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Memoriam

Richard S. Fraser

An Appreciation and Selection of His Work

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This bulletin is dedicated to

Dave Dreiser,

good friend and long-time collaborator

of Dick Fraser

1913-1988

Richard S. Fraser, a veteran Trotskyist and tenacious fighter for black freedom, died in his sleep on November 27 at the age of 75. For the last several years Dick fought to overcome many painful and debilitating illnesses, mustering the courage to face endless operations, so that he could continue his research and literary work on the question of the revolutionary struggle for black liberation in America. Comrade Fraser was not only a cherished friend but a theoretical mentor of the Spartacist League.

member of the SWP's National Committee. In the Pacific Northwest Fraser won several members of the Communist Party in Seattle to Trotskyism following the 1956 Hungarian revolution and the Khrushchev revelations. That Seattle was the place where the SWP had its most significant success in cracking the Stalinists is a testament to the persistence and political capabilities of Richard Fraser.

Through his involvement in black freedom

to black freedom through the program of revolutionary integration, the assimilation of black people into an egalitarian socialist society."

Fraser joined the Trotskyist movement in 1934, recruited on a cross-country greyhound bus trip by a member of the newly formed Workers Party-the product of a fusion between the Trotskyist Communist League of America and A.J. Muste's American Workers Party. For close to 30 years he was an organizer of the Socialist Workers Party on the West Coast in Los Angeles and Seattle; for at least 20 years he was a

gration to the SWP's turn toward a separatist "self-determination" ideology (associated particularly with George Breitman), which would become a theoretical cover for its abstention from the mass civil rights movement in the early 1960s and subsequent full-blown capitulation to black nationalism.

Dick came into disfavor with the SWP leadership when he opposed the party's adoption of the call for federal troops to protect Southern blacks. In his "Resolution on the Little Rock Crisis" Fraser tore apart the SWP's support to Eisenhower's introduction of federal troops in Little Rock in 1957, powerfully pointing out that the end result had been the crushing of local black self-defense efforts. In the 1960s Fraser along with other SWP spokesmen was propelled out of the party as it plunged from centrism to reformism. As he wrote in a letter to his son: "It was I who initiated the split from the SWP by publicly attacking its Personal Representative, my old friend Asher Harer, whom I had recruited in 1935, for the SWP stand on the Vietnam War, and proclaiming that the way to 'BRING THE TROOPS

HOME' was for the Viet Cong to drive them into the South China Sea"

Fraser went on to found the Seattle-based Freedom Socialist Party. Cut off by a split in the FSP, Dickwent into the Newamerican Movement hoping that he could influence and educate some of these young New Leftists in the old Leninist school. With the fusion of NAM and the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee Fraser was subsequently carried into the Democratic Socialists of America.

Over the years we had our disagreements with Dick. Neither of us tried to hide these, but we were always happy to bend the stick in favor of the areas of profound political agreement between us. In his later years Fraser was handicapped by the loss of his Marxist library, which the SL sought to replenish, and of his personal working papers. In turn Dick's collaboration was invaluable in elaborating a perspective for rooting the SL among militant black workers and youth. Fraser's formal membership in other organizations obviously stood in contradiction to his fervent political beliefs, a contradiction which was resolved in his last years. Sharing our outrage over the U.S. bombing of Libya, he distanced himself from the DSA.

Addressing the SL/U.S. Seventh National Conference (1983) on the question of the organization of labor/black leagues, Dick spoke movingly:

"I've had some discussions with many comrades, which have been very gratifying, and I am humbled by the knowledge that things that I wrote 30 years ago, which were so scorned by the old party, have had some important impact, finally."

Dick's last political act before his death was his endorsement of the November 5 Mobilization that stopped the Klan in Philadelphia. That satisfying mobilization of the power of integrated labor was a testament to our comrade Richard Fraser who in endorsing identified himself as a "historic American Trotskyist." That he was, and his loss will be keenly felt.

Adapted from Workers Vanguard

No. 466, 2 December 1988

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On 8 January 1989 the Spartacist League held a memorial meeting in Los Angeles to honor the life and work of Richard S. Fraser. Some 85 people came out to pay tribute to Fraser, from old comrades and friends going back over 50 years when Dick joined the Trotskyist movement to a younger generation which included many members of the Spartacist League. Also present was his son Jonny, whom Dick cherished. A beautiful display of photographs and other materials illustrating Dick's life was assembled by comrades from the West Coast, many of whom had worked with and cared for Dick during his last years as he courageously fought many painful and

debilitating illnesses to carry on his life's work. The speeches and messages to the memorial meeting were as rich and diverse as the man they remembered.

The International Communist League is fortunate to be the heir to an unbroken revolutionary tradition which goes back to Lenin and Trotsky's Communist International. Dick Fraser was an important part of that continuity and it is in this spirit that we are reprinting in full the speeches and messages to his memorial meeting, originally serialized in Workers Vanguard Nos. 469-471 (20 January, 3 February and 17 February 1989).

Karen Wyatt

Los Angeles Spartacist League

We're here today to honor the life of Richard Fraser. Dick joined the Trotskyist movement at the age of 21 in 1934 and was an active participant in the socialist movement until his death on November 27, 1988. The attendance here today I think is a testimony to his deep and lasting friendships as well as the political impact he had on his own and on younger generations. We'll have seven speakers as well as twelve messages from comrades and friends who couldn't attend today. After that we will conclude with the singing of the Internationale. Now you're all welcome to stay following that. The bar will be open and you can look at all the displays that have been done. We'll also be playing music that Dick particularly liked. Included in this is some music that was written, orchestrated and played by Dick's son Jonny who is here today. Dick's love for his

son was very great. Even after eleven hours of surgery the mention of Jonny's name would light up his eyes, and he was very proud of his music.

Don Andrews

reading statement of the Bay Area Labor Black League for Social Defense

We in the Labor Black League for Social Defense salute Richard S. Fraser, historic American

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Trotskyist, who died today, 27 November 1988. Richard Fraser was our teacher, the author of "For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Question" that lights the road to black freedom through the program of revolutionary integration, the assimilation of black people into an egalitarian socialist society.

Richard Fraser, the theoretician, was above all an organizer and a tireless fighter for freedom for black Americans and all the working people. His courageous struggle in his later years to overcome his many painful illnesses in order to complete his historic work on the black question is only one recent example of his exemplary tenacity.

Comrade Fraser rejoiced in and endorsed our victorious labor/black mobilizations that stopped cold the Ku Klux Klan's intended provocations in Washington, D.C. on November 27, 1982 and our recent satisfying victory against these fascists on November 5, 1988 in Philadelphia. The labor/black mobilizations are in life the verification of Richard Fraser's historic contribution to history: for revolutionary integrationism as the road to the emancipation of the American proletariat--white and black--as opposed to the dead end of black nationalism. From its inception the Spartacist League's adaption of Richard Fraser's program of revolutionary integrationism has been the cornerstone of Spartacist's program of black liberation through socialist revolution. Our organization, the Labor Black League for Social Defense, grew out of the SU's successful November 27, 1982 mobilization that stopped the KKK.

We honor our friend and teacher Richard Fraser most of all by continuing his fight. Forward to the Third American Revolution to Finish the Civil War! Hail Richard S. Fraser, fighter for black freedom!

Charles Curtiss

who knew Dick Fraser for 55 years and was Los Angeles organizer of the Communist League of America when Dick joined

I am here in two capacities. From the Los Angeles Socialist Party I bring condolences to the family, friends and comrades of Dick Fraser. But I'm also here in a personal capacity, for the ties that link Dick Fraser and me go back more than a half century. On counting back it was about 55 years ago that I first met Dick in San Diego. We were obviously considerably younger then. Together we studied the fundamentals of internationalist socialism, the class struggle and its final outcome in socialism. We pondered over the sources of surplus value, class exploitation and its termination in a socialist society of abundance for all with production for use not profit.

We analyzed the cruelty and the absurdity of unemployment, of want and suffering in the midst of plenty. This was in the very depths of the Depression. We probed the economic and political roots of war and imperialism, and how to eradicate them and establish an economic order internationally where the antagonism between classes vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.

We learned and we were also active. We fought against fascism in demonstrations. We battled in discussion with individual members of the Communist Party and its supporters against Stalinism and for the internationalist essential of socialism as against the monstrosity of the theory of "socialism in one country." And he, we, responded "present" with enthusiasm on picket lines, as volunteers in supporting union efforts, in backing the movements of the unemployed and the oppressed segments of our society for human rights.

Dick had a constant and loved companion—his fiddle. He was a sensitive musician, a talented and devoted violinist. For it is well to remember that we, young people, many of us in our teens, brought into the socialist movement music and literature. We had choral groups and we heard recitals at our socials. We formed drama groups and Dick among others gave much here.

There was a kindness and generosity in Dick that surmounted even the bitterness of the factionalism that marked the socialist movement and that asserted itself, despite the torturous pain he was suffering. And this kindness and generosity, as so often happens, called forth kindness and

generosity in turn in those he touched, whether briefly or for long periods of time. There is guidance in this thought. Dick in his integrity, his giving of himself without stint in the daily work for socialism, his respect for clarity and knowledge in the realm of thought, his artistry, his magnanimity, was a forerunner of the person of the human future of associated labor in which the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all.

As I visited him in the last months of his life, and these visits were harrowing for he was very sick, I bear witness that he remained true to the ideals and goals and values he consciously adopted 55 and more years ago. The thoughts of youth were for him long, long thoughts. With all the setbacks of the intervening years and with all the pain of his illnesses, Dick stood fast as an internationalist socialist to the very last day of his life. This memory he left us and it is precious.

Myra Tanner Weiss

former longtime member of the Socialist Workers Party sent the following greetings

Dick Fraser lived his whole life as a socialist. However important the differences we had be-

tween us, we shared the desire for a socialist society and Dick struggled always to organize the working class and to raise its political consciousness. My special sympathy for our loss goes to those of you who not only lost a comrade but a close political collaborator and friend as well. He can never be replaced in your hearts. Dick was always certain of the socialist victory for which he devoted his life. And so are we. In revolutionary solidarity.

Dave Cooper

member of Socialist Action who first met Dick Fraser in the SWP in Minneapolis in 1938

I was listening to a tape recording this morning of the history of the IWW. Now Dick was never a member of the IWW. But if you knew Dick Fraser you knew that his roots were in the IWW. What do I mean by that? I mean, Dick may