes abortion sound as easy as a trip to the local fast-food shack: "Almost 90 percent of abortions in America are outpatient procedures performed under local anesthesia during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy."

According to the National Abortion Federation, early outpatient abortions cost \$200 to \$400. Later abortions are somewhat more complicated — the

procedure costs approximately \$400 to \$700 from the 13th to the 16th week; after that, the cost goes up about \$100 per week. To critics who talk of abortion-industry "profits," PPF responds that these costs have "risen less than inflation." Further PPF cost-benefit analysis reveals that each dollar spent for an abortion sought by a poor woman saves taxpayers "about \$4" in "public medical and welfare expenditures resulting from an unintended birth."

Though PPF strongly denies the assertion that its clinics are geared toward making money, Scott disagrees. "Let me put it this way," he says of the "profits" he sees in abortion, "if it were like any other business, it would be on the Fortune 500, no question about it. There are massive amounts of money made in abortion."

Title X, the tax-funded engine behind PPF and other similar groups, specifically bans the use of its funding for "any program in which abortion is a method of family planning." But, rather than being a threat to PPF funding, this proviso has been liberally interpreted simply as a prohibition of use of Title X funds directly for abortion. "During the 1970s, the Office of Population Affairs, which administers Title X, became a virtual adjunct to PPF," says Scott. "Prominent leaders of the organization

With an Eye Toward Tradition



Concerned Women of America's Pate wonders about PPF's government subsidies.

Concerned Women for America, or CWA, was founded in 1979 by Beverly LaHaye as a conservative alternative to the National Organization for Women. It is said to be the nation's largest politically active women's organization, with some 600,000 members. Headquartered in Washington, the group sees its mission as preserving, promoting and protecting traditional Judeo-Christian values. In the following interview, *Insight* national correspondent John Elvin spoke with Carmen Pate, vice president and chief spokeswoman for CWA.

Insight: Do tax dollars support Planned Parenthood and its abortion agenda?

CWA: Well, certainly they do through the Title X program. Of course, Title X was launched to help poor couples and low-income couples. It wasn't even intended for individuals. But as the sexual revolution came into play, the administrators of the program began to expand it. And then money began to go to clinics that performed abortions.

Insight: But can this group legally use the money for abortions?

CWA: Planned Parenthood receives

succeeded one another as administrators of Title X and, after leaving government service, returned to top positions at PPF." Those loose interpretations of Title X's prohibition were rescinded during the Reagan and Bush years, but the Clinton administration reinstated them, Scott says.

So, is Scott saying that today's federal money is being used to support PPF's abortion efforts? "Well, it facilitates abortion," he tells *Insight*. "Certain PPF facilities have an 88 percent abortion-referral rate. For everyone who goes in there, 88 percent of those people get abortions, and those referrals are made with so-called family-planning money from the government. Yes, those funds facilitate abortion."

Critics say PPF plays a sort of shell game to get around the proscribed use of federal funds for abortion, spending government money for "auxiliary activities" and private funds to finance the abortion side of the operation. They want a congressional investigation to determine the validity of their strong suspicions.

PPF, on the other hand, wants laws changed so that all of its activities may be formally intertwined. It hopes to bring this about by electing pro-choice legislators. The organization is proud of its showing in the last election, having

devoted considerable effort to registering "low-income women, young women and women of color" who make up most of its client base. PPF clinics charge less for services than conventional physicians and strongly emphasize confidentiality — a big plus with teen customers. Scott cynically refers to this as the "right" of minors to "government-subsidized fornication."

PPF's new president, Gloria Feldt, says the group won seven out of eight races where its Action Fund conducted drives on behalf of candidates who support "abortion without government intrusion." She said, "We are very encouraged by the success we had in these races and will work to educate even more voters in the future."

Feldt will promote a more activist agenda than her predecessor, Scott says. He has been attempting to confront Feldt in debate, with no success, since 1988, when he served as director of Arizona Right to Life and she was active with PPF in that state. "She is rabidly

dedicated to unrestricted and unlimited legal abortion," he says, and "can be expected to concentrate more on advocacy and less in other areas."

In one of her first public appearances as the new president of PPF a few months ago, Feldt showed herself to be truly in the mold of Sanger. In asking rhetorically what it is that abortion critics really oppose, she said: "Could it be ... sex? Is it the idea of sex without procreation?"

For an answer, one might look to the words of Rep. Henry Hyde, the Illinois Republican who did his best to rally Congress for an override of President Clinton's veto of the ban on the "partial-birth" abortion procedure. Hyde described the



Hyde: Vocal abortion opponent raises irony.

procedure as involving "an abortionist plunging a pair of scissors into the back of the neck of a tiny child whose trunk, arms and legs have already been born and then suction out its brains" — and observed: "People who say 'I feel your pain' can't be referring to that little infant."

large portion of the Title X funding and, you're right, there's a section of Title X that says funds appropriated under the title cannot be used in programs for abortion as a method of family planning. Yet, many of the Planned Parenthood clinics do, in fact, perform abortions. So the way they get around this is to have separate budgets set up for their abortion side and their family-planning side. But, of course, we know they are one of the largest providers of abortion in our country.

Insight: And that's your primary concern about Planned Parenthood?

CWA: The concern that we have isn't only about receiving the money for the abortions; they also, as far as their family-planning portion goes, use the money to hand out contraceptives to minors without parental consent or notification. And they are very strong advocates for continuing Title X and are very loud and vocal, because it supplies a major portion of their funding. It's just a matter of paperwork that allows them to get around the clear intention of the law. You can go into a Planned Parenthood clinic and, in the same building where

they do family planning, you will find they also do abortions. They get around the prohibition by mere paperwork.

Insight: What are you doing about this?

CWA: As a matter of fact, in August of '95 we were very active in trying to have the Title X program terminated. Unfortunately, we lost the vote and so the funding was restored. There had been a lot of efforts on the part of organizations like ours and other pro-family organizations to try to get the truth to the congressmen and senators to let them know what that funding is doing. What we're asking is that Congress examine the actual use of the funding to determine whether the law needs to be modified to be sure that it is consistent with the intention of Congress.

Insight: So, in CWA's view, what's the remedy?

CWA: We just feel that it needs to be investigated, that Congress needs to know how much abortion counseling is done, how many young women are referred for abortions and of course full disclosure about abortions performed in

the same building. We brought our concerns about the parental-notification aspect of Title X to the attention of the last Congress. We're convinced it is a matter of just educating the congressmen and senators and continuing to encourage investigations of what PPF is doing with all that tax money.

Insight: What would be the best-case scenario, from your standpoint?

CWA: We would like this kind of funding to be removed from Title X. That would be No. 1 because it has failed to reduce the rates of teen pregnancy or out-of-wedlock births. It has failed to reduce sexually transmitted diseases. As a matter of fact, it has just increased the problems. And you can look at statistics from their own research, from an institute commissioned by Planned Parenthood, which shows that all of the negatives have increased, not decreased. So we believe that this government program does not deserve to continue receiving millions of taxpayer dollars and that other options for dealing with these problems should be explored.