Contents:

- Basic biographical data
- Biographical sketch
- Selective bibliography
- Sidelines, notes on archives

Basic biographical data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>George Novack</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other names (by-names, pseud. etc.):</td>
<td>Edward ; G.N. ; George Edward Novack ; John Marshall ; Manuel ; W. Warde ; William F. Warde; Yasef Emmanuel Novograbelska ; Yason Mendel Novograbelsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date and place of birth:</td>
<td>August 5, 1905, Boston, Mass. (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date and place of death:</td>
<td>July 30, 1992, New York, NY. (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality:</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupations, careers:</td>
<td>Writer, editor, lecturer, advertising manager, political and civil rights activist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Biographical sketch

George Novack was an outstanding Marxist intellectual, writer and editor, a great populariser of Marxist ideas and last not least a prominent Trotskyist and long-time co-leader of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP). The following biographical sketch is chiefly based on the biographical sketches and obituaries listed at the end of this sketch, particularly the biographical contributions by Alan Wald.

George (Edward) Novack was born Yasef Mendel Novograbelsky in Boston, Mass., on August 5, 1905. His parents – Israel Novack (who anglicized the family's surname Novograbelsky when George was a child) and his wife Ada (b. Marcus) – were Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Israel Novack ran a Turkish bathhouse in Boston. After George had entered primary school, he anglicized his first and middle names. He was raised in the suburbs of Boston and was educated in the public schools of Somerville.

George Novack was married twice: his first wife was novelist and biographer Elinor Rice (1901-1994, remarried Elinor Rice Hays), from whom he was divorced in 1942; in the same year he married artist Evelyn Reed (1905-1979), who later became a well-known Marxist writer on feminist and anthropologist matters. Novack spent most of his life in New York City but had longer stays in Minneapolis (1941), Detroit (1942/43), Los Angeles (1951/53), Paris and London (1951/53).

George Novack attended Harvard University for some 5 years, first studying literature, then switching to philosophy, studying under some of the most noted Harvard scholars of the time. Without obtaining any kind of degree, he left Harvard and went to New York City. Until the mid-1950s Novack earned...
his living chiefly as an advertising manager, executive editor, and sales promoter, occasionally contributing to well-known magazines like Nation and New Republic. He held positions at Doubleday & Co., Dutton & Co., Hudson Advertising Co., Optics Inc., and Automatic Packaging Co.

Being radicalised during the years of the Great Depression following the stock-market crash of October 1929, he began to study Marx and to gravitate toward revolutionary Marxist politics. He soon became associated with a group of left-wing New York Jewish intellectuals known as the Menorah Circle to which for example belonged Sidney Hook and Herbert Solow. From the early 1930s Novack became increasingly involved in various left-wing political groups and radical political activities. Furthermore, his name was frequently mentioned in connection with significant civil liberties defence cases such as for example the case of the framed-up 'Scottsboro Boys'.

At the beginning being a sympathizer of Norman Thomas' Socialist Party (SP), in 1932 he became active in the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners which was closely affiliated with the Communist Party's front organization International Labor Defense. In 1933 Novack associated with the Non-Partisan Labor Defense and with the Communist League of America (CLA), the American section – founded by James P. Cannon, Max Shachtman and Martin Abern – of Trotsky's International Communist League (ICL) which some years later was renamed Movement for the Fourth International and which eventually became the Fourth International in 1938. In 1934 Novack assisted in CLA's fusion with the American Workers Party (AWP) led by A.J. Muste and one year later in the creation of the Workers Party of the U.S. In 1936, together with the majority of the American followers of Trotsky, Novack participated in the entry of the Trotskyists into Norman Thomas' Socialist Party. After the short period of entryism had come to an end in 1937, Novack became a co-founder of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the party of the American Trotskyist mainstream, which was launched on January 1, 1938 and in which he held leading positions for several decades. From 1940 to 1973 he served as an elected member of the SWP National Committee (NC) and he was treasurer of the party's presidential campaign committee.

Between 1951 and 1953 Novack spent several months at the Fourth International headquarters in Europe as a representative of the SWP. In the late 1950s and early 1960s Novack endorsed, like Joseph Hansen and other SWP leaders, the endeavours towards overcoming the 1953 split in the Fourth International, a split lasting 10 years before in 1963 re-unification eventually could take place by setting up the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. During the early 1970s when some major differences within the United Secretariat of the Fourth International arose, Novack sided with the chiefly SWP-based Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency (LTT) opposing the European-based Mandel-Maitan-Frank tendency which held the majority in the International Executive Committee (IEC), the leading body of the Fourth International (United Secretariat). SWP long-time leader and theoretician Joseph Hansen functioned as spokesman of the LTT and it was not at least thanks to Hansen and Novack that the differences within the Fourth International did not lead to a new split but eventually could be resolved.

George Novack remained a member of the SWP until his death although withdrawing from everyday party politics in the 1980s.

2) Nine black male teens who were falsely accused of rape by white women. A lot of information about the trial of the Scottsboro Boys is available online.
3) The members and supporters of that tendency eventually formed the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction (LTF) in August 1973 after they had come to the conclusion that the International Majority Tendency (IMT), chiefly inspired by Mandel, Maitan and Frank, was functioning as a 'secret faction' carrying its own internal discussion outside the elected leading bodies of the FI. The factional controversies should only come to an end in 1977.
4) Unlike most other SWP veterans and intellectuals (to mention for example George and Dorothya Breitman, George Lavan Weissman, Frank Lees and Sarah Lovell), George Novack neither left the party nor was he expelled from it during the transformation period (successive abandonment of Trotskyism and mutation into a Castroite party with a rigid inner-party regime) in the first half of the 1980s engineered by the new generation of party leaders around Jack Barnes and Mary-Alice Waters. The reasons for Novack's stay in the SWP, his sometimes troubled relations to some of their leaders, his close association with Michel Pablo during the early 1950s, his position in view of the 1953 schism in the international Trotskyist movement and his rôle in the SWP as an intellectual were thoroughly discussed by Alan Wald in his excellent contribution 'George Novack, 1905-1992: meaning a life', in: In Defense of Marxism, 1992 (100), pp. 52 sq.
Apart from his lifelong commitment to the cause of revolutionary Marxism and his activity in the Trotskyist movement, Novack’s meaning can be summarized as follows:

– From 1937 to 1940 Novack was national secretary of the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky (ACDLT) and as a prime mover was active in setting up and organizing the impartial International Commission of Inquiry Into the Charges Made Against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials which perhaps became better known as the Dewey Commission, named after its chairman John Dewey (1859-1952), a distinguished American educator and Professor Emeritus of philosophy from Columbia University who was well-known and respected across the political spectrum. In 1937 the Dewey Commission and its sub-committees exhaustively investigated the monstrous Moscow show trials and conducted hearings in Coyoacán (Mexico) as well as in Europe. The commission’s final report (1938) comprising some 400 pages came to the conclusion that Leon Trotsky was not guilty and that the Moscow show trials were frame-ups. Novack was part of the welcoming delegation that met Leon Trotsky on his arrival in Mexico for exile in January 1937 and as an observer attended the Trotsky hearings of the John Dewey Commission in Spring 1937. From 1941 to 1950 Novack functioned as secretary of the Civil Rights Defense Committee (CRDC, chairman; James T. Farrell, vice-chairman: John Dos Passos) which was launched to defend political activists who became targets of state, police and judicial repression, as for example those 18 leaders of the SWP and of the Teamsters Union who were convicted and sentenced in the famous Minneapolis 'sedition' trial (Dec. 1941) under the notorious anti-union and anti-communist Smith Act for their radical opposition to U.S. government policy. During the McCarthy era as well as during the 1960s and 1970s, Novack played a prominent part in a lot of other civil liberties fights, e.g. in the famous James Kutcher (the 'legless veteran') case; in the 1970s Novack was plaintiff of a lawsuit against spying, harassment and disruption by the FBI and other U.S. government agencies against the SWP which ended only in 1986 with a Federal Court ruling favourable to the plaintiffs.

– Apart from being a devoted defender of civil liberties, Novack became a noted scholar (although disgracefully ignored by most non-socialist academics), an outstanding editor and a gifted writer able to popularize complex Marxist thought. Most of his some 20 books – chiefly focusing on interpretations of history and philosophy from a Marxist perspective – were published by SWP’s book publishing house Pathfinder Press and its forerunners Pioneer Publishers and Merit Publishers; most of his main works are still available (as at 2006). Some of his best known books about philosophical and historical subjects are: Introduction to the logic of Marxism (1942), The irregular movement of history (1957), The long view of history (1960), Origins of materialism (an overview of ancient thought and culture and of the roots of scientific and materialist world outlook, 1965), Democracy and revolution (dealing with democracy as a concept and political form from the ancient world to the 20th century, 1971), Genocide against the Indians (1970), Empiricism and its evolution (1968), Understanding history (1972), Humanism and socialism (1973), Pragmatism versus Marxism (an analysis and criticism of John Dewey's philosophy, 1975), Polemics in Marxist philosophy (including essays on Engels, Trotsky, Sartre, Lukács and Kolakowski, 1978).

Novack was also author of a considerable number of pamphlets and of articles most of which appeared

5) The transcript of proceedings in the hearings of the Preliminary Commission of Inquiry Into the Charges Against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials held April 10 to 17, 1937 at Coyoacan, Mexico, were originally published in 1937 in a 650 pp. volume titled The case of Leon Trotsky : report of hearings on the charges ... / by the Preliminary Commission of Inquiry, John Dewey, chairman. In 1968 Merit Publishers (New York, NY) published a reprint of this unique source to which George Novack contributed an introduction (pp. VII-XIV).


7) James Kutcher had lost both his legs when fighting in the U.S. Army on the European battlefield during World War II. In the wake of the McCarthyite witch-hunt, Kutcher was fired from his job with the Veterans Administration (VA) because he had refused to cease his activities in the Socialist Workers Party. George Novack was chairman of the Kutcher Civil Rights Defense Committee (KCRDC); after an almost nine years lasting legal struggle, Kutcher regained his job and won a modest monetary compensation for damages.

8) See also our bibliographical listing below.

© by Wolfgang & Petra Lubitz 2004 — page 3
in SWP's theoretical journal *International Socialist Review* (previously called *Fourth International*, and *New International*, respectively), in SWP's weekly paper *The Militant*, in *Intercontinental Press* and in a lot of other American and international socialist journals and magazines. Through his books, pamphlets and articles, many of which were published under his pseudonym William F. Warde, as well as through a great number of lecture tours and educational classes, Novack had a considerable impact on some generations of younger socialist activists both in America and abroad. His books and articles were characterized by being readily understandable to laypersons, unlike those from the pen of many other Marxist theorists. Some of Novack's books and articles were translated into other languages, primarily into Spanish.

Apart from editing Marxist essays on *America's revolutionary heritage* (1976, including some of his own contributions towards a history of US capitalism, slavery and the destruction of the American native society), a book on *Existentialism versus Marxism* (1966) and a Trotsky anthology titled *The age of permanent revolution* (1964), Novack was associate and contributing editor of *SWP's* theoretical magazine *International Socialist Review* from 1965 to 1974 and member of the editorial board of *SWP's* international magazine *Intercontinental Press*. In the 1960s Novack was research associate of the *Fund for the Republic* and collaborated on publications and research projects with Isaac Deutscher, Ernest Mandel and C. Wright Mills. Furthermore Novack was – together with George Breitman and George L. Weiss – one of the main editors at *Pathfinder Press*, the publishing arm of the *Socialist Workers Party (SWP)* which during the early 1970s published up to 30 new book titles and as many pamphlets per year, thus making a considerable contribution to the spread and furthering of a new left culture.

In Autumn 1975, George Novack together with another outstanding long-time leader of the *SWP*, Joseph Hansen, became target of a long-standing monstrous, perfidious and shameless slander campaign initiated and engineered by Gerry Healy, the 'cult-leader' of the British *WRP (Workers Revolutionary Party, formerly Socialist Labour League, SLL)*. This campaign of Healy's group and a handful of Healyist offshoots outside Britain (particularly the *Workers League, USA*) culminated in the accusation of Novack and Hansen having been accomplices of the GPU, as well as informers of the FBI and having been deeply involved in a conspiracy aiming at Trotsky's assassination in 1940. Perhaps Healy's campaign was to interpret as an act of revenge for Hansen's and Novack's sharp and polemical criticism of Healy's ultra-sectarian policies and of the Stalinist or hooligan-like organizational and political practices of his bizarre group. Furthermore, Healy obviously could never forget or forgive that it were particularly Hansen and Novack who after a long period of discussions and negotiations in 1963 had successfully engineered the re-unification of the majority of the *International Committee of the Fourth International* led by the *SWP* with the International Secretariat of the Fourth International led by Mandel, Frank, Maitan and Pablo [see above]. However, the indictments and accusations were refuted by almost the entire international 'Trotskyist family' (of course with the exception of Healy's followers) which was represented when in January 1977 an international meeting in solidarity with Novack and Hansen was held in London unanimously condemning the disgusting Healyist campaign.

Having lived a quite secluded life since the death of his wife Evelyn in 1979, George Novack after a brief illness died in a New York City senior citizens residence on July 30, 1992, a week shy of his 87th...
Selective bibliography

- Selective bibliography: Books/pamphlets (co-)authored by George Novack


Democracia y revolución : de los griegos a nuestros días / trad. del inglés: Antonio Durán. - Barcelona : Fontamara, 1977. - 298 pp. - (Argumentos) (& later ed. also publ. by Fontamara, México)


George Novack

Bio-Bibliographical Sketch


As quatro Internacionais / George Novack ; Dave Frankel ; Fred Feldman. - [Lisboa] : Ed. Delfos, 1979. - 279 pp. - (Colecção Toupeira ; 4)


Las tres primeras Internacionales / George Novack ; Dave Frankel ; Fred Feldman. Trad. dal inglés por Jesús Pérez. - Barcelona : Fontamara, 1978. - 208 pp. - (Argumentos)


• Selective bibliography: Books/pamphlets and journals (co-)edited by George Novack


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

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

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


George Novack

Bio-Bibliographical Sketch


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

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


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

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


  Clave : tribuna marxista (México) <TSB 0318>


  Discussion Bulletin / Socialist Workers Party (New York, NY) <TSB 1547>


  The Educator (New York, NY) <TSB 0463>


  Estrategia : para la liberación nacional y social de Latinoamérica (Buenos Aires) [ISSN 0425-3361]


  Fjärde Internationalen (Uppsala, later: Stockholm, later: Göteborg) [ISSN 0345-3375] <TSB 0518>

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

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

Inprecor : [French edition] (Various places) [ISSN 0378-8342 ; ISSN 0294-8516] <TSB 0647>

Inprekorr : internationale Pressekorrespondenz der IV. Internationale (Various places) [ISSN 0256-4416] <TSB 0654>

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

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


International Internal Discussion Bulletin (New York, NY) <TSB 0694>

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

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

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 speeches by J.P. Cannon]


Labour Review (Manchester, later: London) [ISSN 0456-9946 ; ISSN 0140-1270] <TSB 0882>

Latin American Perspectives (Various places) [ISSN 0094-582X]

Left Forum (Sydney, N.S.W., later: Glebe, N.S.W.) <TSB 0891>


Liberation (New York, NY) [ISSN 0024-189X]


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


The New International (New York, NY, 1934-36 and 1938-58) <TSB 1089>

News Bulletin / American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky (New York, NY) <TSB 1098>

Party Organizer / Socialist Workers Party (New York, NY) <TSB 1183>


Quarta Internazionale : rivista teorica (Roma; later: Milano) <TSB 1280>

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


Socialist Appeal (New York, NY) <TSB 1497>
Socialist Perspective (Sydney, NSW) <TSB 1516>

SWP Discussion Bulletin (New York, NY) <TSB 1684>

Torotsuki-kenkyu = Trotsky Studies (Tokyo) <TSB 1707>


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

• Selective bibliography: Books and articles about George Novack

[Anon.]: George Novack. [Biographical sketch, Wikipedia article]


[Anon.]: Novack, George (Edward) 1905- (William F. Warde), in: Contemporary authors, 49/52.1975, pp. 405-406. [Biographical sketch]


George Novack

Bio-Bibliographical Sketch


Wicks, Harry: Answer to the slanders against the SWP of America, [Electronic resource, originally publ. In Workers League internal bulletin, March 1977]

Selective bibliography: Books dedicated to George Novack


Trotzkyism in the United States: historical essays and reconsiderations / George Breitman, Paul Le Blanc, and Alan Wald. - Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Pr., 1996. - III, 318 S. - (Revolutionary studies)


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

Sidelines, notes on archives

Some general appraisals:

"George was neither a genius (most geniuses can't function as part of a team as George did) nor a giant among Marxist theoreticians. But he did have exceptional intellectual skills and gifts. What is important is that he developed these to the best of his ability, making full use of them on behalf of the socialist movement. I don't believe he withheld anything from the cause, and he was incredibly generous with his time to any worker or student genuinely interested in learning Marxism. [...] Yet his motivation was never fundamentally a desire for fame or prestige, and it certainly wasn't for money. A good deal of it was love of and respect for party leaders and collaborators - especially for Cannon, Joseph Hansen, and Farrell Dobbs, who were unquestionable the new "family" he selected to replace his old one, and to which he became bounded. George's example is inspiring not because he went left when so many others did in the 1930s, but because he persisted in his work on behalf of revolutionary so-
socialism through the hard times. I believe that it was important in the 1960s that George was still on the scene as an active revolutionist. He showed the younger generation that, whether or not one agreed with George's philosophical views or political party, socialism was not a temporary, youthful fad but a lifelong mission. Through his writing, too, he was an authentic culture-bearer from past struggles to the present. [...] In U.S. Trotskyism, George found a movement compatible with his gifts - a movement that needed him, and that in turn provided the inspiration and support permitting a productive life."

"Like all people George Novack had his strengths and his weaknesses. Unlike most people he was distinguished by his lifelong commitment to the building of a Leninist/Trotskyist revolutionary party in the U.S. Novack's strength: his many talents. George Breitman called him a 'natural resource'. These talents were at the disposal of the Socialist Workers Party during its halcyon days (1937-42). Novack's abilities as a researcher, writer, teacher in the fields of American history and Marxist philosophy are evidenced in the more than dozen titles of his published works. [...] Novack's weakness: his inability to stand by his convictions under the fire of a vigorous opponent. In 1952 Michel Pablo headed the Fourth International in Paris. He formed a faction which said that the struggle against Stalinism could not be victorious. He predicted that the Soviet Union and the other workers' states would last for centuries. Novack came in contact with him and was influenced by him. [...] In a similar manner in 1981 Novack succumbed to the influence of the Barnes clique which was abandoning Trotskyism for Castroism."

"George Novack is the quintessential Party scholar. Over a span of half a century in the revolutionary movement, he has produced a prodigious output of Marxist literary work. He is also a noted Marxist lecturer. [...] George Novack represents a breed that has become virtually extinct in the United States, the radical intellectual who is also a party activist. [...] Novack is one of the very few 'New York intellectuals' of his generation who maintained his revolutionary integrity."  

— Note on archival sources:

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin Archives Division houses the George Novack and Evelyn Reed Papers, 1933-1992, comprising 11 reels of microfilm. The call no. of this collection is Micro 555. The copyright is retained by the SWP. The collection contains the papers of George Novack and his wife, Evelyn Reed, anthropologist and fellow Trotskyist. The collection consists of the following sections: Biographical material (incl. autobiographical sketches and interviews), Evelyn Reed papers, Correspondence (e.g. with G. Breitman, I. Deutscher, F. Dobbs, J.T. Farrell, M. Genecin, J. Hansen, H. Isaacs, E. Mandel, E. Reed, L. Trotsky, A. Wald), Speeches and writings (chronological and alphabetical files), Philosophical writings (incl. many course outlines), Historical writings. Some papers also reflect Novack's rôle in the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky and in the American Civil Rights Defense Committee. Letters by George Novack and other archivalia are to be found, too, in many archives all over the world where papers of leading Trotskyists are preserved (see also the sub-chapters on Archives : America and Archives : Europe within the framework of our Lubitz' TrotskyanaNet website).

Note: The photograph on page 1 has been taken from Trotskyism in the United States / George Breitman [at al.], Atlantic Highlands, NY, 1996, p. V

Wolfgang and Petra Lubitz, 2005  
last rev. Febr. 2017


© by Wolfgang & Petra Lubitz 2004 — page 11