

100 years since the birth of Jean Brust, Trotskyist and fighter for the working class

30 August 2021

To mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Jean Brust, the WSWS has published an exhibit featuring essays on her life and political significance.

August 31, 2021 marks 100 years since the birth of Jean Brust, a leading figure in the Trotskyist movement whose legacy lives on in the work of the US Socialist Equality Party and the entire International Committee of the Fourth International. Today's new generation of workers and youth joining the Trotskyist movement can learn from Jean's enormous confidence in the revolutionary role of the working class.

Comrade Jean, who died November 24, 1997 at the age of 76, joined the Trotskyist-led Young People's Socialist League as a teenager in 1937. Alongside her lifelong partner, Bill Brust, Jean fought for the cause of international socialism for the next 60 years.

What characterized her political work was a profound conviction in the ability of the Marxist movement to find a path to the masses of working people, and the ability of the working class, educated and led by the party, to build a new, truly humane society.

This sentiment was rooted in great historical experiences, including the work of the Trotskyist movement in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Jean was a teenager in the Twin Cities when the Trotskyists led the union organization drive among local trucking company workers that culminated in the 1934 Minneapolis General Strike, one of the critical struggles that laid the basis for the sit-down strikes and formation of the mass industrial unions. Later, Jean herself played a significant role in the strike wave of 1945-48 as a young worker in the meatpacking plants.

Central to her political understanding was the revolutionary perspective that had led to the October Revolution in Russia and that was fought for by Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition. There were many socialist groups in the 1930s, but Jean joined the

Trotskyists. She was an early member of the US Socialist Workers Party, the party formed in the closest collaboration with Trotsky in the years before he became the victim of a Stalinist assassin in 1940.

When the SWP repudiated Trotskyism in the early 1960s, Jean and her husband Bill Brust would not accept this betrayal and joined with an opposition inside the party that was loyal to the International Committee. Jean went on to become a founding member of the Workers League, the predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party, and was part of the leadership of the American and world Trotskyist movement until she died.

An active participant in the struggle in the early and mid-1980s to defend Trotskyism against the decay and degeneration of its British section, the Workers Revolutionary Party, Jean then witnessed the vindication of Trotskyism's analysis and long struggle against the counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism. At the same time, Jean treated the "capitalist triumphalism" that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union with the contempt it deserved. She understood that a new period of revolutionary struggle was inevitable and that the party must prepare for it. Jean Brust's political struggle and contributions are incorporated in the WSWS and the SEP today.

For those who are repelled by the crimes of capitalism: the horrific wave of needless deaths from the coronavirus pandemic, the growth of poverty and inequality, and the threat of dictatorship, fascism and war, Jean's life has enormous relevance. It demonstrates both the power of Marxism and what is finest in the revolutionary traditions of the working class.

The WSWS has collected a number of essays on the life and political work of Jean Brust. We invite you to see the exhibit: "100 years since the birth of Jean Brust

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