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Basic biographical data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Martin Abern</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other names (by-names, pseud. etc.):</td>
<td>Marty Abern ; Martin Abramowitz ; Henry Allen ; Harry Allen ; Harry Stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date and place of birth:</td>
<td>December 2, 1898, ? (Russian Empire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date and place of death:</td>
<td>April ?, 1949, ?, USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationality:</td>
<td>Russian ; USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupations, careers, etc.:</td>
<td>Party organizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of activity in Trotskyist movement:</td>
<td>1928 - ca. 1946</td>
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Biographical sketch

There are only a few general biographical notes about Martin Abern, listed in the bibliography below. Our short sketch is chiefly based upon Glotzer, Albert: Abern, Martin (1898-1949), in: Biographical dictionary of the American Left, ed. by Bernard K. Johnpoll and Harvey Klehr, New York, NY, [etc.], 1986, pp. 1-2.

Martin Abramowitz was born in the province of Bessarabia (since 1878 part of the Russian Empire) on December 2, 1898 as a son of Joseph Abramowitz and his wife Aneta Schwartz. In 1902 the family emigrated to the United States, settled in Minneapolis, Minnesota, became naturalized and assumed the name Abern. In Minneapolis Martin Abern attended both elementary and high school before enrolling at the University of Minnesota in 1914 where he was tolerated as a campus radical only because he was a star of the university's football team. After the United States had entered World War I, Abern was expelled from Minnesota University because he had refused the draft and was sentenced to a six-month prison term. Martin Abern in 1928 married Lydia Winter.

Having joined the ranks of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World)1 and of the YPSL (Young People's Socialist League, the youth section of the SP, Socialist Party) already at an early age, Abern together with the entire left wing of the SP and YPSL left the Socialist Party in 1919 and in face of the Bolshevik Russian revolution and of the launching of the Comintern (Communist International) became a founding member of the American communist movement2. Abern was one of the leaders of the

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1) The IWW, also known as The Wobblies, was launched in 1905 as a revolutionary industrial union movement. Many people of the first generation of American Trotskyists had been members of the IWW before or during World War I.

2) In 1919 two communist parties were launched simultaneously in the U.S. which both were driven to underground in early 1920 by governmental repression. In 1920 both parties united while in 1921 another CP was founded which in 1922 split in 2 parties of the same
CPUSA's youth group and as the leader of the youth delegation from the U.S. attended the 2nd congress of the Communist Youth International which was held in Moscow in 1922 in connection with the 4th world congress of the Comintern where Abern as a delegate represented the half-legal American CP. He served as secretary and party organizer in Minnesota in 1920-1921 before going to Chicago, Illinois, serving there as national secretary of the YWL (Young Workers League), the youth branch of the CP, closely co-operating with young Max Shachtman. In 1922 Abern became a member of the Central Executive Committee of the CPUSA and soon sided with James P. Cannon in the latter's factional controversies with the party majority led by William Zebulon Foster. Abern also served as assistant national secretary of the ILD (International Labor Defense), a communist-led mass, or, front organization, taking active part in the defence work for Sacco and Vanzetti.

Shortly after the expulsion of the Trotskyist and Zinovievist left opposition from the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and the cleansing of the leading bodies of the Comintern from their adherents, the American left oppositionists were excluded from the CPUSA in the autumn of 1928. At that time the American left (Trotskyist) opposition officially called itself Opposition Group in the Workers (Communist) Party of America, led by James P. Cannon, Martin Abern and Max Shachtman. Shortly after their expulsion from the CP they launched the weekly paper The Militant, the first issue of which appeared on November 15, 1928. The American (and Canadian) adherents of the ILO (International Left Opposition) led by Leon Trotsky gathered around The Militant; Abern belonged to The Militant's editorial board as did Shachtman and Cannon, too; some weeks later they were joined by the talented union organizer Arne Swabeck and by Maurice Spector, who had been expelled as a Trotskyist from the Canadian CP.

In May 1929 at a convention held at Chicago, these men – together with their followers and supporters – founded the CLA (Communist League of America) which became the American section of the International Left Opposition. From the very beginning of CLA, Abern was a member of its National and Political Committee, the leading bodies of this party.

When in 1934 the CLA fused with Abraham J. Muste's AWP (American Workers' Party) to form the Workers' Party, Abern belonged to the leadership of this new party, too, which eventually dissolved in 1936 when under the slogan of entryism the majority of the American Trotskyists individually joined the ranks of Norman Thomas' Socialist Party (SP), from which, however, they were expelled already in the summer of the following year.

On January 1, 1938 Abern belonged to the founding members of the SWP (Socialist Workers Party) which became the U.S. section of Trotsky's Fourth International after it was formally launched in September 1938. Together with the other just-mentioned founding fathers of American Trotskyism as well as with some other outstanding activists of the left oppositional current of the American worker's and trade union movement, Abern was elected a member of the National Committee of the SWP and served on its Political Committee, too.

However, within less than two years after the SWP had been constituted, serious differences about some fundamental political questions arose – particularly about the question of the class character of the USSR – in face of the Hitler-Stalin-pact and the unfolding World War II. The main antagonists in these factional struggles and theoretical debates were James P. Cannon on the one, and Max Shachtman, James Burnham and Martin Abern on the other side. In 1940 these three SWP leaders left the party together with a considerable part of its membership and with the majority of the party youth, forming a new Workers' Party which some nine years later should be renamed Independent Socialist...
Martin Abern

Bio-Bibliographical Sketch

League after abandoning Trotskyism at the end of the World War. Abern, who had taken a very active part in the internal struggles preceding the split, was elected to the National Committee of the new Workers' Party. After World War II he had to reduce his activities in face of deteriorating health. Martin Abern died of a heart attack in April 1949.

[Further biographical details not known.]

Selective bibliography

- Selective bibliography: Books, collections, journals, bulletins to which Abern contributed

Internal Bulletin / Communist League of America (Opposition) (New York, NY) <TSB 0358>
Internal Bulletin / Socialist Workers Party (New York, NY) <TSB 1548>
Workers Monthly (Washington, DC)

- Selective bibliography: Books and articles about Abern

[Anon.]: Martin Abern [Biographical sketch, Wikipedia article]

Note: More informations about Martin Abern is likely to be found in some of the books, pamphlets, university works and articles listed in the relevant chapter(s) of the Lubitz' Leon Trotsky Bibliography [ISSN 2190-0183], e.g. in chapter 7.5.18.

Notes on archives

The Papers of Martin Abern form part of the John Dwyer Collection (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Mich.). John Dwyer in 1947 had obtained this large collection of documents of the American communist and Trotskyist movements which Abern had assembled. Archival material by Abern is also to be found in the Max Shachtman Papers (Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Elmer Bobst Library, New York, NY), in the Eastman Papers (Manuscript Department, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind.). Abern's letter exchange with Trotsky is contained in The Exile Papers of Lev Trotsky (call phrase: bMS Russ 13.1) forming part of the famous Trotsky Archives at Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.†

Wolfgang and Petra Lubitz, 2005,
slightly rev. August 2016

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† TSB item numbers (e.g. <TSB 0716>) refer to Lubitz' Trotskyist Serials Bibliography, München [etc.]: Saur, 1993, which is out of print but available as PDF file within the framework of Lubitz' TrotskyanaNet. In TSB you can find detailed descriptions concerning the respective Trotskyist journals, newsletters, bulletins and the like.

6) For some details on U.S. public archives relevant to Trotsky(ism) research see the Archives : America chapter within the framework of our Lubitz' TrotskyanaNet website.

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