

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Americas > USA > History (USA) > History of people's struggles (USA) > **Peter Camejo, 1939-2008 - To the end, he was still working to do the right thing**

Peter Camejo, 1939-2008 - To the end, he was still working to do the right thing

Monday 29 September 2008, by [ONASCH Bill](#) (Date first published: 16 September 2008).

Peter Camejo, one of the most prominent left leaders to emerge from the Sixties radicalization in the USA, lost a second bout with lymphoma Saturday, September 13. He was 68.

Camejo was born in to a wealthy Venezuelan family. His mother, Elvia, who had family and friend ties in the USA, and was concerned about health care in Venezuela at the time, chose to have Peter in a hospital in the Bronx. As a result Camejo began life as a dual citizen of the USA and Venezuela. Peter spent his earliest days in Venezuela. When Elvia divorced his father, Daniel, when Peter was seven, he relocated with his mother to the U.S. where he resided the rest of his life.

Peter was an exceptional student in high school and achieved a perfect SAT score in math. He went on to attend the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology for three years. But soon interest in the civil rights movement, and later radical politics, began to distract him from academic pursuits.

He became involved in the newly formed Young Socialist Alliance, an independent formation that evolved in to the youth group of the Socialist Workers Party. I first met Peter in 1963, when he came to Chicago to speak for the YSA. He was already well on his way to becoming, in my opinion, the best agitational speaker our generation produced.

He put these speaking skills at work in many venues. He became a well-known student leader at UC Berkeley—where he was enrolled from 1965 to his expulsion, ordered by Governor Ronald Reagan, in 1967 for “unauthorized use of a microphone.” Reagan listed him as one of the “ten most dangerous Californians.” The only evidence cited for this remarkable assertion was that he was “present at all antiwar demonstrations.”

The height of Camejo's speaking abilities was reached during his 1976 campaign as the SWP's presidential candidate. He traveled 150,000 miles, speaking at dozens of campaign events. He even managed to get the last word in on William F Buckley's television talk show. With no funds available for television or direct mail advertising, and only able to get on the ballot in eighteen states, Camejo racked up an impressive vote total of over 90,000.

Camejo also produced some serious writing, such as *Racism, Revolution, Reaction, 1861-1877: The Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction*; *Liberalism, Ultraleftism or Mass Action*; *Who Killed Jim Crow: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement and It's Lessons for Today*; and *How to Make a Revolution in the United States*.

Years later, after Peter applied his mathematical prowess as a stock broker, first with traditional Wall Street firms, later with his own enterprise, he wrote, *The SRI Advantage: Why Socially Responsible Investing Has Outperformed Financially*.

For reasons not clear to party members at the time, Camejo parted company from the central leadership of the SWP in 1980. He eventually became a leader in California's Green Party,

describing himself as a watermelon-green on the outside, red on the inside. He made three campaigns for Governor as a Green and in 2004 was Ralph Nader's vice-presidential pick.

I certainly had my differences with parts of Peter's evolution from socialist agitator to watermelon. But the contributions he made to building social movements and the socialist movement for decades are enduring and, to the end, he was still working to do the right thing. He will be missed. Our sympathy goes out to his family, friends, and comrades.

P.S.

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* Bill Onasch is a veteran of the US socialist movement, and an supporter of Labor Standard. He was previously active in the Socialist Workers Party and Fourth Internationalist Tendency. He is the author of 'Organizing for Socialism' and co-author of 'Hurricane Katrina: the Crime and Tragedy' and 'American elections and the issues facing working people'.