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**Basic biographical data**

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

**Biographical sketch**

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

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

Tom Kerry first turned radical during World War I when he joined the *Young People's Socialist League (YPSL)*, the youth arm of the *Socialist Party (SP)*. Like many other young American radicals, he was highly inspired by the Russian October revolution and their leaders Lenin and Trotsky. After Kerry had left the *SP* milieu, he remained unorganized for several years, before in view of the Great Depression, he was radicalised again. Remembering Trotsky's outstanding rôle in the Russian revolution and its aftermath, he was bewildered about the vitriolic attacks against Trotsky launched by the *Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA)* and by the *Communist International*. By reading Trotsky's autobiography *My Life*, Kerry became a close sympathizer of what was called Trotskyism or Bolshevism-Leninism. Thus he hesitated to join the ranks of the *CPUSA*. When living in San Francisco during the early 1930s, Kerry sometimes visited political meetings; outside a public gathering organized by the *CP*, he met some Trotskyists selling their weekly paper *The Militant* and began to discuss with them. Some weeks later Kerry and his partner Karolyn became members of the *Communist League of America (CLA)*, the organization of Trotsky's followers in the USA led by James P. Cannon, Max Shachtman and Martin Abern. Some months after Kerry had joined the ranks of the *CLA*, it fused with A.J. Muste's group to form the *Workers Party (WP)*. In the years to follow, Kerry – at the time a seaman in the San Francisco area – joined the *Sailors Union of the Pacific (SUP)* and became an extraordinarily

1) Mandel, Ernest: Tom Kerry, faithful to the end, faithful to the future, in: *International Viewpoint*, 1983 (24), p. 25.

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

On January 1, 1938, a new organization of the American Trotskyists was founded, the *Socialist Workers Party (SWP)*. Tom Kerry was elected a member of its *National Committee*, a position he held for several decades. From the end of the 1930s to the early 1950s, Kerry took responsibility for the *SWP* influence in the maritime unions. Furthermore, in 1938 Lundeberg appointed him as international representative (general organizer) of the *Seafarers International Union (SIU)*. Kerry took also responsibility for editing the *Seafarers Log*, *SIU's* newly established paper. After the Second World War, Kerry joined the renamed *National Maritime Union (NMU)* and continued to work there on behalf of the *SWP* until being witch-hunted during the McCarthy years. "Kerry was the revolutionary trade union leader incarnate"<sup>2</sup>.

After the outbreak of World War II, Kerry went to New York City where he took on party work at the *SWP* headquarters. When in 1944 James P. Cannon and parts of the central party leadership had to go to prison<sup>3</sup>, Kerry became part of the substitute national leadership (until 1945). In 1953, Kerry was sent by the party to Los Angeles in order to reorganize the LA branch of the *SWP*. In 1955, he was elected a member of the party's *Political Committee*.

When James P. Cannon (1890-1974), founder of American Trotskyism and long-time leader of the *SWP*, decided in 1953 to retire from party leadership, he was succeeded in the function as *National Secretary* by Farrell Dobbs, noted trade union activist and for several times *SWP* presidential candidate, who held the post until 1972. When Farrell Dobbs visited Los Angeles on one of his national tours, he persuaded Tom Kerry to come back to the New York *SWP* headquarters. The 16 years to follow marked a highlight in Kerry's political career. From 1956 to 1972, Farrell Dobbs and Tom Kerry – the latter officially being called *Organizational Secretary* – formed the central leadership team of the party. The practical day-to-day work was effectively divided between the two men who did their best to lead the party, to secure the survival of the organization and to keep the core of its cadres intact in a time of political reaction, McCarthyite persecution, declining class struggles, a considerable loss of members and breaking away of some factional caucuses. When both Kerry and Dobbs retired from their leading functions in 1972, the *SWP* had re-gained some influence and recruited a considerable number of younger militants in the wake of the student revolt and of the nation-wide resistance against the U.S. war against Vietnam.

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

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

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

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2) Stone, Ben: *Memoirs of a rank & filer*, New York, NY, 1986, p. 119.

3) 18 prominent *SWP* leaders and teamster union activists were tried, convicted and given sentences from 12 to 18 months in 1941 under the *Smith Act* in the famous '*Minneapolis sedition trial*'; after the sentences were upheld on appeal in 1943, they were sent to jail in 1944.

*Selective bibliography*<sup>4</sup>

- **Selective bibliography: Books/pamphlets (co-)authored by Kerry**

- The anatomy of Stalinism. - New York, NY : Nat. Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party, 1972. - 16 pp. - (Education for socialists) ["For members only". - Also publ. in Spanish]
- Class, party, and state and the Eastern European revolution / Joseph Hansen ; Tom Kerry. - New York, NY : Nat. Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party, 1969. - 61 pp. - (Education for socialists) [Repr. of articles from 1949-51 and 1963] [& later ed.]
- Class struggle policy in the rise of the labor movement. - New York, NY : Nat. Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party, 1976. - 22 pp. - (Education for socialists)
- Labor party and Freedom Now party : an answer to the New York Times. - New York, NY : Pioneer Publ., 1963. - 12 pp.
- The Mao myth and the legacy of Stalinism in China / Tom Kerry. - New York, NY : Pathfinder Pr., 1977. - 190 pp. (A Marxist studies book)
- Three contributions on postwar developments / Cliff Conner ; Les Evans ; Tom Kerry / issued by the National Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party. - New York, NY, 1973. - 24 pp. - (Towards a history of the Fourth International ; 1) (Education for socialists)
- Workers, bosses and bureaucrats : a socialist view of labor struggles since the 1930s / Tom Kerry. - New York, NY : Pathfinder Pr., 1980. - 285 pp.

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

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

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

- Aspects of socialist election policy. - New York, NY : Nat. Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party, 1971. - 88 pp. - (Education for socialists)
- Bulletin in Defense of Marxism (New York, NY) <TSB 0219>
- Cahiers Léon Trotsky (Paris, later: Grenoble; later: Saint Martin d'Hères) [ISSN 0181-0790] <TSB 0277>
- Cahiers rouges : la revue du trotskisme (Paris) <TSB 0283>
- The Chinese revolution and its development. - New York, NY : Nat. Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party, 1969. - 47 pp. - (Education for socialists)
- Fourth International (New York, NY, 1940-56) <TSB 0532>
- In Defense of Marxism (New York, NY) <TSB 0616>
- Information Bulletin / Socialist Action (San Francisco, Cal.) <TSB 1493>
- International Socialist Review (New York, NY) [ISSN 0020-8744] <TSB 0715>
- James P. Cannon : a political tribute ; including five interviews from the last year of his life. - New York, NY : Pathfinder Pr., 1974. - 46 pp. [Speeches and obituaries by J. Hansen, J. Barnes, T. Kerry, A. Pulley et al., reprinted from various sources, plus some interviews with and speeches by J.P. Cannon]
- James P. Cannon as we knew him : by thirty-three comrades, friends, and relatives / introd. by Jack Barnes. Ed. by Les Evans. - New York, NY : Pathfinder Pr., 1976. - 288 pp. [Collection of obituaries, reminiscences and appraisals]
- Revolutionary strategy in the fight against the Vietnam war. - New York, NY : Nat. Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party, 1975. - 94 pp. - (Education for socialists)
- Socialist Action (San Francisco) [ISSN 0747-4237] <TSB 1489>
- The struggle inside the Socialist Workers Party 1979-1983 / ed. by Sarah Lovell. - New York, NY : Fourth Internationalist Tendency, 1992. - 329 pp. - (In defense of American Trotskyism)
- The struggle to reunify the Fourth International : (1954 - 1963) / National Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party. - 1-4. - New York, NY, 1977-78. - [Various pag.] - (Towards a history of the Fourth International ;

4) TSB item numbers (e.g. <TSB 0716>) refer to Lubitz' *Trotskyist Serials Bibliography*, München [etc.] : Saur, 1993, which is out of print but [available as PDF file](#) within the framework of the *Lubitz' TrotskyanaNet* website. In TSB you can find detailed descriptions of the respective Trotskyist journals, newsletters, bulletins and the like.

[7]) (Education for socialists)  
 SWP Discussion Bulletin (New York, NY) <TSB 1684>  
 United front vs. people's front. - (Enl. ed.) - New York, NY : National Education Dept., Socialist Workers Party, 1972. - 30 pp. - (Education for socialists) [Orig. ed. publ. in the same year]  
 What is wrong with the Peace and Freedom Party : a socialist view. - New York, NY : Socialist Workers 1968 National Campaign Committee, 1968. - 12 pp.

- **Selective bibliography: Books and articles about Kerry**

[Anonymous]: [Obituary], in: *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* <TSB 0277>, 1983 (13), pp. 127-128  
 [Anonymous]: [Obituary], in: *Inprecor : [French edition]* <TSB 0647>, 1983 (142), p. 26  
 Mandel, Ernest: [Obituary] Zum Tod von Tom Kerry, in: *Inprekorr : internationale Pressekorrespondenz der IV. Internationale* <TSB 0654>, 1983 (152), p. 22  
 Mandel, Ernest: [Obituary] Tom Kerry, faithful to the end, faithful to the future, in: *International Viewpoint* <TSB 0726>, 1983 (24), p. 25  
 Stone, Ben: [Biographical sketch], in: *Stone, Ben: Memoirs of a radical rank & filer*, New York, NY, 1986, pp. 116-119  
 Waters, Mary-Alice: [Obituary] Tom Kerry : proletarian fighter, in: *The Militant* <TSB 1026>, 1983 (Jan. 28), p. 13

- **Selective bibliography: Books dedicated to Kerry**

Trotsky, Leon: *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1932 - 33* / ed. by George Breitman and Sarah Lovell. - New York, NY : Pathfinder Pr., 1972. - 365 pp. [& later ed.]  
 Wohlforth, Tim: *The prophet's children : travels on the American Left* / Tim Wohlforth. - Atlantic Highlands, NJ : Humanities Pr., 1994. - XVIII, 332 pp. - (Historical memories)

**Note:** More informations about Tom Kerry are likely to be found in some of the books, pamphlets, university works and articles listed in the relevant chapter(s) of the *Lubitz' Leon Trotsky Bibliography [ISSN 2190-0183]*, e.g. in chapter [7.5.18](#).

### **Note on archives**

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

*Note: Photograph on page 1 taken from: Trotskyism in the United States / George Breitman [et al.], Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1996. © 1996 by Della Rossa.*

Wolfgang and Petra Lubitz,  
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