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- Basic biographical data
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Basic biographical data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Tom Kerry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other names (by-names, pseud. etc.):</td>
<td>Bell * Thomas Kerry * Powers * C. Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date and place of birth:</td>
<td>June 27, 1901, Boston, Mass. (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date and place of death:</td>
<td>January 8, 1983, Los Angeles, Cal. (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality:</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupations, careers, etc.:</td>
<td>Party organizer, trade unionist, editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of activity in Trotskyist movement:</td>
<td>1934 - 1983 (lifelong Trotskyist)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Biographical sketch

"Tom Kerry symbolized for the entire International the exemplary generation of founders and builders of American Trotskyism who worked under the leadership of James Cannon and the guidance of Trotsky himself".¹

Tom (Thomas) Kerry was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on June 27, 1901 as a son of Irish immigrants. He was married with Karolyn Kerry (b. Karolyn Eudora McLeand, 1910-1981) who was active in the truck union movement and later became a close collaborator of SWP leader James P. Cannon and a managing editor of International Socialist Review.

Tom Kerry first turned radical during World War I when he joined the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), the youth arm of the Socialist Party (SP). Like many other young American radicals, he was highly inspired by the Russian October revolution and their leaders Lenin and Trotsky. After Kerry had left the SP milieu, he remained unorganized for several years, before in view of the Great Depression, he was radicalised again. Remembering Trotsky's outstanding rôle in the Russian revolution and its aftermath, he was bewildered about the vitriolic attacks against Trotsky launched by the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) and by the Communist International. Thus he hesitated to join the ranks of the CPUSA. When living in San Francisco during the early 1930s, Kerry sometimes visited political meetings; outside a public gathering organized by the CP, he met some Trotskyists selling their weekly paper The Militant and began to discuss with them.

Some weeks later Kerry and his partner Karolyn became members of the Communist League of America (CLA), the organization of Trotsky's followers in the USA led by James P. Cannon, Max Shachtman and Martin Abern. Some months after Kerry had joined the ranks of the CLA, it fused with A.J. Muste's group to form the Workers Party (WP). In the years to follow, Kerry – at the time a seaman in the San Francisco area – joined the Sailors Union of the Pacific (SUP) and became an extraordinarily


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active syndicalist there as well as later in other unions. In the *Sailors Union* he co-operated closely with Joseph Hansen who was appointed assistant editor of its paper *Voice of the Union* by influential union leader Harry Lundeberg.

On January 1, 1938, a new organization of the American Trotskyists was founded, the *Socialist Workers Party (SWP)*. Tom Kerry was elected a member of its *National Committee*, a position he held for several decades. From the end of the 1930s to the early 1950s, Kerry took responsibility for the *SWP* influence in the maritime unions. Furthermore, in 1938 Harry Lundeberg appointed him as international representative (general organizer) of the *Seafarers International Union (SIU)*. Kerry took also responsibility for editing the *Seafarers Log*, SIU's newly established paper. After the Second World War, Kerry joined the renamed *National Maritime Union (NMU)* and continued to work there on behalf of the *SWP* until being witch-hunted during the McCarthy years. "Kerry was the revolutionary trade union leader incarnate".

After the outbreak of World War II, Kerry went to New York City where he took on party work at the *SWP* headquarters. When in 1944 James P. Cannon and parts of the central party leadership had to go to prison, Kerry became part of the substitute national leadership (until 1945). In 1953, Kerry was sent by the party to Los Angeles in order to reorganize the LA branch of the *SWP*. In 1955, he was elected a member of the party's *Political Committee*.

When James P. Cannon, founder of American Trotskyism and long-time leader of the *SWP*, in 1953 decided to retire from party leadership, he was succeeded in the function as *National Secretary* by Farrell Dobbs, noted trade union activist and for several times *SWP* presidential candidate, who held the post until 1972. When Farrell Dobbs visited Los Angeles on one of his national tours, he persuaded Tom Kerry to come back to the New York *SWP* headquarters. The 16 years to follow marked a high-light in Kerry's political career. From 1956 to 1972, Farrell Dobbs and Tom Kerry – the latter officially being called *Organizational Secretary* – formed the central leadership team of the party. The practical day-to-day work was effectively divided between the two men who did their best to lead the party, to secure the survival of the organization and to keep the core of its cadres intact in a time of political reaction, McCarthyite persecution, declining class struggles, a considerable loss of members and breaking away of some factional caucuses. When both Kerry and Dobbs retired from their leading functions in 1972, the *SWP* had re-gained some influence and recruited a considerable number of younger militants in the wake of the student revolt and of the nation-wide resistance against the U.S. war against Vietnam.

Tom Kerry functioned as editor-in-chief of *SWP*s theoretical journal *International Socialist Review (ISR)* for some 10 years, contributed to *ISR* and to several American and international Trotskyist journals, papers and bulletins; furthermore he was author or co-author of some pamphlets, educational bulletins and of a book containing a selection of his writings on trade union and party problems (see bibliographical listing below).

After his retirement, Kerry's mental outlook remained youthful as ever and he kept up his interest in political matters until his death.

Severely crippled with arthritis for a number of his last years, Tom Kerry died at the age of 81 in a Los Angeles hospital on January 8, 1983. A memorial meeting in his honour was held in New York City on January 19, 1983.

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3) 18 prominent *SWP* leaders and teamster union activists were tried, convicted and given sentences from 12 to 18 months in 1941 under the *Smith Act* in the famous 'Minneapolis sedition trial'; after the sentences were upheld on appeal in 1943, they were sent to jail in 1944.
**Selective bibliography: Books/pamphlets (co-)authored by Kerry**


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

International Socialist Review (New York, NY) [ISSN 0020-8744] <TSB 0715>
The Militant (New York, NY) <TSB 1026>

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


Bulletin in Defense of Marxism (New York, NY) <TSB 0219>

Cahiers Léon Trotsky (Paris, later: Grenoble; later: Saint Martin d'Hères) [ISSN 0181-0790] <TSB 0277>

Cahiers rouges : la revue du trotskisme (Paris) <TSB 0283>


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

In Defense of Marxism (New York, NY) <TSB 0616>

Information Bulletin / Socialist Action (San Francisco, Cal.) <TSB 1493>

International Socialist Review (New York, NY) [ISSN 0020-8744] <TSB 0715>

James P. Cannon : a political tribute ; including five interviews from the last year of his life. - New York, NY : Pathfinder Pr., 1974. - 46 pp. [Speeches and obituaries by J. Hansen, J. Barnes, T. Kerry, A. Pulley et al., reprinted from various sources, plus some interviews with and speeches by J.P. Cannon]


Socialist Action (San Francisco) [ISSN 0747-4237] <TSB 1489>


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4) 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 the Lubitz' TrotskyanaNet website. In TSB you can find detailed descriptions of the respective Trotskyist journals, newsletters, bulletins and the like.

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Tom Kerry

Bio-Bibliographical Sketch

[7]) (Education for socialists)
SWP Discussion Bulletin (New York, NY) <TSB 1684>

- Selective bibliography: Books and articles about Kerry

[Anon.]: [Obituary], in: Cahiers Léon Trotsky <TSB 0277>, 1983 (13), pp. 127-128
[Anon.]: Tom Kerry, [Biographical sketch, Wikipedia article]

- Selective bibliography: Books dedicated to Kerry


Note: More informations about Tom Kerry are 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.

Note on archives

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives Division (Madison, Wis.) houses the Tom and Karolyn Kerry Papers, 1933-1983 which consist of 2 archival boxes (1 cubic ft.) including a small collection of biographical items as well as speeches and writings, correspondence with J.P. Cannon, F. Dobbs, G. Breitman, L. Sinclair, T. Wohlforth, N. Weinstein et al. (primarily about internal party matters and about articles for the party journals The Militant and International Socialist Review). Some personal correspondence is included, too, reflecting e.g. Tom Kerry’s experiences within the Seafarers International Union (1939-1941). The collection was presented by the SWP in 1992 and is also available on microfilm (2 reels, 35mm). The copyright is retained by the SWP. The call numbers are: Mss 301 [paper] and Micro 2042 [microfilms].


Wolfgang and Petra Lubitz, 2006
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