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Basic biographical data

Name:	Sam Gordon
Other names (bynames, pseud., etc.):	Burton ; Drake ; Harry ; Joe ; Joad ; J.S. ; Paul G. Stevens ; J. Stuart ; J.B. Stuart ; J.E.B. Stuart ; Ted ; Tom
Date and place of birth:	May 5, 1910, ??? (Austria-Hungary)
Date and place of death:	March 12, 1982, London (Britain)
Nationality:	USA
Occupations, careers, etc.:	Printer, journalist, translator, seaman, organizer
Time of activity in Trotskyist movement:	1929 - 1982 (lifelong Trotskyist)

Biographical sketch

Note: This biographical sketch is chiefly based on the material listed in the last paragraph of the Selected bibliography section below.

Sam Gordon was an outstanding Trotskyist who during the 1940s played an eminent rôle as a liaison man between the American *SWP* and the European Trotskyists as well as within the leading bodies of the *Fourth International*.

Sam Gordon* was born on May 5, 1910 as a son of Yiddish speaking Jewish parents living in that part of Poland which then belonged to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. However, when Sam was still a baby, the family moved to Vienna, the Austrian capital, thus the boy grew up in a German speaking environment. In 1920, the family went to New York (USA) where Sam Gordon rapidly learnt English and got naturalized under the Americanized name of Gordon; as an adolescent he was fluent in three languages. In the early 1940s, Gordon got acquainted with Mildred Fellerman (b. 1923), a British teacher

* His real name by birth is not known, thus *Sam Gordon* being an adopted name.

and *Labour Party* activist; when the two met again in Paris in 1947, they fell in love, and in 1948 they got married in the United States; in the 1950s they got a son. Sam Gordon earned his living by a great variety of jobs, ranging from seaman to printer and proofreader.

Gordon's interest in Marxism and radical politics dates back to the years 1927/28 when he attended the *College of the City of New York (CCNY)* and soon became a member of the *Young Communist League (YCL)*, the youth arm of the *CP* of the USA. However, after having listened to James P. Cannon* at *CCNY's Social Problems Club* and thus having got acquainted with genuine Trotskyist ideas, Gordon joined the ranks of the *Communist League of America (CLA)*, the first American party affiliated with the international left oppositional current inspired and led by exiled Leon Trotsky. In 1929, Gordon decided to go to Germany in order to experience advanced class struggle in action, as he told. Reaching Hamburg (Germany) on board of a German merchant ship, he soon made his way to Berlin, the German capital and at the time probably the biggest communist stronghold outside Soviet Russia. During his 1929/30 sojourn there – earning his living as a cocoa salesman – he actively participated in the class struggle and regularly sent letters to *The Militant* (New York), the weekly organ of the *CLA*; most of these letters were published as articles in *The Militant*, giving lively accounts and situation reports from Germany** where political and social crisis accelerated in view of the Great Depression and the rise of Hitler's national-socialist movement.

After returning from Berlin via Paris to the United States, Sam Gordon soon began to play a leading rôle in the young American Trotskyist movement***. Thus, he became a staff writer of *The Militant* and at the same time its printer. It was Max Shachtman, probably the most outstanding intellectual in the ranks of the *CLA*, from whom Gordon learnt how to write, edit, layout and proofread a weekly. When Shachtman for some months in 1931 left *The Militant* staff in the wake of a conflict with Cannon****, young Gordon even was charged with the editorship of the paper. He got a lot of encouragement from James P. Cannon and the latter's life partner, Rose Karsner; for a while, Gordon even shared their household and was treated by them like a son. From 1932, he was a member of the leading bodies (*National Committee* or *Political Bureau*, respectively) of the *CLA* and its successor organizations. In 1938, when the U.S. Trotskyists after a phase of entrism and regroupment launched a new organization, the *Socialist Workers Party (SWP)*, Gordon was one of its founding members, belonging to its leading bodies until the early 1950s. During his American years, Gordon's political activities were manifold; thus in the 1930s he functioned for some years as a branch organizer in New York, Cleveland and Boston, was engaged in the movement of the jobless and later got involved into various trade union work, e.g. as a speaker and

* James P(atrick) Cannon (1890-1974) was a co-founder and leader of the *Communist Party* of the USA but was expelled when he associated with Trotsky's Left Opposition in 1928. Together with Martin Abern, Max Shachtman and other renowned anti-Stalinist communists he founded the *Communist League of America (CLA)* and for several decades remained the national secretary of the American mainstream Trotskyist party.

** In its volume 5.1993, no. 1 (pp. 14-28) the British journal *Revolutionary History* featured, provided with rich annotations and with a comment by Mike Jones (pp. 29-32), some of Gordon's reports with title *Reports from Germany, 1929-30* which originally had appeared in *The Militant* between December 21, 1929 and October 1, 1930.

*** However, this view met with protest from Albert Glotzer (1908-1999), once a co-worker of Cannon who later dissociated from the Trotskyist movement. According to Glotzer, "Sam was never an important leader of the Fourth International, and was never one of the main leaders of the Communist League of America. [...] All this is not to say that Gordon had no talents [...] but he was not a distinguished speaker, being neither graceful nor dynamic, and, despite what is said in the article [by Mildred Gordon, see below, W.L.], was not known for any distinctive theoretical ideas that informed American or world Trotskyism. I am sure that the idea that Sam was an outstanding leader of the Fourth International would surprise the various international leaderships." (Glotzer, Albert: Sam Gordon [letter to the editors], in: *Revolutionary History*, 5.1994 (2), p. 181.

**** See *Dog days : James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America 1931-1933 / comp., introd., and ed. by the Prometheus Research Library, New York City, 2002.*

organizer in the *Painters' Union* and in the *Seafarers' International Union*; for some years he also co-edited its paper, *Seafarers Log*, together with Tom Kerry, another prominent *SWP* militant.

A few days after the Second World War had broken out in Europe, the headquarters of the *Fourth International*, hitherto chiefly located in Paris (France) was transferred to New York where the *International Secretariat (IS)* of the *FI* held its first meeting already in September 1939. The *SWP* was represented in the *IS* by James P. Cannon, Max Shachtman and Sam Gordon who at that time began to use the pen name Stuart. The meeting elected a *Resident International Executive Committee (IEC)* and Gordon was appointed its *administrative secretary*. In this capacity he was involved in the preparation of a gathering which became known as the *Emergency Conference* of the *Fourth International* which was held in New York on May 19-26, 1940 and which passed a number of resolutions and issued a manifesto written by Leon Trotsky, entitled *The imperialist war and the proletarian world revolution**. Gordon was elected a member of the *International Executive Committee (IEC)* at the conference. In June 1940, he joined a *SWP* delegation, consisting of James P. Cannon, Farrell Dobbs, Joseph Hansen and Antoinette Konikow, visiting Trotsky in Coyoacán, Mexico, and discussing with him the perspectives and implications of the unfolding war**.

The war-time *Fourth International* was, of course, dominated by the American section, the *SWP*, which because of reactionary U.S. legislation ceased to officially call itself a section of the *FI* in 1940. Jean Van Heijenoort, who from 1932 to 1939 had served seven years as Trotsky's secretary and thus enjoyed an unquestioned authority with regard to in-depth knowledge concerning the sections and quarrels of the *FI*, factually functioned as head of the *International Secretariat* during the entire World War II period. He was chiefly assisted by some outstanding and devoted American Trotskyists as for example Sherry Mangan, Charles Curtiss, and Sam Gordon. However, by the end of 1941, the latter had to be replaced as administrative secretary by another member of the *SWP* leading staff, Bert Cochran, since as a sailor Sam Gordon had to go off to sea. For some four years, he served as engine greaser on ships of the U.S. merchant fleet which in navy convoys had to bring essential supplies to Britain and other allies, permanently being threatened by German submarines' attacks. As a seafarer, Gordon continued to help organize the *SWP's* seamen's union fraction, and when his ship entered a European harbour, Gordon took every possibility to meet with British and other European Trotskyists thus helping to maintain some contacts and relations between the international leadership and them as well as supplying them with information material under the difficult conditions of the World War.

At the end of the War, Gordon went to Paris as a member of the *IS*, which in March 1946 eventually was shifted back from America to Europe, and was helpful in reconstructing the European sections of the *FI* which had suffered severe human and material losses during the War. Already during War, in 1944, Gordon was able to establish contact with Michel Pablo (Raptis), the leader of the *European Secretariat* of the *FI*, who should emerge as the principal *FI* leader and chief theoretician during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Travelling devastated post-war Europe, Gordon was successful in finding out some dispersed Trotskyists, particularly in occupied and divided Germany***. However, he was less successful in achieving longer lasting unity between the various rival Trotskyist groups and tendencies which had been emerging during the war years and thereafter, e.g. in Britain. In March 1946, Gordon participated as *SWP*

* See Documents of the Fourth International : the formative years (1933/40) / ed. by Will Reisner, New York, NY, 1973, pp. 305-397, and Alexander, Robert J.: International Trotskyism : a documentary analysis of the movement, Durham, NC [etc.], 1991, pp. 285-291.

** For a stenographic report of that meeting see Discussions with Trotsky : June 12-15, 1940, in: *Trotsky, Leon: Writings of Leon Trotsky, [1939-40], 2. ed.*, New York, NY, 1973, pp. 251-289.

*** Thus for example in July 1946 he found Georg Jungclas, one of the few German Trotskyists who had survived emigration, persecution, war and hunger, in an American camp near Bayreuth, Bavaria.

delegate in the first international conference of the *FI* which was held in Paris.

Gordon's sojourn in Europe as a *SWP* delegate lasted until 1948 when he was sent to Ceylon from which, however, he was soon expelled. From the end of 1948 to 1952, the Gordons lived in New York, enjoying friendly relations with some outstanding intellectuals being members or close sympathizers of the *SWP*, such as for example C.L.R. James, Duncan Ferguson, John G. Wright, James T. Farrell and Sherry Mangan. The last 30 years of his life, Sam Gordon spent in Britain, except some visits to Paris (where he met Trotsky widow, Natalia Sedova), Milwaukee and elsewhere. When the U.S. authorities snatched his passport in 1952 – which he only got back around 1960 – Gordon refused to return to McCarthyite U.S. He found a job as proofreader with *The Times* (London) and besides was occupied with translations, the most pretentious of which was, of course, the translation from German into English of Rudolf Hilferding's classical work on *The finance capital*^{*}.

"He remained politically active to the end of his life, but he took a lower profile"^{***}. When the *Fourth International* split in 1953, Gordon sided with the faction led by James P. Cannon and Gerry Healy becoming a member of the rival international Trotskyist organization, the *International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)* and of its British section which for some years practised entristm in the *Labour Party*, before under Healy's authoritarian leadership transforming into an increasingly sectarian and bizarre sect. However, Gordon soon dissociated from the Healyites and belonged to those within the *International Committee* who in the second half of the 1950s began to favour re-unification of the *ICFI* with the other main faction of world Trotskyism, the *International Secretariat of the Fourth International (ISFI)*, led by Ernest Mandel, Pierre Frank and Livio Maitan (and until about 1960, Michael Pablo), which eventually could be achieved in 1963 by launching the *United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI)*.

Almost 20 years of his life, Sam Gordon suffered from a particularly insidious type of cancer affecting one organ after another; facing his illness with greatest courage, he had several operations; his survival for some 20 years astounded his doctors^{***}. For several years, despite his illness, he continued earning his life as a printer and proofreader and also carried on his activities in the printers' union and on the left fringe of the *Labour Party*. Besides this, he kept his contacts with many renowned people on the British, continental and American left, engaged in fundraising campaigns for defence committees and so on. After retiring from his job in 1975, Gordon enrolled at *North London Polytechnic* where he eventually took a degree in modern German literature; shortly before his death, he took up studies at the *London School of Economics*.

Sam Gordon died in London on March 12, 1982, leaving his wife Mildred^{****}. A memorial meeting in honour of Sam Gordon took place in London on March 19; speakers included his longtime friend C.L.R. James and Alan Harris, a leader of the British *International Marxist Group (IMG)*.

* See Gordon, Mildred: Sam Gordon, scientific socialist (1910-1982), in: *Revolutionary History*, 5.1993 (1), p. 12.

** Ibid.

*** Ibid.

**** From 1987 to 1997, *Labour Party* activist Mildred Gordon, who, after Sam Gordon's decease, remarried with Nils Kåre Dahl (1909-1996), was a member of the British parliament (constituency of Bow & Poplar) and engaged in the *Committee on Education, Science and Arts of the House of Commons*.

*Selective bibliography**

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

The Militant (New York, NY) [ISSN 0026-3885] <TSB 1026>

- ***Selective bibliography: Books/pamphlets translated by Gordon.***

Hilferding, Rudolf: Finance capital : a study in the latest phase of capitalist development / ed. with an introd. by Tom Bottomore. From translations by Morris Watnick and Sam Gordon. - London [etc.] : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981. - VI, 466 pp.**

Trotsky, Leon: Germany : the key to the international situation / Leon Trotsky. [Transl. by Sam Gordon and Morris Lewit]. - New York, NY : Communist League of America, 1932. - 24 pp.

Trotsky, Leon: Shall fascism really be victorious? Germany, the key to the international situation / [transl. by Sam Gordon and Morris Lewit]. - New York, NY : Pioneer Publ., 1932. - 45 pp.

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

Bulletin intérieur / Secrétariat International de la IVe Internationale (Paris) <TSB 0542>

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

Healy's big lie : the slander campaign against Joseph Hansen, George Novack, and the Fourth International. - New York, NY : Nat. Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party, 1976. - 87 pp. - (Education for socialists)

Intercontinental Press (New York, NY) [ISSN 0020-5303 ; ISSN 0162-5594] <TSB 0657>

Internal Bulletin / Socialist Workers Party (New York, NY) <TSB 1548>

International Bulletin / publ. for the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International by the Socialist Workers Party of the U.S.A. (New York, NY) <TSB 0540>

International Committee documents, 1951-1954 : struggle in the Fourth International / issued by the National Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party. - 1-4. - New York, NY, 1974. - 246 pp. - (Towards a history of the Fourth International ; 3) (Education for socialists)

Die Internationale (Various places) [ISSN 0535-4005] <TSB 0731>

James P. Cannon as we knew him : by thirty-three comrades, friends, and relatives / introd. by Jack Barnes. Ed. by Les Evans. - New York, NY : Pathfinder Pr., 1976. - 288 pp. [Collection of obituaries, reminiscences and appraisals]

The Militant (New York, NY) [ISSN 0026-3885] <TSB 1026>

Quatrième Internationale (Paris etc., 1936-) [ISSN 0771-0569 - ISSN 0765-1740] <TSB 1282>

Revolutionary History (London) [ISSN 0953-2382] <TSB 1375>

Trotskyism versus revisionism : a documentary history / ed. by C. Slaughter. - 1-7. - London : New Park Publications, 1974-84 [vol. 7: Detroit, Mich. : Labor Publications]

World Outlook = Perspective mondiale (Paris ; later: New York, NY) <TSB 1886>

* 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.

** See Gordon, Mildred: Sam Gordon, scientific socialist (1910-1982), in: *Revolutionary History*, 5.1993 (1), p. 12.

• **Selective bibliography: Books and articles about Gordon**

- [Anon.]: Sam Gordon (1910-1982), in: *Inprecor : [French edition]* <TSB 0647>, 1982 (122), p. 35. [Obituary]
 [Anon.]: Sam Gordon tot : Sam Gordon, ein revolutionärer Führer, der sich 1929 in Deutschland der trotzkistischen Bewegung anschloß, in: *Inprekorr : internationale Pressekorrespondenz der IV. Internationale* <TSB 0654>, 1982 (8=147), pp. 31-32. [Obituary]
 [Broué, Pierre?]: Sam Gordon (1910-1982), in: *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* <TSB 0277>, 1982 (10), p. 127. [Obituary]
 Gordon, Mildred: Sam Gordon, scientific socialist (1910-1982), in: *Revolutionary History* <TSB 1375>, 5.1993 (1), pp. 9-13. [Biographical sketch]
 Glotzer, Albert: Sam Gordon, in: *Revolutionary History* <TSB 1375>, 5.1994 (2), pp. 181-182. [Letter]
 Jones, Mike: A comment on Sam Gordon's reports, in: *Revolutionary History* <TSB 1375>, 5.1993 (1), pp. 29-32
 Matgamna, Sean: Remembering Sam Gordon, in: *Socialist Organiser* <TSB 1513>, 1992 (March 26). [Obituary]

Note: More informations about Sam Gordon 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. in chapters 7.2.01 and 7.5.18.

Sidelines, notes on archives

— **Note on archives**

As far as we know, there is no publicly accessible archive particularly devoted to Sam Gordon; however, a number of his letters and other archivalia can be found within the framework of collections preserved at those archives featured within the sub-chapters on *Public Archives : America* and *Public Archives : Europe* of our *Lubitz TrotskyanaNet* website, as for example:

- Papers of Rodolphe Prager at *IISH (International Institute of Social History)*, Amsterdam*
- Papers of Ernest Mandel at *IISH (International Institute of Social History)*, Amsterdam**
- Papers of Joseph Hansen at *Hoover Institution Archives*, Stanford, Cal.***
- Socialist Workers Party Records 1928-1990 at *Hoover Institution Archives*, Stanford, Cal.****
- Socialist Workers Party Records 1928-2000 at *State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives*, Madison, Wis.
- Exile Papers of Lev Trotskii (call phrase: bMS Russ 13.1), forming part of the famous *Trotsky Archives* housed at *Houghton Library*, Cambridge, Mass. (document nos. 1587-1608, 6399-6404, 8348-8351, 11424-11429, 14218, 14637-14639, 14684-14686, 14767, 15419-15420).

* Online inventory see <http://www.iisg.nl/archives/en/files/p/10766371full.php>

** Online inventory not yet available; online abstract see <http://www.iisg.nl/archives/en/files/m/10801432.php>

*** Online inventory see <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf78700585>

**** Online inventory see <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf1k40019v>

— *Some quotations from Mildred Gordon's appraisal*

"He never tried to do journalistic work for a living as he was not prepared to make the necessary political compromises; he preferred to earn his living as a printer. He was an 'ideas man', and many of the famous cartoons for the *Militant* by Laura Grey were based on Sam's ideas worked out in the regular cartoon meetings. Later on he worked out ideas for a radio and TV supplement for daily newspapers. Roger Protz did a mock up, and Sam offered the idea to *The Times*, which did not take it up. Years later, all the papers produced a media supplement. [...] He was a brilliant linguist, and quickly found his feet almost anywhere. Sam was a warm, loving, outgoing person. He had no greed or jealousy. He was tolerant to a fault. If someone stole something from him, his reaction would be: 'If they want it so badly, let them have it.' Personally he aroused great loyalty, but politically he often aroused lasting hostility. [...] Sam would have been a great professor of German literature, and I am sure that he would have received the recognition he deserved. But he had a full and exciting life, and he would not have changed its course if he had had the chance. He did great service to the movement whose cause he espoused, and he was one of a small but valiant band who kept its ideas alive through the long years of defeat for the working class. As a young man in the USA, he had been a first class organiser in a number of industries and cities. He was always an imaginative and original thinker. He had an encyclopedic knowledge and total recall. He has been seriously underestimated".*

W. Lubitz, rev. January 2006

This miscellany is part of

The Lubitz TrotskyanaNet

* Gordon, Mildred: Sam Gordon, scientific socialist (1910-1982), in: *Revolutionary History*, 5.1993 (1), pp. 9-13 (here: pp. 10, 11, 13). However, it should be noted that this positive view was sharply opposed by Albert Glotzer – see our footnote on p. 2.