A Celebration of the Life of
Jerry Gordon

1928 – 2016

Saturday, January 28, 2017
2:00pm – 5:00pm

Unitarian Universalist Society of Cleveland
2728 Lancashire Road
Cleveland Heights, OH 44106
A Celebration of the Life of Jerry Gordon

Order of Service

Musical mix of songs about workers and movements

Welcome
Greg Coleridge

Short reflections
Jim Lafferty
Donna DeWitt
Theresa El-Amin
Message from Saladin Muhammad

Music
Deborah Van Kleef
(This Land is Your Land)

Short reflections
Mike Ferner
Mark Dudzic
Alan Benjamin
Message from Tom Bias
Message from David Sole

Short reflections from attendees – 2 minute max

Music
Deborah Van Kleef
(Solidarity Forever)

Everyone is invited after the service for food and fellowship in the social hall downstairs.
Jerry Gordon was born in 1928 in Miami, Florida. His father was an attorney and his mother a home maker. While a senior at Miami Beach High School, a friend introduced him to a publication called “In Fact,” a muckraking journal put out by George Seldes, designed to expose falsehoods in the media. This began his life-long commitment as a political activist and advocate of socialism.

Gordon attended the University of Florida, graduating in 1948 with high honors and as a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

Gordon attended Harvard Law School for one year but dropped out and worked several years in auto plants and on other jobs. He moved to Toledo and worked at Willys Motors, where he was a member of UAW Local 12. Soon after being hired, he was drafted into the Army, where he served for seven months in the Combat Engineers before being discharged for refusing to fill out an Army questionnaire relating to political affiliations and activities. Upon discharge, he returned to his job at Willys Motors and ran for a full-time union position, losing by one vote. During an economic downturn in the early 1950s, he was laid off and returned to Cleveland, where he became a full-time organizer for the Labor Youth League, a Marxist youth group.

When the Soviet Union invaded Hungary and Stalin’s crimes were revealed, he broke all ties with the Communist Party, while remaining a dedicated socialist for his entire life.

From 1956 to 1966, Gordon worked at the George R. Klein News Company in Cleveland as a computer programmer, leading a union organizing campaign there, which resulted in the warehouse and office workers voting to join Teamsters Local 521. He was elected chief steward.

Gordon was also active in civil rights struggles and walked picket lines in support of the Freedom Fighters’ struggle to end segregation in hiring at Central Cadillac in Cleveland. Years later, together with other activists, he helped form the Northeast Ohio Anti-Apartheid Committee (NOAC), which organized mass meetings, marches and rallies demanding an end to U.S. support for South Africa’s Apartheid regime. A rally attended by several hundred people at the headquarters of UFCW Local 880 in Cleveland on October 11, 1985, to protest South African Apartheid spurred the growth of NOAC.

After working as a volunteer Teamsters organizer in an unsuccessful attempt to organize Western Reserve University workers, in 1964 Gordon returned to law school, this time at Cleveland Marshall, and got his law degree in 1966.

In the succeeding years, while practicing law, Gordon represented several members of the Socialist Workers Party and others who were
arrested in a police raid on the Party’s meeting hall during a social event. He challenged the constitutionality of Cleveland’s Disorderly Assembly Ordinance under which they were charged — and the Ohio Court of Appeals upheld his position, voiding the ordinance and dismissing all charges against defendants charged under that ordinance. He also represented the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) in a challenge to Ohio’s election laws, seeking the right to write in the names of candidates. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the SLP’s favor, although it denied ballot status to that Party while granting such status to George Wallace and the Independent Party, which had filed a companion law suit.

In the 1960s, Gordon also became active in the Vietnam antiwar movement and was elected chair of the Cleveland Area Peace Action Council (CAPAC). While a member of the steering committee of the country’s central antiwar coalition at the time, the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, he became convinced that in order to build the broadest and most massive antiwar movement possible, a new coalition was needed which could more effectively reach out to workers and the organized labor movement, together with students and other sectors of the population. Toward this end, he favored organizing mass demonstrations of a legal, peaceful, non-confrontational character to generate the largest turnout of those opposing the Vietnam War, in contrast to the emphasis the New Mobilization Committee was placing on civil disobedience and confrontational tactics.

Together with other activists and with the endorsement of CAPAC, Gordon joined in issuing a call for an open national antiwar convention which would create a new coalition encompassing these beliefs and orientation. The convention was held in Cleveland on June 19-21, 1970, with 1500 activists in attendance and it resulted in the establishment of the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC). Gordon was elected one of the coalition’s national coordinators and he became its principal spokesperson.

In 1971, Gordon ended his practice of law and became a full-time organizer for NPAC. On April 24 of that year, NPAC organized the largest antiwar demonstration in U.S. history. That action, held in Washington DC, drew an estimated 750,000 people (for the details, see Fred Halstead’s book, “Out Now!” Monad Press, New York, 1978).

In later years, Gordon gave speeches on the Vietnam antiwar movement, one of which was published by The Greater Cleveland History Society (“Cleveland Labor And the Vietnam War,” November, 1990) and another of which was placed in the antiwar archives at Kent State University (“Reflections on War Resistance” delivered at Kent State as part of a panel discussion on May 5, 2000).

After the Vietnam War, Gordon became an International Representative for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). Two years later, he took a similar position with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, which eventually became part of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW). He was on the UFCW staff for the next 23 years, nearly all of them with the International Union. He retired at the end of 1998 after brief stints with two UFCW locals, one in Detroit and the other in Toledo.

During his 23 years with the UFCW, Gordon was active in many struggles, most of them outside of his duties on the job. An exception to this was the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), where he was able to get the UFCW to assign him to work full time for several weeks in an effort to get Virginia to ratify the ERA. A coalition called Labor for Equal Rights Now (LERN) was formed and organized a demonstration of about 1500 people in Richmond. But the Virginia General Assembly refused to pass the measure.
Gordon also opposed U.S. policies in the Western Hemisphere and helped organize the Emergency National Conference (ENC) Against U.S. Intervention in Central America/the Caribbean following the U.S.’s 1984 invasion of Grenada. He remained active in succeeding years as a coordinator of the ENC, the formation established by the conference.

In late 1990, Gordon served as coordinator of a Cleveland coalition formed to prevent the U.S. from waging war against the people of Iraq. When the U.S. government launched air and missile strikes on Iraq on January 16, 1991, the coalition called for mass demonstrations in the streets of Cleveland and hundreds of people turned out. The coalition charged that the government’s actions were in the interests of big oil, not the American people. But despite widespread popular opposition in the U.S. and throughout the world, the U.S. government unleashed its military might and the Iraqi people were subdued within a few weeks.

During the 1990s and thereafter, Gordon was actively involved in building Labor Party Advocates, a forerunner of the Labor Party, which was established at a national convention of 1400 delegates in Cleveland in June 1996. Thereafter, he was elected chair of both the Ohio State Labor Party (OSLP) and its Cleveland chapter. He continued serving as OSLP chair until his death.

The Labor Party was particularly active in advocating a national health care program guaranteeing everyone quality coverage from birth to death through a not-for-profit and publicly funded single payer system. A letter by Gordon calling for such a program was featured in the March 12, 2001 issue of the Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Gordon was for many years a supporter of Socialist Organizer, a socialist organization based in San Francisco, and he frequently contributed articles to their publication, The Organizer. This included a series of articles on the Detroit newspaper strike that began in 1995 and ended five years later in a disastrous defeat for the workers. Gordon was actively involved in the strike and represented UFCW Local 876 on the steering committee of the Action Coalition of Strikers and Supporters (ACOSS), a group promoting solidarity in support of the strikers. The Organizer published his articles analyzing the strike in a pamphlet titled “Overview of the Detroit Newspaper Workers’ Strike — Some Lessons for the Labor Movement.” So far as is known, this is the only published overall account of the strike. It appeared under Gordon’s pen name, Jack Richards.

Gordon was also a supporter of Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ), a militant group based in North Carolina, whose main objective is organizing unions in the South. That goal plus promoting the cause of independent working class political action constituted the program of the Workers Unity Network (WUN), a formation which Gordon and Saladin Muhammad, national chair of BWFJ, together with others, brought into being around 1994. WUN advocated formation of the Labor Party and successfully fought to strengthen that Party’s program in support of the Black freedom struggle. WUN dissolved soon after the Labor Party was formed.

In February 2001, Gordon was part of a small group of Clevelanders, who formed the Single-Payer Universal Health Care Organizing Committee, later renamed Single-Payer Action Network Ohio (SPAN Ohio). SPAN became the organizing center in Ohio for supporters of a single-payer universal health care system. In 2003, the group reorganized itself and became a statewide coalition. Gordon was elected secretary of the coalition. The Ohio AFL-CIO and UAW Region 2-B affiliated with it, along with many other unions, physicians, nurses and other health care providers, community organizations, women’s groups, clergy, businesses,
and single-payer activists. In 2004, SPAN launched an initiative petition campaign in an attempt to put single-payer universal health care on the Ohio ballot. [To date the requisite number of signatures have not been collected.]

In late 2002 when the U.S. government threatened war against Iraq, Gordon joined with Cleveland-area activist Greg Coleridge, director of the Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee, to form the Northeast Ohio Anti-War Coalition, which sought to prevent an attack against Iraq, and, when it happened, to demand the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from that country.

In January 2003 a group of trade unionists established United States Labor Against the War (USLAW), which ultimately won the affiliation of 190 labor organizations in support of its program of immediate withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Iraq. One of USLAW’s most notable achievements was its successful campaign to get the national AFL-CIO to take an antiwar position, resulting in a resolution adopted by that body in June 2005 urging the government to “bring them [U.S. troops] home rapidly” from Iraq. Representing the OSLP, Gordon was elected to USLAW’s national Steering Committee and pressed the group over the next several years to endorse and build national antiwar demonstrations demanding “Out Now From Iraq!” regardless of which of the major national antiwar coalitions was calling the action.

In early 2008, Gordon joined with a few other people to form a new national antiwar organization initially called the National Assembly to End the Iraq war and Occupation and later the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations. At its founding conference June 28-29, 2008 in Cleveland, he was elected the group’s national secretary. The National Assembly called for immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, massive demonstrations in the streets, and unity of the movement.

In 2011, at a time when Wisconsin’s public unions were under assault by Gov. Scott Walker, Gordon joined with others in calling an emergency conference of trade unionists held in Cleveland March 4-5, 2011, to advocate a more militant and robust fightback against what the group referred to as the many-sided attacks against labor and the working class as a whole. The major strategy advocated was united, massive mobilizations in the streets. The outcome of this conference was the formation of the Emergency Labor Network (ELN), with Gordon elected as secretary. This network gave way to the Labor Fightback Network (LFN), formed at a conference held at Rutgers University in New Jersey on May 10-12, 2013, with Gordon again serving as secretary.

The LFN was active on many fronts, including opposing U.S. wars and occupations, so-called “free trade” pacts, organizing the South, fighting voter suppression, building the August 28, 2013 March on Washington commemorating 50 years since Rev. Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream speech,” supporting public education, solidarity with unions under attack, jobs for all, a single-payer health care system, etc. The network increasingly emphasized the need for labor to break with the Democratic Party and — together with its community allies — run independent candidates for public office as a key step forward to establishing a workers’ party based on the unions and progressive community organizations.

Gordon is survived by his wife, Bonnie, whom he married in 1971, and by three children from a previous marriage, Pamela Granovetter, who resides in Cincinnati, Ohio; Richard Gordon of Brooklyn Center, Minnesota; and Gary Gordon of Boca Raton, Florida. He is also survived by a sister, Barbara Jonas, of Miami Beach, Florida; a brother, Murray Gordon, of Miami, Florida; and five grandchildren.
Mourning the Loss of One of Our Finest

By Single Payer Action Network OHIO

Jerry Gordon passed away Oct 27 in his sleep at the age of 88. He was a tireless and fearless activist for peace and justice — at the local and national levels. He educated and organized against wars from Vietnam to Iraq and in support of multitudes of worker rights struggles, single payer health care and an independent Labor Party. Jerry was a founding member of SPAN Ohio and even after he stepped down as the leader, he remained active in advocating for healthcare justice. He was an attorney and union member. He was strategic but went with the flow, connecting issues and people.

Above all else, he was passionate, humble and compassionate — rarely discussing his leadership in organizing national actions against the Vietnam war or court victories for justices. Jerry coaxed me to help pull together and coordinate the Northeast Ohio Anti-War Coalition (NOAC) many months before the US war and occupation of Iraq — always, always providing reasoned advice and encouragement. A real giant for peace and justice is no longer with us in body, but for those who knew him will remain always with us in spirit.

Jerry coaxed me to help pull together and coordinate the Northeast Ohio Anti-War Coalition (NOAC) many months before the US war and occupation of Iraq — always, always providing reasoned advice and encouragement. A real giant for peace and justice is no longer with us in body, but for those who knew him will remain always with us in spirit.

Jerry had been the first attorney to file a ballot access lawsuit in federal court against a state law requiring a very high number of signatures. He filed that case in January 1968 against Ohio, which at that time required 433,100 valid signatures for a new party to get on the ballot. The case went to the Supreme Court, which struck down Ohio’s law as unconstitutional. In 1969 the Ohio legislature lowered the petition from 15% to 7%, which still required over 200,000 signatures. In 1970 Gordon filed a new case for the Socialist Labor Party, and this time the 3-judge court not only struck down the 7% petition, it put the Socialist Labor Party on the ballot for the 1970 and 1972 elections.

Jerry served as National Secretary of the Labor Fightback Network from its founding until this past August. From their blog: He had devoted nearly all of his eighty-eight years to the struggle of the working class for peace, justice, human rights, and a decent standard of living. He was an uncompromising fighter against racism, imperialism, and all forms of sexism. Most importantly, Jerry put his principles into action, organizing coalitions based on principled unity which brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets. He taught a whole generation of young activists not only the importance of united-front action but how to make it happen in the real world. He will be sorely missed.

Jerry coaxed me to help pull together and coordinate the Northeast Ohio Anti-War Coalition (NOAC) many months before the US war and occupation of Iraq — always, always providing reasoned advice and encouragement. A real giant for peace and justice is no longer with us in body, but for those who knew him he will remain always with us in spirit.

A real giant for peace and justice is no longer with us physically, but for those who knew him he will remain always with us in spirit.

(This notice was published in the SPAN Ohio Newsletter. It was written by Mary Nichols-Rhodes.)
IMAGES OF
Second Labor Fightback Conference
Rutgers, New Jersey
May 15-17, 2015
Opening Remarks by Greg Coleridge

Jerry Gordon may not have been a particularly religious or spiritual person, but he was a profoundly moral one — incredibly principled in his words and actions.

Jerry was tenacious, tireless, intelligent, strategic, compassionate and persuasive. Sometimes, his attempt to be persuasive was more like conniving. I can certainly attest to this.

Prior to the outbreak of the Iraq war, Jerry tried to convince me to help him coordinate the Northeast Ohio Anti-War Coalition (NOAC), saying I’d be the perfect person to unite different people and groups. I told him I was very busy with other projects but would think it over. He called me the next day saying he had had a dream that night of me bringing everyone together and leading a massive effort against going to war. How was I going to deny realizing Jerry’s dream! He knew a master in working over people.

Jerry was a great teacher and mentor, always encouraging and sharing his experiences in organizing without boasting of his own impressive efforts in organizing massive national actions against the Vietnam War.

His strongly held principles for building public power and applying political pressure to resist oppression will forever remain with me, which are:

- The major strategy of organizing to build ever-larger mass street actions which focused on an overarching clear demand but which allowed participants to connect that demand with their own issues and concerns

- Radical inclusiveness of people and groups to build unity. If they agreed with what was being planned, they were welcome at march or event planning meetings and actions. Egos and turf were to be left at the door.

- Politically independent from all political parties, especially the Republican and Democratic parties, to avoid cooptation.

- Commitment to democracy via internal decision-making and in our calls/demands reflecting the will of those we’re advocating for.

A real giant for peace and justice is no longer with us in body, but for those who knew him will remain always with us in memory and spirit.

Greg Coleridge
Cleveland Heights, Ohio

Remarks by Jim Lafferty

Dear Bonnie and Jerry’s friends gathered here this evening. In thinking of what I would most like to say about my dear friend and political comrade Jerry Gordon, I started to recount all of the important political struggles of the last 70 years that Jerry has been a leader in. It’s a very, very long list. But then I thought, “Well, I suspect others will cover that aspect of his life as well or better than I ever could.” So, I decided, instead, to just talk for a few minutes about the extraordinary personal and political qualities he possessed and brought to his work as a political activist. Qualities which, when all is said and done, are the reasons he was such a powerful, successful and tireless revolutionary. Indeed, the reasons why he was, quite simply, one of the greatest political thinkers, leaders and organizers of our times.

First, of course, was his brilliant and clear-sighted political analysis. He simply “understood” and could describe the political situation better than anyone else I’ve encountered in my political life. Also, and just as important, Jerry Gordon was possessed of as much, or more, political integrity than any other political activist I’ve ever known and worked with. And I’ve had the opportunity over my life time to work with many of the most notable activists of our times. And when I say that Jerry had more political integrity than most, I do not mean to disparage the many other fine and productive political activists I’ve worked with. But Jerry was unique; he was one of a kind.

We worked most closely together on behalf of ending the U.S. wars of intervention in Vietnam, in Central
America, and in the Middle East. It’s no secret that the various coalitions that were formed to oppose those wars were not always working in harmony. Or as I used to say, “There is often very little peace in the peace movement.” And so there would be great temptation to trim one’s sails, alter one’s demands, compromise one’s beliefs as to how best to fight for an end to those imperialist wars. And I personally witnessed a great deal of “sail trimming” taking place again and again. But not by Jerry Gordon. If it was the right thing to do; the correct political demand to make; the principled way to interact with one’s political opponents in the movement, he did just that. He was always true to his core beliefs and core principles. As far as Jerry was concerned, there were no political shortcuts; no way that you can truly advance the struggle you are a part of that isn’t true to your core principles.

Now, I don’t mean to suggest he was not willing, indeed, anxious, to find principled common ground with others in the movement. Quite the contrary. No one fought harder for unity in the anti-war movement, or in any of the other critically important movements he was a leader of, than Jerry Gordon.

It is fair to say that I learned more about what is, and what is not, correct politically from Jerry than from any other person in my life. I was still quite young when he recruited me to help him form the National Peace Action Coalition, the anti-Vietnam War coalition that was the broadest based, and that staged the largest protests against that horrific war. What I learned from Jerry during the Vietnam War years, and continued to learn up until days before his death, would fill a big book. In very large part, I am who I am today politically because of Jerry Gordon; because of what I learned from him both by working with him and watching him work alone. Of course, truth be told, I could never keep up with him as a political thinker and strategist, any more than I could keep up with him on one of his interminable, fast-paced daily walks.

One last quality I’d like to call attention to today is Jerry Gordon’s big heart. To have fought for so many causes, for so many decades, and to have fought for them with so little regard for his own personal comforts or rewards, is clear evidence of his love of humanity and his wish to do all he could to bring comfort to the world. And unlike so many notable political activists, his ego never clouded his vision of what and who really mattered; and, what and who the fight was really all about. As I said to Alan Benjamin, and he told me he feels the same, since Jerry’s death not a day goes by that I don’t think of picking up the phone and calling him to ask him about some political idea I have, or to learn what he thinks about this or that political development. And then, before my thought of calling him has even been fully thought, I remember that he is dead. And I am sad all over again. And not being able to do that is a tremendously painful and debilitating loss for myself and, I suspect, for oh so many others. And, of course, for our movement.

Now, quite apart from my political dependence on Jerry Gordon, I also grieve the death of an old and dear and trusted friend. Indeed, to have had his friendship and his political comradeship for nearly 50-years is one of the greatest gifts this life has given me. To have lived in Detroit, and in New York City and now in Los Angeles, and to know during all those years that my friend and comrade Jerry Gordon was just a phone call away in Cleveland, was, as I say, a true gift.

Of course, now, in this particularly dangerous political moment, and the equally dangerous political future it portends, I will miss Jerry Gordon all the more. So many on the left today are disoriented by Trump’s election and the fascistic Administration he is foisting on the American people and, indeed, on the world. But, I have a pretty damned good idea what Jerry, himself, would say about the political challenge that faces us if I could pick up my phone and call him today. I think he’d say, “Jim, look at the millions of people who were in the streets this past week-end. And they were in the streets everywhere! And they were not just protesting Trump, they were demanding justice and decency across the board. Jim, this is a great opportunity for our movement, if we will seize it. The workers will soon come to see through Trump, and then may finally be ready for a stronger workers party. The people may finally see there is only one true way to have their needs met, and that’s the revolutionary way. So, Jim, if our revolutionary movement stays true to itself; if it never settles for less than what the people deserve; if it’s never afraid to fight for what is right and just no matter what the odds; and, if it will never give up the fight, there is no force on earth that can stop it forever. We’ve proven that with our many victories time and time again over the decades. So, Jim, if we will remember that history itself is on our side, our day will surely come!”
Sisters and brothers, for my part, I pledge today to again follow Jerry’ Gordon’s advice, knowing in my heart that our day, the peoples’ day, will, indeed, surely come!

Jim Lafferty
Los Angeles, California

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Remarks by Donna Dewitt

Good afternoon. I’m honored to celebrate Jerry’s life with Bonnie, his family and friends.

I didn’t know Jerry as long as many of you, but my life has been greatly enriched from our friendship.

Like most of you, I learned quickly that if Jerry called, you better be prepared with your response, knowing that if you were in agreement, there was going to be “the ask”. If there was some difference of opinion you might as well be prepared to lose the debate, unless you were convincing in your rebuttal, which would, also, lead to “the ask”. Either way, he was masterful in accomplishing his goal. It was almost a certain a win/win for him every time.

I want to share two personal experiences with Jerry that revealed a lighter side.

We were wrapping up a day of a Labor Fight Back meeting in Charleston at the ILA Hall. ILA members were shuttling delegates from the Hall to the hotel. I was staying with SC AFL-CIO president, Erin McKee, at her home about 20 minutes away. I received a call from some of the folks at the hotel after 11 pm and they were quite concerned because they could not find Jerry. They had searched the hotel, knowing that he would sometimes walk around the hotel floors to get exercise. The ILA member driving the shuttle that dropped him off remembered teasing him about taking him out on the town, but Jerry thanked him and proceeded to the hotel. I began putting my clothes back on to help in the search for Jerry. The phone rang and Alan Benjamin reported that they had finally located Jerry walking near the hotel in search of skim milk. By this time it was very late and numerous folks were chastising him about his stroll around the College of Charleston area on a Saturday night. Needless to say, most of the baby boomers were yawning and attempting to stay awake the next morning, while Jerry looked very chipper and rested.

On another occasion Millie Phillips and I joined Jerry in walking back to our hotel from Rutgers, where a Labor Fightback Conference was being held. We decided to select a restaurant and have dinner, keeping in mind that Jerry was very particular about what foods he ate. We decided on a restaurant that Jerry was very pleased with and after a nice meal we discussed a wide array of subjects. We all talked about our families. Jerry talked about his children. And as he talked about the respect and love he felt for Bonnie, Millie and I were both touched by the conversation and the apparent partnership they shared. This was, truly, one of my fondest memories of Jerry.

He left us with many strong examples of a principled true trade unionist and activist, uncompromising in his ideals. These memories will continue to remind of us of his expectations for the Labor Fightback Network and we will continue to draw strength from the many lessons he taught us.

We miss you, Jerry. We love you.

Donna Dewitt,
Columbia, South Carolina

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Remarks by Theresa El-Amin

Opportunities to connect the personal and the political seem to be more frequent every day. This is especially true for me on hearing about Jerry’s transition.

I got the news about Jerry a few weeks ago from a former Socialist Workers Party comrade of Jerry’s who is now a member of Solidarity, a socialist, feminist, anti-racist organization. Quite a few comrades in Solidarity who were members of the SWP and active in the labor left knew Jerry and his commitment to working class independence. Much respect for Jerry has been expressed by his comrades who were formerly in the SWP and with Jerry in the Fourth International Tendency or FIT.

I came to Cleveland recruited by Karen Nussbaum to work for District 925, SEIU. Forever grateful to Karen for the opportunity that moving to Cleveland provided for my political education. Good to see Harold Mitchell, my friend and the person who connected me with the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) here in Cleveland. So many fond memories
of living in Cleveland. Glad to be here with you all today as we celebrate the life of our friend and comrade, Jerry Gordon.

I arrived in Cleveland in February 1986 at the age of 38 knowing nothing about socialism. Meeting Jean Tussey and Jerry Gordon started me on the path that led to my transformation from a rank-and-file union activist to a working class freedom fighter who just so happened to have a job as an organizer with the Service Employees International Union.

1986 was also the first time I attended a Labor Notes conference. COSATU (Coalition of South African Trade Unions) and the Black Workers For Justice were present. Another “aha moment” in my transformation.

Jean Tussey and Jerry Gordon embraced the work of the BWFJ as reliable allies and comrades. Their support helped to bring the BWFJ out of isolation in the South. Particularly, their support of the “Organize the South Solidarity Tour of the Midwest”. The OTS tour was supported by Labor Notes, plus socialists in the labor movement in PA, OH, MI, IL and WI.

The OTS tour culminated with an event in Cleveland in June 1990 where 18 workers from textile and auto parts plants in the South spoke about their third world working conditions.

SEIU transferred me to Rhode Island in August 1990. Always felt it was a punitive transfer since Brother Sweeney was known for sending letters to staff disparaging work with “communists”. However, what I learned in Cleveland prepared me to continue solidarity work with the BWFJ which meant deepening my political relationship with Jean Tussey and Jerry. Discussions with Jean, Jerry and the BWFJ began to clarify and shape my thinking on US imperialism in Haiti and other countries of oppressed peoples being exploited by US capitalism. Real lessons in why US intervention is generally not a good thing.

When the Labor Party held its founding convention here in Cleveland in 1996, I was here. Not in my best health as I struggled to overcome the impact of surviving a brain aneurysm in 1994. Still, the occasion was cause for celebration as representatives of labor parties from France, Germany and elsewhere joined the US labor left in beginning the work of independence from the parties of the bosses.

In the months following the founding convention of the Labor Party, Jerry and others called for a clean break from the Democratic Party. By 1998, the struggle on which way forward for the Labor Party had divided Labor Party forces into “not now” and “let’s move forward”. Jerry was for guess what? Yes, “Forward!”

Jerry was always willing to reach out to me in spite of my health challenges. When I think about the life Jerry lived, he will always be an inspiration to me to “never give up”.

Theresa El-Amin
Columbus, Georgia

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Message from Saladin Muhammad

Comrades and friends of Comrade Jerry Gordon:

I apologize that I cannot be at this memorial for Jerry Gordon, a working-class organizer and fighter who never lost confidence in the working-class as a revolutionary force capable of mobilizing it's power to bring about a better world.

Jerry and myself as a representative of Black Workers for Justice worked closely to organize the Workers Unity Network, a grouping of forces connecting efforts to organize labor in the US South and the struggle for Black liberation to the program and trajectory of building the US labor party.

This unity started at the level of recognizing that labor's weaknesses in the South and in its relationship to the Black liberation movement, weakened the unity and power of the working-class.

Jerry was a Comrade and friend. This combination of being genuinely concerned for the well being of others, especially those engaged in struggles for democracy and radical change, made Jerry a person many could talk to and learn from.

The walking man was a kind of an unofficial nickname that some of us would use when referring to Jerry.

Comrade Bonnie, Jerry's life partner, Comrade Jean Tussey, Bonnie's mother, and some others were part of a collective with Jerry who believed in collective leadership.
While Comrade Jerry will be missed, his lessons of theory and practice will continue to help guide the struggles of the working-class. Presente!

Saladin Muhammad
Rocky Mount, North Carolina

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Remarks by Mike Ferner

Gene Debs said that, “Intelligent dissent is the mainspring of civilization.”

Nobody ever had to tell Jerry Gordon that it was time to rewind that mainspring. He practiced intelligent dissent more forcefully and more consistently than anyone I ever met, going back to 1980.

But he didn’t just practice intelligent dissent as an individual. He knew the importance of organization and spent his life organizing for the kind of better world we know we deserve. I learned more about organizing and unions from Jerry than anyone. Jerry was a mentor, a teacher, a leader and most of all a friend.

And yet, you had to be careful when Jerry called. Like other people said here today, he always had something in mind for you. And it was almost impossible to say “no” to him. The routine he discovered that worked well on me was to appeal to my ego and say something like, “Mike, I have this idea and wanted to get your thoughts on it.” But before the conversation was over, I was chairing a committee or doing something else I had no intention of doing a half an hour earlier.

Jerry and I never had deep, philosophical discussions, we mostly kept focused on the task at hand. But there’s no doubt in my mind that if I had thought of asking Jerry why he was a socialist, he would likely have quoted Gene Debs to me, saying something very much like, “I’m for socialism because socialism is for humanity.”

That was Jerry Gordon . . . and are we ever going to miss the old guy.

Mike Ferner
Toledo, Ohio

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Remarks by Mark Dudzic

I first met Jerry sometime around 1994. We were trying to build a Labor Party. Jerry lent his enthusiasm and expertise to this effort and really helped get it off the ground. He was instrumental in organizing a major event bringing together unions from the Cleveland and Detroit areas. This event helped convince many of us from the small group of national unions that were involved in Labor Party Advocates that the time had come to call for a national founding convention.

Jerry also pushed to hold that founding convention right here in Cleveland and then worked with us to find additional facilities and hotel space as the projected attendance tripled in size. Bonnie helped organize the registration and logistics.

Jerry believed to his very core that workers needed their own independent party and that everything we did as working class activists had to support this goal.

Now Bonnie, don’t take this the wrong way but Jerry could also be a bit of a pain in the butt! Depending on how you felt about it, you could call him impatient or you could see him as someone taken by the fierce urgency of now. Either way, he often pushed us to do things that we didn’t want to do. And he could be relentless. Sometimes we listened. Sometimes not. And sometimes I wish we had listened.

One moment where his influence was decisive is in the period after 9/11, 2001. Much of the labor and progressive movement was disoriented by the immensity of the catastrophe. Jerry urged us to speak out against the drive to war, the attack on civil liberties and the scapegoating of Muslims. He helped launch US Labor Against War and set in motion a process that culminated in a substantial section of the U.S. labor movement taking a stand against their own government’s involvement in an active war.

The other thing to remember about Jerry was that no matter how passionate the argument might be about a particular issue, once it was over he moved on. He never personalized his differences and was always able to keep them in perspective.

It was impossible to stay mad at him because you always knew that, however deep your differences with him on a given issue, he took his position from a deep conviction of what was right for our movement
and the working class.

Jerry brought this style and passion to all of the subsequent projects and campaigns that I worked with him on: USLAW, Single Payer Action Network of Ohio, the Labor Fightback Network. And he almost singlehandedly kept the Ohio Labor Party Chapter alive long after the national party was put on the shelf.

Now Jerry could strike you as somewhat odd. There was his food discipline where he would bring his own foods with him to restaurants. And his rigid schedule of powerwalking no matter the time and place. I’ve spent many minutes pacing hotel hallways with him in order to discuss one issue or another that was of import at the time! But what really humanized him for me was his love for Bonnie. There was tenderness there and a deep respect and comradeship.

The world will miss Jerry and I will miss him. I imagine him speaking to us today. He would be calling on us to take a stand and speak out against Trump’s barbaric ban on refugees and Muslims.

He enriched my life and he enriched every movement that he was involved in.

Mark Dudzic
Washington, D.C.

Remarks by Alan Benjamin

When I got the call from Bonnie Gordon on October 28 to tell me that Jerry had died the night before, I could not believe my ears. I had spoken to him just a few days earlier about the surprising win by the Cleveland Indians over the Chicago Cubs in the World Series. We had also talked, as we always did, about labor’s subordination to the Democratic Party, and how union members were not turning out to support Hillary Clinton.

I was in shock. Though Jerry was almost 88 years old, he was in better shape than anyone my age. He seemed invincible. I used to ask him to slow down a bit, joking that we did not want him to burn out as we needed him around for the long run, or at the very least till he was 100 years old. He would laugh.

Jerry’s commitment to healthy eating and fast-walking became something I tried to emulate — though not always successfully, as I lack his amazing discipline. But I have strived to do my twice-daily “Jerry Gordon Fast Walks.”

Jerry, however, was much more than a role model for healthy living. He was my political mentor, going back to the early-1970s, when I first heard him speak at an SWP educational conference in Oberlin, Ohio, about the vital role of the united-front tactic in building the Vietnam antiwar movement and about the need for a Labor Party in the United States.

Throughout the 1980s, we worked closely to promote the idea of a Labor Party. In 1992, we decided it was time to begin regrouping labor and community activists committed to this orientation, and we organized a National Conference for Independent Political Action in San Francisco. Jerry co-chaired the meeting. The conference contributed to the effort of building local chapters of Labor Party Advocates across the United States once a number of key unions decided to launch LPA in 1992-93. The conference also stressed the importance of building international labor solidarity against U.S./NATO wars and capitalist globalization.

Jerry was not only a warrior for independent working class politics, he was also a staunch internationalist.

In June 1996, Jerry co-chaired a side meeting at the founding convention of the Labor Party in Cleveland with labor delegates in attendance from 12 countries. It was a meeting organized jointly by The Organizer newspaper, of which Jerry was an active supporter and regular contributor; Baldemar Velasquez, president of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC); and the independent international regroupment which at that time was organized in the International Liaison Committee for a Workers’ International (ILC). Jeremy Corbyn, currently the head of the British Labour Party, was one of the keynote speakers.

Over the following two decades, Jerry played a key role in countless international labor fightback campaigns, including the international campaign to free Mumia Abu-Jamal; the campaign to stop all deportations and grant amnesty/legalization to all undocumented immigrants in the United States who were expelled from their countries as a result of U.S. “free trade” policies; and the international campaign to end the U.S./NATO wars. The list goes on.

We also worked closely together building the “clean-
break’ wing of the Labor Party, which advocated running independent labor, or labor-community, candidates for office at the state and local levels to affirm the Labor Party’s full break with the Democratic Party..

Though unsuccessful in this first attempt to build a Labor Party, Jerry was not demoralized; he was more convinced than ever that the labor movement must make a clean break with ruling class politics if it was to preserve and expand its gains.

And he was a staunch supporter of Black Workers For Justice and the fight by Black people against the police killings and for self-determination, as well as the effort to organize the U.S. South.

But Jerry was also a dear friend. I cannot think of one week over the past 30 years when we did not speak at least two or three times over the phone, usually politics, but also sports. I got an earful when LeBron James left Cleveland to go play in Miami, but then learned that all was forgiven after the Cavs finally brought an NBA championship to Cleveland, a feat he was not sure he would witness during his lifetime. (Needless to say, I was rooting for the Warriors.)

Jerry was the best example any young activist could want to follow: He was deeply rooted in the life and politics of the working class. Some considered him stern and stubborn, but he had a wonderful sense of humor. He was only impatient with all the so-called labor leaders who continued to rationalize their support for “lesser-evilism.”

I will miss Jerry deeply, but I will always keep in mind his constant reminder to me and to others: Never accept a substitute for a Labor Party; the working class needs its own political party. Don’t veer off course!

I pledged to him that I would heed these words. Jerry Gordon, Presente!

Alan Benjamin
San Francisco, California

* * * * *

Message from Tom Bias

This is a sad day for me. Even though Jerry had a long life and without doubt left this world a better place than he found it, I’m sad that he’s gone. I’m sad that neither I nor any other working-class activist will have the benefit of his counsel; I’m sad that the working class and community groups working for social justice will no longer have the benefit of his hard work. And I’m sad for the simple reason that I miss him. I have worked with him at one level or another for all of my adult life—actually, even longer than that. But, I am happy that Jerry was in this world; I’m grateful to him for the contribution he made to the struggle for social justice and for all the things I and hundreds of friends and comrades learned from him, and I’m especially glad that I got to know him as a friend.

I’m also disappointed that I cannot be with you all in person today to celebrate the life of this remarkable man. I made the decision to attend the convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark as an elected delegate from my parish, and let me tell you why. As I write these remarks, Donald John Trump has been President of the United States for two days. To resist his racist, sexist, labor-hating agenda will require far broader involvement of people than we have seen in many years. We will need to bring into the struggle people who are not and never have been political activists. We will need to reach out to organizations in our communities with whom we have not worked before and appeal to their most basic moral values. In my church we pray for the President, no matter who holds the office. But our beliefs dictate to us that when a woman feels afraid to go into a supermarket because she wears the hijab that it’s the church’s business to stand up for her. It is our responsibility to be welcoming to the refugee, to feed the hungry, provide clothing for those in rags, and to give friendship to those who are incarcerated, and we understand that it is not enough to give from our own pockets. No, it is necessary to stand up for those threatened by racist violence, to work for an entire country and society that welcomes the refugee, feeds the hungry, clothes those wearing rags, and gives not only friendship but justice to those who are in prison. The Trump agenda goes 100% against these moral values; the question that we need to discuss is how can we bring the moral authority and the grassroots network of the faith communities to bear, not against Trump as a man and as the President, but against his anti-human public policies. We all need to be having this discussion, not just with the people we know and with whom we have worked for many years, but with our neighbors, our extended families, with the parents of our children’s classmates—those of us whose children are still children!—and, for
those of us who are people of faith, with our fellow parishioners. That’s what I will be doing. I hope when all the meetings have concluded that I have been able to make a difference. If there’s one thing I know, it’s that Jerry Gordon shared these moral values and devoted his life to working to make them a reality. So I am sorry that I cannot be here in person, but I could not let this opportunity to network for social justice and human decency slip away.

Now, I don’t want to wear you out with a lot of talk here this afternoon. I want to say just a few things about Jerry that were important to me and that made a difference in my life.

First, my affiliation with the Socialist Workers Party during the 1970s is no secret to anyone. When I joined the Young Socialist Alliance in 1969 one of the first things I learned about was the power of mass action, especially when it unleashes the very real and invincible power of the working class. At that time the odor of smoke was still in the air from urban rebellions in places like Detroit and Newark, especially in the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, a genuine hero of our country and indeed of our world. The Vietnam war was raging, and opposition to it by then included large numbers of active-duty GIs and veterans. Trade union leaders were beginning to speak out against the war as well, breaking with pro-war business unionist leaders like AFL-CIO President George Meany. The Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialist Alliance argued for a mass-action strategy to organize opposition to the Vietnam war—the principled demand of immediate U.S. withdrawal, non-exclusion in organizing, democratic decision-making, and action which could involve active-duty GIs and veterans and working men and women and their families.

But the SWP did not fight alone. Leading the campaign within the antiwar movement for principled unity, for inclusion of those social forces capable of forcing an end to the war, and non-exclusion and democracy were two organizers who spoke eloquently and gave 100% to build a coalition to make the mass actions happen. They were Jim Lafferty of Detroit and Jerry Gordon of Cleveland. I first heard Jerry speak when he gave the keynote address at a national conference of the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam at Case Western Reserve here in Cleveland in February 1970. He was clear and uncompromising. He told it as it was. Jerry was out front leading the fight along with Jim and people like Ruth Gage-Colby of the Women’s Inter-

national League for Peace and Freedom, John T. Williams of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Fred Halstead of the SWP, and other good people. That went on for three years until the U.S. bowed to the inevitable early in 1973 and signed a peace agreement with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front. Two years later, in 1975, the forces of the DRV and NLF put an end to the charade, marched into Saigon, and reunified Vietnam. The war was over. The mass-action strategy had been successful in contributing mightily to the victory of the Vietnamese people. And Jerry Gordon personally contributed mightily to convincing the antiwar movement that the mass-action strategy was the way to go. Jerry stepped up to the challenge of leadership, and he did not fail. The success of the anti—Vietnam war movement was due in no small measure to the leadership and work of Jerry Gordon.

The struggle against the Vietnam war was the dominant feature of the first half of my twenties. At the end of my twenties I had to walk away from the Socialist Workers Party, as did so many others of my generation—and those of the generation who had participated in the great struggles of the CIO in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1984 I joined a group of comrades who had been expelled from the SWP or who had resigned in disgust as I had. It was known as the Fourth Internationalist Tendency. We had a local organizing committee in Cleveland which included Jean Tussey, Jerry’s mother-in-law, and in 1989—I think it was—the Cleveland local organizing committee recruited Jerry to the F.I.T. It was during the next two years or so that I really got to know Jerry and to work with him directly, which I had not done during the years of the Vietnam war.

During those years, I was the National Administrative Secretary of the F.I.T., and we had a lot of difficult decisions to make, and a lot of changes in the world to understand. Those were the years when the Berlin Wall came down, of the students in Tienanmen Square in Beijing, the Solidarity Union in Poland, and ultimately, the end of the Soviet Union itself. Jerry and I often found ourselves on opposite sides of the debate. To this day I will stand by what I said back then—Jerry never convinced me. But as sharp as our arguments were, they were always respectful and comradely.

I disagreed often with Jerry, but there was never one minute that I didn’t respect him and never one minute that I didn’t believe that he was sincere and had no hidden agenda. I know that Jerry respected me and
Message from David Sole

I was very saddened to hear of Jerry's death and ask you to convey my condolences to his family and friends. He and I worked very closely together during the long Detroit newspaper strike, beginning in 1995.

As a militant he was interested in pushing the strike and strike support to the left. But as a staff union person he couldn't do it quite openly. Just before the strike and all through the many years it went on, I was the elected president of UAW Local 2334.

Jerry Gordon knew I was also to the left, and while we perhaps didn't agree on some other issues fully, he also knew that I was a militant but not one of the ultralefts who also populated the Action Committee of Strikers and Supporters (ACOSS). So Jerry and I blocked together and he many times pushed the committee to have me speak at large rallies and demonstrations.

Our collaboration was important and we built a warm friendship over those years. I recall at a big indoor conference on the strike held at Wayne State University I even had Jerry go over my speech and he made some useful changes. Later, after he had left Detroit, it was Jerry Gordon who got me invited to speak in Cleveland at a big indoor rally at the start of the Iraq War where Amy Goodman and I shared the stage. I was still UAW local president so could be a labor leader against the war.

We sometimes exchanged emails in later years on one international event or another, often not agreeing. But I will always remember Jerry Gordon warmly and with great respect for his contributions to the struggle.
MESSAGES CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF JERRY GORDON

FROM MARY NICHOLS-RHODES (Single Payer Action Network OHIO)

Jerry was a tireless and fearless activist for peace and justice — at the local and national levels. He educated and organized against wars from Vietnam to Iraq and in support of multitudes of worker rights struggles, single payer health care and an independent Labor Party. Jerry was a founding member of SPAN Ohio and even after he stepped down as the leader, he remained active in advocating for health-care justice. He was an attorney and union member. He was strategic but went with the flow, connecting issues and people.

Jerry served as National Secretary of the Labor Fightback Network from its founding until this past August. He was an uncompromising fighter against racism, imperialism, and all forms of sexism. Most importantly, Jerry put his principles into action, organizing coalitions based on principled unity, which brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets. He taught a whole generation of young activists not only the importance of united-front action but how to make it happen in the real world. He will be sorely missed.

A real giant for peace and justice is no longer with us physically, but for those who knew him he will remain always with us in spirit.

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FROM SALADIN MUHAMMAD (Rocky Mount, N.C.)

Dear Bonnie, I want to express my deepest sorrow and condolences for the passing of Jerry, a comrade and a friend that I worked with and had upmost respect for.

The revolutionary walker and long distance fighter was how some comrades would remember Jerry. He mapped out his walking in the house, in the streets/roads and in hotels at meetings. As the struggle for revolutionary change was, walking was also a major part of his life.

Even when struggling around differences, Jerry treated forces as comrades, not enemies.

Jerry will be missed by many who will carry forward his thinking and revolutionary commitment.

The Black Workers For Justice will lift up his name at our annual Dr King Support for Labor Banquet.

Hope you are well. Warm regards.

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FROM JAMES LAFFERTY (Los Angeles)

Dear Bonnie: I just heard the terrible, terrible news. I am heart-broken. Is there anything I can do to help you at this time? Anything you need that I might be able to provide?

You have just lost the dearest and finest man I’ve known. The country has just lost one of the very best people it has ever produced.

I have just lost my dearest and oldest comrade. I guess I thought Jerry would live to be at least 100, and fighting every day until then. What a loss...for you, for the country...for everyone who had the great pleasure and honor to have known and worked with him.

I don’t know what else to say. I am stunned. I am grief struck by the loss of this dear, dear friend. Love and support.

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FROM TOM BIAS (National Secretary, Labor Fightback Network)

In the predawn hours of October 28, 2016, Jerry Gordon, who had served as National Secretary of the Labor Fightback Network from its founding until August of this year, passed into eternity. He had devoted nearly all of his eighty-eight years to the struggle of the working class for peace, justice, human rights, and a decent standard of living. He was an uncompromising fighter against racism, imperialism, and all forms of sexism. Most importantly, Jerry put his principles into action, organizing coalitions based on principled unity, which brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets. He
taught a whole generation of young activists the not
only the importance of united-front action but how to
make it happen in the real world. He will be sorely
missed.

In the months and weeks ahead, many words will be
written and spoken which will share the events of
Jerry’s life and work—activity in the labor movement,
civil rights struggle, and peace movement going back
six decades. As Jerry’s friends and comrades commit
their memories to paper—or electronic word-pro-
cessing files—we will share them here in the weeks
and months to come. At this time, I can only share
my own reminiscences.

I first encountered Jerry Gordon in 1970 at a national
conference of the Student Mobilization Committee to
End the War in Vietnam. The event was in Cleve-
land, Ohio, where Jerry lived for most of his life. Jerry
was the keynote speaker. He was introduced as a
labor lawyer, and he looked the part! He was dressed
appropriately to appear in court—quite a contrast to
us scruffy students, most of us barely out of our
teens. I later found out that Jerry was exactly the
same age as my own mother. The speech that he
gave, however, was as fiery and militant as anything
I had heard in the struggle—and by this time in my
life I had heard a lot! He wasn’t afraid to call the
Nixon administration’s Vietnam policy by its right
name: imperialism. He didn’t shrink from calling for
mass action by the student youth, working people,
and military personnel, rather than relying on the
good intentions of politicians trying to get elected to
office.

Over the next five years, Jerry, along with his close
associate Jim Lafferty of Detroit, worked tirelessly to
bring disparate forces to unite around the demand
that the United States withdraw its forces immedi-
ately from Vietnam, and—after May 1970—from
Cambodia and Laos as well. After the massive stu-
dent uprising of May 1970, sparked by the invasion
of Cambodia and the National Guard murders of four
students at Kent State University in Ohio and of two
students at Jackson State University in Mississippi,
Jerry and Jim, along with Ruth Gage-Colby of the
Women’s International League for Peace and Free-
dom, and John T. Williams of the International Broth-
erhood of Teamsters, led the formation of the
National Peace Action Coalition. This coalition
brought a combined total of a million people into the
streets in Washington and San Francisco in April of
1971. For the first time, unions and labor officials
were breaking with the pro-war policies of AFL-CIO
President George Meany. Jerry Gordon was one of
the best networkers I ever saw—and that was before
we even had the term “networking”—and he knew to
whom to reach out. He started with people he knew
in Cleveland and people in the Amalgamated Meat-
cutters and Butcher Workmen’s Union, the union he
represented, and worked from there. It became clear
quickly to the warmakers that organized action in op-
position to the Vietnam war could not be limited to
the student youth, and if they did not want a deepgo-
ing social explosion, they would have to bring the
war to a close quickly.

Jerry Gordon played a direct and in many ways deci-
sive role in forcing the United States to get out of
Vietnam short of victory. It wasn’t Jerry as a single
person who made the difference: it was his leader-
ship in building a united and principled coalition for
immediate U.S. withdrawal, based in the people—the
working class, the student youth, and the GIs. It was
his refusal to compromise his principles in the inter-
ests of getting someone elected to office; it was his
insistence that the antiwar movement had to reach
out to organized labor as that one social force which
had the power to shut down the American economy
and force an end to the war, if it came to that. The
warmakers understood, and they made sure that it
didn’t come to that.

I got to know Jerry much better personally in the
1980s and later, working with him in opposition to
U.S. intervention in Central America and then in the
efforts to stop the Bush 41’s Gulf War and then Bush
43’s Gulf War. But those fundamental principles of
coalition-building hadn’t changed. Jerry stood by
them in every struggle: principled unity, the central
role of labor, mass action by the people, rather than
favors from the politicians. That’s what I learned from
Jerry Gordon, and they are lessons I will never forget
as long as I live. And Jerry Gordon was a working-
class leader and a fighter for social justice, whom I
will never forget as long as I live.

Jerry Gordon, ¡presente!

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FROM JEFF MACKLER (Oakland, Calif.)

Jerry’s passing is a terrible loss all who cherish the
socialist cause. His devotion to the class struggle, to
inclusive and democratic movement functioning, to
principled united front mass actions against all U.S.
wars is an enable for all. Jerry had that rare capacity
to engage in serious discussions and even disagreements with his closest associates without breaking the bonds of friendship that kept the door open for ongoing collaboration. — From all the comrades of Socialist Action.

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FROM RICHARD WINGER (Ballot Access News)

Jerry Gordon was the first attorney to file a ballot access lawsuit in federal court against a state law requiring a very high number of signatures. He filed that case in January 1968 against Ohio, which then required 433,100 valid signatures for a new party to get on the ballot. He filed it in the northern district of Ohio.

The 3-judge court sat on the case, which had been filed for the Socialist Labor Party, for six months. Finally it issued an opinion saying the case should have been filed in the southern district. This was wrong, because one of the plaintiffs, Peter Kapitz, the U.S. Senate nominee for the Socialist Labor Party, lived in Cleveland, which is in the northern district.

Gordon dutifully refiled the case in the southern district. The 3-judge panel in that district combined his case with the case filed for George Wallace and the American Independent Party. Then they ruled that although the Ohio law might be unconstitutional, they would not put either party on the ballot. Both parties then filed with the U.S. Supreme Court. The American Independent Party asked Justice Potter Stewart to put their party on the ballot, even before the U.S. Supreme Court had heard the case. The court wasn’t sitting yet. Stewart put the American Independent Party on the ballot.

Gordon asked three days later that the Socialist Labor Party be also put on, but Stewart refused on the grounds that the delay of three days was inconvenient for the ballot-printing process. The next month the Court heard the case and struck down the Ohio law.

In 1969 the Ohio legislature lowered the petition from 15% to 7%, which still required over 200,000 signatures. In 1970 Gordon filed a new case for the Socialist Labor Party, and this time the 3-judge court not only struck down the 7% petition; it put the SLP on the ballot for the 1970 and 1972 elections.

Gordon, who lived in Cleveland, accomplished a great deal more than just these two ballot access cases. He represented activists in many types of cases.

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FROM MILLIE PHILLIPS (Oakland, Calif.)

My deep condolences to Bonnie and to the rest of Jerry’s family. Jerry was a mentor, comrade, and inspiration to so many of us. It was an honor to work with him. I will always remember and miss his dedication, determination, energy, and political clarity.

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FROM ED BRUNO (Tampa, Fla.)

Jerry was one of a few union leaders who post-CIO kept the flame of militant democratic unionism alive along with labor as an independent political force. The pre-CIO folks are all gone, and there are damn few left who survived the red-baiting and purging of the 1950-60s. As we lose these connections it becomes harder and harder to re-build the labor movement.

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FROM DONNA DEWITT (Columbia, SC)

All, I am at a loss for words, but so many of you have expressed many beautiful thoughts about Jerry. My thoughts are with all of you, his friends, and Bonnie. He will be greatly missed but he gave us so many memories to keep him with us as we continue the work he loved dearly.

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FROM MIKE CARANO (Tallmadge, Ohio)

I know how much I’ll always appreciate the example and wisdom Jerry brought to world. Not only politically, but in how to respectfully bring people together, how to consistently keep the bar of integrity high; how to forge ahead and not spiral down the path of cynicism; and how to be a friend and comrade. Mike C.

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FROM MARK DUDZIC
Thanks for letting me know, Alan. I just wrote Bonnie. A sad loss for us all.

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FROM NANCY WOHLFORTH (Washington, DC)

So very hard to know that he has now died. He was such an activist for so, so many years.

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FROM BARBARA MUTNICK

So sorry, for us all. Barbara

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FROM AJAMU DILLAHUNT (Raleigh, N.C.)

Jerry Gordon- Presente!

I had not seen him in many years, but I remember his seriousness and energy in the service of the working class. And I remember the walks, wherever he was.

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FROM BRETT HUME (Savannah, Ga.)

A true loss to all Working Families. The majority will never know the things Jerry has done for them for so long.

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FROM LARRY DUNCAN (Chicago)

I remember when Jerry in the ‘90s was in Chicago before he was going to speak at, I guess, a Labor Party meeting, and trying to keep up with him on one of his rapid daily walks. I was pretty winded afterward.

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FROM STEVE EARLY (Richmond, Calif.)

Bonnie — Please accept my condolences for your and our loss—Jerry was one of a kind, much admired far and wide, for his tireless work on behalf of so many good and necessary labor and political causes. Best wishes during this difficult time

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FROM MICHAEL EISENSCHER (Oakland, Calif.)

Bonnie, I’m so very sorry to hear this sad news. Jerry was a one-of-a-kind human being and totally dedicated social justice activist. Jerry played an instrumental role in the early days of USLAW when we were fighting to put the AFL-CIO on record against the war. He was at the center of organizing labor participation in the large national antiwar demonstrations that followed the invasion of Iraq. He was also very helpful to our National Labor Assembly for Peace held in Cleveland in 2006. Jerry was, above all, an internationalist who had a deep commitment to global peace and international labor solidarity. He will be sorely missed, but especially by those who knew and worked with him.

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FROM ALLAN FISHER (San Francisco)

I didn’t know Jerry very well, but I sure appreciated his presence at a few meetings and conferences I attended. Sorry to hear he is gone.

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FROM COLIA L. CLARK (Harlem, N.Y.)

My heart weeps. What a powerful lost for the labor struggle and workers rights. What a blow to the development of the Labor Party! He has been on my mind through out this election season. We who struggle for human rights and dignity will miss him. I will miss his careful guidance and steadfast push for a change in the US in civil rights, human rights, Labor, women and youth. May the great spirit guide his path home.

Please let me know if there is some way in which I might be of assistance.

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FROM DANIEL GLUCKSTEIN (POID, Paris France)

I was very saddened to learn about Jerry Gordon’s death. Jerry was a friend and comrade with whom I collaborated closely over the past 25 years. Please
accept my personal condolence, as well as that of the Democratic Independent Workers Party (POID) of France and the Organizing Committee of the Mumbai World Conference Against War, Exploitation and Precarious Labor, of which Jerry was an enthusiastic supporter.

Jerry represented the very essence of the struggle for a Labor Party and a Workers’ International.

I met Jerry for the first time in 1992, when I was invited as a guest speaker to the National Conference for Independent Political Action in San Francisco. Jerry co-chaired the meeting. The conference contributed to the effort to launch Labor Party Advocates and to build local chapters of LPA across the United States. It also stressed the importance of building international labor solidarity against the “war at home and abroad.”

Those two axes — the fight against war and exploitation — were central to Jerry and to our collaboration over the years. The common thread that bound our work was the continued effort to advance the fight for independent working class political action in every country — which in the United States, and Jerry was a strong advocate of this perspective, included the fight for an independent Black Party linked to the struggle for a Labor Party.

In June 1996, Jerry co-chaired a side meeting at the founding convention of the Labor Party in Cleveland with labor delegates in attendance from 12 countries, a meeting organized jointly by The Organizer newspaper, of which Jerry was an active supporter and regular contributor; Baldemar Velasquez, president of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC); and the independent international regroupment which at that time was organized in the International Liaison Committee for a Workers’ International, but which today is centered in the Organizing Committee of the Mumbai Conference Against War, Exploitation and Precarious Labor. There were more than 100 convention delegates in attendance at that international gathering.

We continued this close international collaboration in countless efforts over all these years, to name but a few:

* the international campaign to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, which gathered over 1 million signatures worldwide addressed to the U.S. Attorney General; Jerry was an organizer of the international delegation that traveled to the Justice Department in Washington, D.C., to deliver these signatures;

* the Western Hemisphere Conference Against NAFTA and Free Trade (San Francisco, 1997), with its accompanying campaign to stop all deportations and grant amnesty/legalization to all undocumented immigrants in the United States who were expelled from their countries as a result of U.S. policies;

* the Open World Conference in Defense of Trade Union Independence and Labor Rights (San Francisco, 2000) that brought together 565 delegates from 60 countries; Jerry gave the main report on building a broad U.S. and international coalition against U.S./NATO wars.

I could cite many other such campaigns and conferences. The list is long.

Jerry was a champion of building united-front coalitions against the war and in defense of working class interests. But he was also a strong advocate of a clean break by the labor movement with ruling class politics.

And he was a solid supporter of the fight by Black people against the police killings and for self-determination, and of the effort to organize the U.S. South.

In all these and other efforts, we worked closely across national borders to build a genuine international fightback movement.

Today, that fight continues as we build the Mumbai Conference in mid-November 2016. We will not have Jerry at our side as we deepen this fightback internationally, but his important contribution to working class internationalism will continue to inspire us and serve as an example in the months and years to come.

Solidarity greetings to all,

Daniel Gluckstein, Co-National Secretary, Democratic Independent Workers Party of France

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FROM DONNA CARTWRIGHT

Jerry will be missed by all in the single payer health-care movement.
FROM MYA SHONE AND RALPH SCHOENMAN
(Vallejo, Calif.)

Dear Bonnie,

We write to convey distress and sadness to learn of Jerry’s death. He was such a constant source of energy, optimism and guidance to so many that it is hard to imagine him gone.

Like so many we were impacted by his peerless dedication, punctuated by patient guidance, warmth, humor and clarity on display to all components of the workers’ movement who shared his ideals and commitment.

We send our heartfelt condolences and regards.

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FROM AL ROJAS (Sacramento, Calif.)

Sister Bonnie: We Send You All of our Spiritual healing & energy in these moments the only comfort for many Us is what he & did to make this a better World for all working Families.

Bless you for being who you are & at his side as his partner for life. Our condolences to the Family.

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FROM CAROL GAY

This is very upsetting news. It makes me very sad.

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FROM DAVID KEIL

The best way we can commemorate Jerry’s life is by reviving yet again the effort that he put his heart into for united antiwar actions and coalitions, from the 1970s on, notably with the National Assembly. Now is a particularly urgent time.

I am glad to have known and worked with him.

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FROM TIM STINSON (Albany, Ore.)

Alan, I’m never good with conveying condolences, but will simply say that I recall Brother Jerry from the 2006 national convention of Socialist Organizer in SF. He was such an uplifting comrade to speak with — not simply with recollections of past struggles, his were many — but with informative, educational words, unvarnished yet full of affirmation of future ones, & victories to win.

For Bonnie, you & all the comrades who knew Brother Jerry well, & were close to him, I hope my words convey my honest sadness for our loss.

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FROM LOGAN MARTINEZ

Very sorry to hear of Jerry passing.

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FROM GEOFF MIROLOWITZ

Jerry was an exceptionally determined person. Once he decided what he thought was right, he stuck to it and fought for it unflaggingly. We were on the same side in many meetings where sharp political differences were expressed. He always stayed calm and when the chips were down you could count on him.

This determination also had its amusing moments. Jerry and I traveled to Paris together in the fall of 1971 both to make contact with the French antiwar movement and to meet with the Vietnamese representatives there from North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front.

It was a very short trip packed with meetings end to end. But one afternoon allowed a short break for us to take a walk to see a bit of the city. Jerry set a stiff pace and I...fell behind. Finally he stopped and waited for me to catch up. Then with the same sort of serious mien that I had seen him employ to good effect in negotiations with other U.S. antiwar forces who did not share our political perspective, he said to me, “We are going to have to split up!” “Why?” I asked in my naive 17 year-old voice. His answer: “You are just too slow!”

I am glad to have known and worked with him.

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FROM CARMEN MAYMI O’REILLY

He did good work until the end. Now it’s time to rest. Thank you. I did not know you but know of you and your contributions.
FROM GORDON FOX

I worked with Jerry in the antiwar coalition in Cleveland, and then a few years later worked as his, well, secretary for an NPAC convention. Both times he struck me as someone who really thought clearly about what he was doing politically, and expected those he worked with to do the same. Many years later, I was working in Baltimore with some Iranians to organize a meeting on solidarity with those fighting the dying monarchy there - and was delighted to find Jerry’s name as a union official from the DC area. We invited him to speak, and he didn’t hesitate to accept. And gave, as I remember it, a fine talk. He struck me then too as a stalwart fighter. I’m glad to have known and worked with him.

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FROM STEVE HAMILTON (WV Mountain Party)

Jerry you were truly a working class warrior. I had the distinct privilege of organizing with the Labor Party Advocates. I also organized with him against the Iraq Anti-war movement. He was an integral part of organizing the North East Ohio Anti-War coalition. His politics remained consistent the entire of time I knew him. I am sure he will be organizing the angels up in heaven. You are truly missed.

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FROM BILL ONASCH (Kansas City)

As best I can recollect, I first met Jerry through an introduction by his late mother-in-law Jean Tussey at a Midwest Socialist Educational Conference in Cleveland in the early Sixties. We would meet in person dozens of times over the next half-century +, later supplemented by long distance calls and e-mail about a wide range of projects of collaboration.

It didn’t take long for me to appreciate Jerry was sui generis—a truly unique leader and mentor for his time. He was a lawyer who explained that workers and the oppressed could expect little justice from American jurisprudence. He proved to be adept as a shop floor militant in a factory setting and later as a union staffer. He was persuasive in convincing white workers that it was in their interest to support Black liberation.

You will find numerous references to Jerry’s prominent role in the Vietnam antiwar movement in Fred Halstead’s comprehensive Out Now! He applied many of the lessons from that movement as he helped launch a mass movement against U.S. intervention in Central America in the 1980s. Unity efforts around the Afghanistan and Iraq wars had much more limited success—but Jerry was a good fit for the unprecedented US Labor Against the War.

While over the years Jerry usually identified himself as an independent, his world view was shaped by his understanding of Marxist theory and objectives that allowed him to see the big picture. He adhered to the legacy of great American socialists such as Eugene V Debs and James P Cannon who believed that as workers broke from the political monopoly of the bosses and bankers they would likely form a party on a foundation of their only class based mass organizations—their unions.

Jerry was one of the first to respond to Tony Mazzocchi’s Labor Party Advocates initiative and he urged me to do the same. It was no coincidence that, like so many important past antiwar conferences, the impressive Labor Party Founding Convention was held in Cleveland. Even after that once promising national effort faltered the Ohio State Labor Party kept the flame alive.

Jerry made clear to me that any positive achievements associated with him over what came to be the last 45 years of his life had to be shared with Bonnie—his partner in every sense of that term. They were as inseparable as their names in their AOL address. I greatly appreciate Bonnie’s written remembrance which revealed many facts new to me about this man I thought I knew well.

There will never be another just like Jerry Gordon. But he leaves a legacy of hundreds he helped train to be principled fighters for justice. I applaud those part of Jerry’s last big project—the Labor Fightback Network—for organizing this celebration of Jerry’s life and their commitment to providing a published tribute as well.

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FROM STEVE BLOOM (Brooklyn, N.Y.)

Sorry I will not be able to attend the memorial for Jerry Gordon on January 28. I remember my first contacts with Jerry as a young staff member of the Student Mobilization Committee to end the war in Vietnam when he was one of the national coordina-
tors of NPAC (the National Peace Action Coalition). His energy and commitment were an inspiration to us all. And we crossed paths many times over the years as both Jerry and I continued to work consistently against US wars abroad. He was a tireless fighter who will be missed by everyone who knew him.

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FROM HAL SUTTON (SW Florida, UAW Retired)
To the family of Jerry Gordon, What can never die has gone on to organize. Mourn. Organize.

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FROM PAUL KREHBIEL (Los Angeles)
So sorry to hear the sad news. Jerry’s contributions were immense. My condolences to family and friends.

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FROM VALERIE ROBINSON
Dear Bonnie, Stew and I are sorry about Jerry’s passing. We remember him well for his leading role in the anti-Vietnam war movement. Our sympathy goes out to you.

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PERSONAL NOTE FROM MARY NICHOLS-RHODES TO BONNIE
Dear Bonnie, Jerry was one of a kind, and was such a person of integrity! He frequently mentioned how much he loved and appreciation you. I am so glad you had each other. I am so sorry for your loss.

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FROM SYD STAPLETON
Hello Bonnie, I was sorry to hear the news about Jerry’s death. He was such an important figure in the antiwar movement, and I have so many memories of his fine, and often brave role. He was, in his own way, quite heroic. In the many years I knew and worked with him, he never backed down from something he believed was right.

I hope you are well. I’m sorry for your loss, and send my best wishes.

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FROM ANDREW POLLACK (Brooklyn, N.Y.)
I just heard. I’m so sorry. We’re all grateful for his contributions over the decades and will make sure they will remain a legacy that lives on.

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FROM TINA BEACOCK (Chicago)
Bonnie, So sorry for your loss. He was fierce, smart, courageous and principled. A working class fighter actually in the union - not easy in such a country. I met Jerry working on an antiwar march in the 80’s, and I’d known of his work for some years before. I wish I knew you better, to know what words would be a comfort, if any would. My condolences.

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FROM EDUARDO ROSARIO (Brooklyn, N.Y.)
Hello Bonnie: I was deeply saddened to receive the news from my brother Alan Benjamin on the passing of Jerry. He was a great brother and fighter for the labor movement and working class. I have had the privilege to know Jerry going back to our days of Labor Party Advocates and that’s close to 30-years ago. I will profoundly miss him. He was my brother and was a guiding light for many of us who were fortunate enough to know him and call him a friend. He shall be missed but never forgotten.

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FROM BARBARA GREGORICH
Hi Bonnie, We saw a post on Facebook, maybe 20 minutes ago, and were going to write. Thank you for telling us. I’m glad to know that Jerry died in this manner: a good way to go.

Even more glad to know that you’re basically fine. Our love and sympathy.

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FROM PHIL PASSEN & BARBARA GREGORICH
We met Jerry in the mid-sixties, during the movement against the war in Vietnam, and remained in contact with him throughout the years. We remember Jerry
as a passionate and uncompromising fighter against capitalism and the evils it spawns, and for a society based on human needs rather than profits. He was a tireless organizer on behalf of the working class and fought until the end of his life to build fighting working class organizations. He set a great example, and will be sorely missed.

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FROM LITA BLANC (San Francisco)

Dear Bonnie, I was so very sad to learn that Jerry died. As you can imagine, I knew him best through his deep friendship and decades of political collaboration with Alan. I know he was a principled and dedicated activist and leader who could be counted on to help find a path forward. He will be sorely missed.

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FROM JAN PIERCE

Dear Bonnie, Please know that I join the legions of follower’s and fans that share your grief in the loss of Gerry a genuine labor leader. Thank you so much for sharing this truly remarkable multi-faceted man with all of us. Be well sister.

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FROM VANN SEWELL

I just got this note just now. I am so sorry to hear of the loss of Jerry for all of us who knew him, worked with him and loved him. I will miss him very much but his spirit and influence will stay with us forever. I am at a loss at this point other than to give you my deepest condolences. Please let me know if and when there is a memoriam for him. Also let me know if there is anything I can do for you in this difficult time. In sympathy and love,

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FROM CATHERINE (PODOJIL)

Dear Bonnie, I was just thinking of you two recently and wondering how you were and how you were dealing with the election nonsense.

I had no idea Jerry was that old. He looked young to me every time I saw him. I’m so sorry, my friend. Take care of yourself.
made. Thank you for sharing him with us. We mourn with you, and hope you are surrounded by loving family and friends as you face this sad new part of your life.

Peace, solidarity and deepest sympathy -

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FROM BARRY SHEPPARD (Hayward, Calif.)

In the early 1970s, I functioned as the acting National Secretary of the SWP, when the party was in fact the organizational backbone of the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC) after there was a split in the previous national anti-Vietnam-war coalition. NPAC continued the positions held previously, that the anti-war movement was based on the principle of uniting all who were opposed to the war whatever their political differences on other matters, a mass action perspective oriented to winning over workers and soldiers, and political independence from the two capitalist parties. The CP and others rejected this perspective, resulting in the split.

Jerry Gordon was one of the leaders of the antiwar movement who agreed with this perspective and became founding leaders of NPAC. We in the SWP worked closely with Jerry. Once, I and the SWP organizer of our national antiwar work, flew to Cleveland to discuss with Jerry a minor tactical difference that had come up. We met at Jean Tussey’s house, and came to a common position through comradely discussion. The role he played in leading NPAC was exemplary and key.

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[Note: Some people sent cards, or they called called; some, among them may have also sent emails. They are: Don Bryant, Millie Phillips, Richard Saunders, David A. Pavlick, April Stoltz, Jim Outman, Betty Boyce, Ethel Pariso, Patricia Gough, Juanita Geter and Family, Marcia Gallo, Richard Gordon, Gary Gordon, Pamela and Matthew Granovetter, Barbara and Roy Jonas, Murray Gordon, Romayne and Neal Kaffen, Kristin and Eric Wilder, Rick and Angela Kaffen, Carmella Zingale, Harriet Applegate, Michael Carano, Mark Weber, Kim and Carl Allamby, Jerry Levinsky, Anna Natysin, and Carole Seligman.]

OSLP Forum in Parma, Ohio, on October 1, 2016 titled, “Inside or Outside the Two-Party System?” This was Jerry Gordon’s last public appearance.
Jerry Gordon Memorial Fund

To honor Jerry Gordon’s life and work, his friends and comrades have launched the Jerry Gordon Memorial Fund, to raise money to continue the project to which Jerry devoted the last years of his life -- the Labor Fightback Network.

The Jerry Gordon Memorial Fund’s initial goal is to raise $5,000, and we hope that many of you will contribute as much as you can to it. You can contribute online by going to: http://laborfightback.org/#paypal or you can mail a check, payable to Labor Fightback Conference, to:

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