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Basic biographical data

Name:	Bert Cochran
Other names (bynames, pseud. etc.):	E.R. Frank ; Alexander Goldfarb ; White
Date and place of birth:	December 25, 1913 [?]*, New York, NY (USA)
Date and place of death:	June 6, 1984, New York, NY (USA)
Nationality:	USA
Occupations, careers, etc.:	Writer, editor, journalist, lecturer, trade union and party organizer
Time of activity in Trotskyist movement:	1934 - ca. 1954

Short biographical note

Bert Cochran, in the Trotskyist movement also known by his pseudonyms E.R. Frank and White, was born in Poland as Alexander Goldfarb. In the early 1930s, he attended the *University of Wisconsin* and was recruited to Trotskyism by Max Shachtman. In 1934, he joined the ranks of the *Communist League of America (CLA)*, the Trotskyist party founded and led by James P. Cannon, M. Shachtman and M. Abern. *CLA* was renamed *American Workers Party (AWP)* when it fused with the the group of A.J. Muste. In accordance with Trotsky's turn towards the 'entrlist' tactic, the majority of the *AWP*, including Bert Cochran, entered Norman Thomas' *Socialist Party (SP)* where the Trotskyists formed a faction called the *Appeal Group* (named after their organ *Socialist Appeal*). They were expelled from the SP in 1937 and on January 1, 1938, they founded the *Socialist Workers Party (SWP)*. Cochran belonged to the founding members of this new American Trotskyist party and for several years served as member of its leading body, the *National Committee (NC)*. In the 1930s and 1940s, Cochran played an important role

* The year given here is uncertain since various sources are giving different years, ranging from 1913 to 1917!

in the union work of the *SWP*; thus he worked as a district organizer of the *MESA (Mechanics Educational Society of America)* in Ohio and was responsible for the party's educational and factional trade union work in the *UAW (United Automobile Workers of America)* in Detroit, Michigan. He also took responsibilities as a party organizer in New York City.

In 1952/53, Cochran formed a faction inside the *SWP* and for a while held positions close to those advocated by the European majority (led by M. Pablo, E. Mandel and P. Frank) in the *International Secretariat of the Fourth International (ISFI)*. In 1954 Cochran was eventually expelled from the *SWP* as a result from a sharp factional struggle in which he, together with Harry Braverman and George Clarke - the faction became known as the *Cochranites* - stood against party leader James P. Cannon and his majority faction known as the *Cannonites*. The factional struggle chiefly focused both on different evaluations of Stalinism and on what the Cochranites criticized as sectarian vanguardism with regard to the *SWP*. By this bitter split, the *SWP* not only lost Cochran and some other talented *NC* members but also a good deal of its working class militants, particularly in the Detroit and Cleveland areas. Together with about 100 other expellees, Cochran founded the *Socialist Union* and launched a magazine which was called *The American Socialist*; it ran from 1954 to 1959 (totally 38 issues were published). More or less dropping from active politics and repudiating factionalism and vanguardism, Cochran from 1954 to the end earned his living as a free-lance writer and journalist and as a lecturer in the fields of politics, socialism, unionism and contemporary American history. He wrote several books, amongst them biographies on Truman and Stevenson (see bibliography below) and contributed several articles to the *Monthly Review* and other independent socialist journals as well as to *The American Socialist*; he also contributed to *The Washington Post*, *The Nation* and *The Progressive*. Cochran taught at the *New School for Social Research* (New York City) and at *SUNY's (State University of New York) Empire State College*; he was also a senior fellow at *Columbia University's Research Institute on International Change*.

Cochran died of cancer on June 4, 1984. He was survived by his wife Cynthia Cochran (b. Copeland), the sister of Vince Copeland who was the founder and long-time leader of the *Workers World Party*, a dissident group which had emerged from the *SWP*.

Selective bibliography *

- ***Selective bibliography: Books/pamphlets authored by Cochran***

Adlai Stevenson : patrician among the politicians. - New York, NY : Funk & Wagnalls, 1969. - 424 pp.

The cross of the moment. - New York, NY : Macmillan, 1961. - 267 pp.

Harry Truman and the crisis presidency. - New York, NY : Funk & Wagnalls, 1973. - 432 pp.

Labor and communism : the conflict that shaped American unions. - Princeton, NJ : Princeton Univ. Pr., 1977. - XIV, 394 pp.

Prospects of American radicalism. - New York, NY : American Socialist Publications, 1954. - 15 pp.

The war system. - New York, NY : Macmillan, 1965. - IX, 274 pp.

Welfare capitalism and after. - New York, NY : Schocken, 1984. - XV, 227 pp.

* 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 *TrotskyanaNet*. In TSB you can find detailed descriptions concerning the respective Trotskyist journals, newsletters, bulletins and the like.

- ***Selective bibliography: Books/pamphlets and journals (co-)edited by Cochran***

American labor in midpassage / Bert Cochran, ed. - New York, NY : Monthly Review Pr., 1959. - XI, 196 pp.
 The American Socialist (New York, NY) [ISSN 0517-4872] <TSB 0024>
 Fourth International (New York) <TSB 0532>

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

American radicals : some problems and personalities / Harvey Goldberg, ed. - New York, NY [etc.] : Monthly Review Pr., 1957. - X, 308 pp. - (Modern reader paperbacks) [& later ed.]
 The American Socialist (New York, NY) [ISSN 0517-4872] <TSB 0024>
 Bulletin du Secrétariat Européen de la IVe Internationale (Paris?) <TSB 0210>
 Bulletin intérieur / Secrétariat International de la IVe Internationale (Paris) <TSB 0542>
 Class, party, and state and the Eastern European revolution. - New York, NY : Nat. Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party, 1969. - 61 pp. - (Education for socialists)
 The Educator (New York, NY) <TSB 0463>
 Fourth International (New York, NY, 1940-56) <TSB 0532>
 Internal Bulletin / Socialist Workers Party (New York, NY) <TSB 1548>
 Masses and Mainstream (New York, NY) [ISSN 0738-5447]
 Monthly Review (New York, NY) [ISSN 0027-0520]
 The Nation (New York, NY) [ISSN 0027-8378]
 The Progressive (Madison, Wis) [ISSN 0033-0736]
 Three reports on the Chinese communes / with a foreword by E.L. Wheelright. - Sydney : Outlook, [ca. 1960]. - 28 pp. - (Outlook discussion pamphlet ; 8)
 Trotsky, Leon: Fascism : what it is, how to fight it ; a compilation / Leon Trotsky. - New York, NY : Pioneer Publ., 1944. - 47 pp.
 The Washington Post (Washington, DC) [ISSN 0190-8286]

- ***Selective bibliography: Books and articles about Cochran***

[Anon.]: Cochran, Bert, 1917- , in: *Contemporary authors*, vol. 45/48.1974, p. 97. [Biographical sketch]
 [Anon.]: Cochran, Bert, 1917-1984, in: *Contemporary authors*, vol. 113. 1985, pp. 94-95. [Biographical sketch]
 [Anon.]: Bert Cochran is dead at 70 : socialist author and teacher, in: *The New York Times*, 1984 (June 9), p. 28. [Obituary]
 Alvin, Milton: Bert Cochran, former leader of SWP, in: *Socialist Action* <TSB 1489>, 2.1984 (7), p. 8 [corrections by Milt Zaslow in: *ibid.*, 2.1984 (9)] [Obituary]
 [Broué, Pierre?]: Bert Cochran (1915-1984), in: *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* <TSB 0277>, 1984 (20), 121-122. [Obituary]
 Proyect, Louis: The Cochran-Braverman legacy, at: http://www.columbia.edu/~lnp3/mydocs/american_left/Cochranite.htm. [Also publ. with title: The Cochranite legacy. Pres. at the International Conference Explorations in the History of U.S. Trotskyism, New York, NY, Sept. 29 - Oct. 1, 2000]

Note: More informations about Bert Cochran are likely to be found in some of the books, pamphlets, university works and articles listed in the relevant chapter(s) of our *Trotsky Bibliography*, 3. ed., München [etc.], 1999, e.g. chapter 7.5.18.

Some interesting information is to be found on the website *The American Socialist*, URL:

<http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/amersocialist/index.htm> which focuses on the *Socialist Union* and

Cochran's paper *The American Socialist*.

Note on archives

The papers of Bert Cochran (1935-1955, 1.25 linear feet) are held by the Tamiment Library, New York City; the collection number is #205. An online finding aid is - as far as we know - not (yet) available. The collection includes Cochran's correspondence with prominent *SWP* leaders like for example J.P. Cannon, F. Dobbs, G. Clarke, F. Morrow, A. Swabeck, his correspondence with A.J. Muste, documents relating to his activities in the *UAW* and to the *SWP* factional struggles of 1939/40 (Burnham-Shachtman split), 1945/46 (controversy with the Morrow-Goldman faction); reports and speeches on post-World War II national and international political issues as well as several unpublished manuscripts by Cochran.

W. Lubitz, rev. January 2006

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