

# Caroline Lund (1944-2006)

Tuesday 24 October 2006, by [PERCY John](#) (Date first published: 25 October 2006).

**Caroline Lund, a lifelong fighter for socialism, workers' rights and women's liberation, died at her home in Oakland, California, on October 14, aged 62. She will be sorely missed by her friends and comrades in the US and around the world, especially her lifelong partner and comrade Barry Sheppard.**

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Caroline succumbed to the ravages of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS, sometimes called Lou Gehrig's disease — physicist Stephen Hawking being a long-term sufferer.) Caroline first noticed the symptoms in August last year, but doctors took some time to make the diagnosis. The rapid muscular degeneration would have been especially frustrating to her, an athletic person and a regular runner.

Caroline came from a conservative Lutheran family in the US mid-west, but was won to revolutionary socialist ideas in 1962 when she attended Carlton College — a small liberal arts college just south of Minneapolis. Carlton had a very active socialist discussion club, whose members would later become part of the central leadership of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the main Trotskyist grouping in the US at the time, including Jack Barnes, Elizabeth Stone, Mary-Alice Waters, Dan Styron, Doug Jenness and John Benson.

Caroline quickly became a leader of the SWP's youth organisation, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA). In 1965, she moved to New York where she met and married Barry Sheppard, one of the younger SWP leaders. From 1967 she often worked on staff for the SWP with a range of assignments — leading different campaigns, local organising, international work and writing for its weekly paper, the Militant.

In recent years, both Caroline and Barry have been strong supporters of Green Left Weekly and collaborators of the Democratic Socialist Perspective in Australia. But both Caroline and Barry played a special role in helping the development of the revolutionary Marxist current in Australia during the late 1960s and 1970s, as leaders at the time of the SWP and the international Trotskyist organisation, the Fourth International (FI).

Barry visited Sydney in July 1969 on behalf of the FI and the SWP to make contact with the fledgling movement here, the socialist youth organisation Resistance that had grown out of the campaign against the war in Vietnam and the youth radicalisation, and the Marxists who eventually formed the DSP.

## Minneapolis

One result of that trip was an invitation for a Resistance leader to attend the December 1969 YSA

convention in Minneapolis. I was selected to go, and that's where I first met Caroline. I was immediately impressed by her political sharpness.

Minneapolis had been the site of a major industrial struggle by the Teamsters Union in the 1930s, and a victory by the US Trotskyists, well told by Farrell Dobbs in his series of books, *Teamster Rebellion*, *Teamster Power*, *Teamster Politics & Teamster Bureaucracy*.

A leader of the 1934 strike, Dobbs was the SWP national secretary in 1969. Holding the convention in the former stronghold of the US Trotskyists registered the new rise of the movement during the campaign against the Vietnam War after the difficult years of the 1950s.

I was very impressed by both the YSA convention — an extremely exciting event attended by 800 revolutionary youth — and the SWP.

Caroline gave the report to the convention on a document titled "The Worldwide Youth Radicalisation and the Tasks of the Fourth International", debating a leader of the FI's French section.

From 1969, a fierce debate developed in the FI, initially over the question of FI majority's call for its supporters in Latin America to engage in a continental strategy of guerrilla warfare, but quickly extending to many other political issues.

Caroline and Barry were based in Brussels at that time, taking responsibility for the SWP's international work and working with the FI leadership. When they returned to the US, one of Caroline's assignments was on the staff of *The Militant*, and many of her articles, especially on issues of women's liberation, were republished as pamphlets, which we distributed in Australia.

I next met Caroline in 1974-75, when I went to New York to work on *Intercontinental Press*, the weekly news magazine published by the SWP for the FI and edited by Joe Hansen. In 1975 Caroline also joined the IP staff for a time. I got to know her much better, reinforcing my impression of her as a wonderful human being and political leader.

In 1977-80, Caroline and Barry again went to Europe to work with the FI leadership, this time to Paris. During much of this time, the DSP also assigned party leaders to work with the FI in Paris — first Jim Percy, then DSP national secretary, and Nita Keig, and later Doug Lorimer. Australian comrades worked closely with Barry and Caroline, being in the same faction in the FI.

The 1960s and early '70s was a period of great political advances for the SWP and YSA. The party had played a key leadership role in many political struggles, especially the mass movement against the Vietnam War, and had recruited many of the best of the radicalising youth to its ranks.

## **New generation**

In 1972, this new generation took over leadership of the SWP. Jack Barnes became the SWP national secretary, and Barry Sheppard became for many years the SWP's national organisational secretary. Caroline was elected to the SWP national committee.

This period of growth and political advance is described in the first volume of Barry's history of the SWP (*The Party — The Socialist Workers Party 1960-1988. Volume 1: The Sixties, A political memoir*. Resistance Books, 2005). The book was written with the editorial assistance of Caroline. Barry's introduction recognises his indebtedness to his comrade — "This book would have been impossible without her".

The second volume, which Barry is currently working on, will analyse a sadder period — the sectarian degeneration of the SWP.

At the end of the 1970s the SWP decided on a “turn to industry”, a push to get all its members into “blue-collar” jobs, in expectation that a sustained fight-back against the capitalists’ attack on working-class living standards would be led by “blue-collar” unionists, opening the way to a mass labour radicalisation.

Unfortunately that projection didn’t eventuate, but the SWP leadership persisted with the turn, “deepening” it, and increasingly losing touch with reality. The SWP’s and YSA’s political work became increasingly divorced from and hostile to the actual course of US radical politics — a sharp contrast to the exemplary united-front campaigns they led in the 1960s and early ‘70s. Critics of the sectarian course were increasingly denied their democratic rights within the party. In the early 1980s more SWP members were expelled than in the party’s entire previous history. Barry and Caroline were also pushed out, in 1988. They moved from the east to the west coast, settling in the San Francisco Bay Area where they could be near their old friend and comrade Malik Miah, who had been expelled from the SWP a few years earlier.

The DSP had broken off our relations with the SWP as we saw it degenerate, but renewed our collaboration with former SWP leaders as they were expelled or forced out — first with Peter Camejo, then with Barry, Caroline and Malik.

Those who had been expelled formed different organisations as they tried to pick up their political lives. Barry and Caroline have been involved in some of these — Solidarity, Socialist Action — and also formed an organisation with Malik for a while in the Bay Area, called Activists for Independent Socialist Politics.

Caroline had begun work at a General Motors plant in New York in 1980 as part of the SWP’s “turn to industry”, and for the rest of her life was an active union militant. In the 1980s she was an autoworker, a garment worker, an electrical worker, a telephone worker, an oil worker and a steel worker.

Union militant

In the Bay Area, she briefly worked at an oil refinery, then at the Toyota-GM New United Motor Manufacturing Inc. plant from 1992. At NUMMI, she was a production worker until early 2006, when she went on disability pension, due to her illness.

For the last eight years, Caroline produced a newsletter at NUMMI that was a model for rank-and-file union militants. Called the *Barking Dog*, it defended workers against the company’s abuses and criticised the United Auto Workers union bureaucrats when they did not.

Caroline believed in the ability of workers to run their own unions and workplaces. “The rank and file are very ignorant about what real unionism is because they’ve never seen it in action, like the old-timers in the 1930s and 40s. But in many ways the rank and file understand more than the union officials”, she argued, adding: “I don’t think most of the existing unions can be reformed. They are too steeped in the culture of ‘cooperation’ with the companies, where the leadership thinks of the union as a source of perks for themselves and their friends. New unions are going to have to arise, from the bottom up, out of the ashes of the old.”

Caroline was a *GLW* supporter, and a contributing editor of *Links* magazine. She attended the DSP December 2003 congress, writing a report that concluded: “Overall, the congress was very inspiring, full of energy, commitment and idealism. It reminded me so much of the US SWP in its good days of

the '60s and '70s." She also attended the Third Asia Pacific International Solidarity Conference in Sydney in March 2005.

Those who met her at these events will warmly remember this passionate, courageous comrade, and deeply mourn her death, but her lifelong commitment to her socialist principles and activity will continue to inspire us.

**[Memorial meetings for Caroline Lund are being organised in Oakland on Saturday November 11, at 2 pm at the Humanist Hall, and in New York on November 18 at 3pm at the Brecht Forum. Messages should be sent to "achis igc.org". Messages of condolence can be sent to Barry Sheppard at "lundshep comcast.net".]**

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\* From Green Left Weekly, October 25, 2006.