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Basic biographical data

Name:	Charles Cornell
Other names (bynames, pseud. etc.):	Carsten ; Charles Olney Cornell
Date and place of birth:	March 14, 1911, Cochise, Ariz. (USA)
Date and place of death:	January 1, 1989, San Mateo, Cal. (USA)
Nationality:	USA
Occupations, careers, etc.:	Teacher, real-estate agent
Time of activity in Trotskyist movement:	1935 - ca. 1950

Biographical sketch

Note: There are only a very few biographical facts known to us with regard to Charles Cornell.

Charles (Olney) Cornell was born on March 14, 1911 in Cochise, Arizona.

Earning his living as a young teacher in San Francisco, Cal., Cornell in 1935 became a member of the Trotskyist *Workers Party (WP)* there. When in 1936 the majority of the *Workers Party*, in accordance with Trotsky's turn towards 'entrism', decided to join the ranks of Norman Thomas' *Socialist Party (SP)* as a Trotskyist faction, Cornell followed. However, the entrism phase came to an end already in 1937. Cornell from the very beginning was a member of the *Socialist Workers Party (SWP)* which was launched on January 1, 1938 under the leadership of James P. Cannon as American section of Trotsky's *Movement for the Fourth International* which in September 1938 became the *Fourth International*.

Leon Trotsky had been granted asylum in Mexico in January 1937. From Spring 1939, he, together with his wife Natalia, his grandson, some secretaries and domestic helpers, lived in a house at Coyoacán, a suburb of Mexico City. Since Trotsky as well as Mexican authorities were deeply convinced of the menace of a Stalinist assault at the life of Stalin's archfoe, the house was fortified and other precautionary measures were taken against potential attacks. Frequently, young and devoted Trotskyists from various countries came to Mexico in order to serve as secretaries and/or bodyguards to Trotsky. Most of those young comrades were Americans sent to the Trotsky household by the *SWP*. Thus, Jake Cooper, Joseph

Hansen, Walter O'Rourke, and Robert Sheldon Harte were the young Americans serving as guards (or, secretary-guards) in 1940, and so was Charles Cornell, too, whose period of service there ran from June 1939 to August 1940.

When on May 24, 1940, a machine-gun assault led by Mexican Stalinist painter David Alfaro Siqueiros took place, but was survived by Trotsky and his family, Charles Cornell together with a guard from Germany, Otto Schüssler, was arrested by Mexican police colonel Leandro Apolinar Sánchez Salazar who was charged with the investigation of the attempted assault. At the beginning of his investigation he suspected Trotsky and his secretaries of having staged the raid, but soon realized that he was wrong. After two days and at the personal intervention of Trotsky, both Schüssler and Cornell were released.

Some three months later, Cornell was present at Trotsky's residence at Coyoacán but could not forestall a second – this time fatal – assault against Trotsky: the perfidious icepick murder committed on the late afternoon of August 20, 1940 by Stalinist secret service agent Jaime Ramón Mercader del Río Hernandez, who used the alias names Jacques Mornard and Frank Jacson, respectively. Together with Joseph Hansen and the other guards, Cornell at least could overwhelm Mercader and surrender him to the police.

Cornell later gave a lively and colourful account about the time he spent in Coyoacán titled *With Trotsky in Mexico* which was published in the August 1944 issue of *Fourth International*, the theoretical journal of the *SWP* (reprinted in 1969).

Back to the United States, Cornell for a couple of years remained a member of the New York branch of the *SWP* but never played any important rôle in the party. He soon withdrew from political activities and engaged in real-estate development and home building, first in Connecticut and later in Arizona.

After retiring in 1988, he moved to San Mateo, Cal., where he died after a longer struggle against leukemia on January 1, 1989, leaving his wife Betty, a daughter and a son.

*Selective bibliography**

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

Fourth International (New York, NY, 1940-56) <TSB 0532>

Leo Trotzki 1879-1940 in den Augen von Zeitgenossen. - Hamburg : Junius, 1979. - 190 pp.

Leon Trotsky - the man and his work : reminiscences and appraisals / Joseph Hansen [et al.] - New York, NY : Merit Publ., 1969. - 128 pp.

Trotsky / ed. by Irving H. Smith. - Englewood Cliffs, NJ : Prentice-Hall, 1973. - VII, 181 pp. - (Great lives observed)

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

[Broué, Pierre?]: Charles Cornell (1911-1989), in: *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* <TSB 0277>, 1989 (38), p. 119. [Obituary]

Note: Some informations about Charles Cornell are probably 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. chapters 2.8.08 and 7.5.18

* 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.

Note on archives

There is no particular Charles Cornell archive as far as we know. Nevertheless, some archival material – chiefly letters dated 1939 and 1940 – from and to Cornell can be found within the *Exile Papers of Lev Trotskii* (bMS Russ 13.1), forming part of the famous *Trotsky Archives* housed at *Houghton Library*, Cambridge, Mass.* Within the framework of the *Exile Papers*, the secretarial correspondence is concentrated in two sections**:

(1) Letters to Trotsky's secretaries (only an individual's correspondence received while he was employed as Trotsky's secretary is included in this section). Document nos. relevant with regard to Cornell are: T6203-6206 (letters by James P. Cannon), T6253-6255 (letters by Curtis Brown Ltd, literary agents), T6258-6263 /letters by Charles Curtiss), T6264 (letter by Lillian Curtiss), T6274-6277 (letters by Farrell Dobbs), T6370-6377 (letters by Albert Goldman), T6630-6635 (letters by Rose Karsner), T6845-6846 (letters by *Life*, Chicago), T6852-6853 (sender unknown), T7109 (letter by Herbert Solow), and T 7239 (letter by Al Young).

(2) Letters by Trotsky's secretaries***. Document nos. relevant with regard to Cornell are: T11121-11125 (letters to Curtis Brown, literary agents), T 11141 (telegram to Charles Curtiss), T 11142 (telegram to Lillian Curtiss), T11236 (telegram to Dan Ferguson), T11241 (telegram to Jaime Font), T11392-11397 (letters to Albert Goldman), T11501 (letter to Emrys Hughes), T11717-11727 (letters to Rose Karsner), T11908 (letter to L. Kogan), T11971 (letter to W.L. Langer), T11999 (letter to *Liberty*), T12028-12029 (letters to *Life*, Chicago), T12041-12052 (letters to Charles Malamuth), T12263 (letter to William Rich), T12265 (letter to Earle Robertson), T12361 (Letter to Max Shachtman), T12404-12410 (letters to *Socialist Appeal*, New York), T12431 (letter to Sherman Stanley), T12442 (letter to C.V.R. Thompson), T12483-12485 (letters to Sara Weber), T12511-12516 (letters to John G. Wright), T12583-12585 (letters to unidentified addressees).

W. Lubitz, rev. January 2006

This miscellany is part of

The Lubitz TrotskyanaNet

* For some details about the *Trotsky Archives* see the sub-chapter on *Public Archives : America* within the framework of our *Lubitz TrotskyanaNet* website.

** According to the exhaustive guide to the archives titled *The exile papers of Lev Trotskii, vol. 1-3*, Cambridge, Mass., The Houghton Library, 1975.

*** "The secretarial correspondence is essentially an extension of Lev Trotskii's correspondence. Several of the letters, however, provide information on Trotskii's day to day life, particularly in Coyoacán, available nowhere else in the collection." (*The exile papers of Lev Trotskii, vol. 2*, Cambridge, Mass., The Houghton Library, 1975, p. 398.)