



Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*

Volume Two

CHAPTER XLV



We oppose conscription

the people as Woodrow Wilson, who wrote and talked democracy, acted despotically, privately and officially, and yet managed to keep up the myth that he was championing humanity and freedom.

We had no illusions about the outcome of the conscription bill pending before Congress. We regarded the measure as a complete denial of every human right, the death-knell to liberty of conscience, and we determined to fight it unconditionally. We did not expect to be able to stem the tidal wave of hatred and violence which compulsory service was bound to bring, but we felt that we had at least to make known at large that there were some in the United States who owned their souls and who meant to preserve their integrity, no matter what the cost.

We decided to call a conference in the *Mother Earth* office to broach the organization of a No-Conscription League and draw up a manifesto to clarify to the people of America the menace of conscription. We also planned a large mass meeting as a protest against compelling American men to sign their own death-warrants in the form of forced military registration.

Because of previously arranged lecture dates in Springfield, Massachusetts, I was unfortunately not able to be present at the conference, set for May 9. But as Sasha, Fitzi, Leonard D. Abbott, and other clear-headed friends would attend, I felt no anxiety about the outcome. It was suggested that the conference should take up the question of whether the No-Conscription League should urge men not to register. *En route* to Springfield I wrote a short statement giving my attitude on the matter. I took the position that, as a woman and therefore myself not subject to military service, I could not advise people on the matter. Whether or not one is to lend oneself as a tool for the business of killing should properly be left to the individual conscience. As an anarchist I could not presume to decide the fate of others, I wrote. But I could say to those who refused to be coerced into military service that I would plead their cause and stand by their act against all odds.

By the time I returned from Springfield the No-Conscription League had been organized and the Harlem River Casino rented for a mass meeting to take place on May 18. Those who had participated at the conference had agreed with my attitude regarding registration.