

David McReynolds

(edited from a short biography written by Bruce Cronin)

David is a long-time political activist and organizer in the peace, social justice, and democratic socialist movements. He was born in Los Angeles in 1929.

He came to New York at the invitation of the editors of radical publication, *Liberation magazine*, a radical pacifist journal, and from 1957 – 1960 he served as its editorial secretary. During this period he began to work closely with Bayard Rustin and A.J. Muste, an association that would greatly influence his approach to politics and social change. He also developed close working relationships with the other editors – each a respected figure in the radical pacifist movement – Dave Dellinger, Roy Finch, and Sid Lens.

In 1960 he was hired by the War Resisters League to serve as its Field Secretary responsible for outreach to young people. In 1960 and 1961 he turned the small symbolic protests against Civil Defense (led by Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker) into the first acts of mass civil disobedience in the North. Hundreds refused to take shelter, and many, including David, were arrested. He remained Field Secretary until 1965, when Bayard Rustin left the staff of WRL, and David and Ralph Digia became co-secretaries. Soon, as younger staff came on, all titles were abolished and David simply remained on staff until his retirement in 1999. During this time, he also served on the Council of the War Resister's International for ten years, and was elected as its chair for a two-year term from 1986-1988.

Throughout the period of the Vietnam War, David was active in virtually every national committee working to bring an end to the conflict. In addition to his central role in building large coalitions to oppose the war, he also worked to ensure that the large demonstrations he was so key in helping to organize did not become violent. In 1964 he, along with A.J. Muste, wrote the first definitive analysis calling for unconditional U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. In addition to his organizing and coalition-building work in the U.S., his leadership in the anti-war movement took him to several continents. He visited Saigon in 1966 with his friend Peggy Duff to meet with dissident Buddhist leaders. Later that year he traveled throughout Europe organizing opposition to the war. He returned to Vietnam in 1971 and again in 1981.

After the Vietnam War ended, David continued to challenge the militarism and paranoia that characterized the Cold War. From the mid-1970s through the late 1980s David became a leader in the nuclear disarmament movement, stubbornly advocating the more radical abolitionist position when much of the U.S. peace movement was focused on the moderate nuclear weapons freeze campaign. Throughout this period, and into the twenty first century, he worked closely with Peggy Duff of the International Confederation for Disarmament and Peace, and with all wings of the Japanese movement, to help build an international movement that refused to align with either major power bloc. This helped pave the way for the enormously important development of the European Nuclear Disarmament movement led by Edward Thompson. Throughout this period David fought to a peace movement independent of, and opposed to the political control of, either Washington or Moscow. He sought peaceful alternatives, and at various times engaged in direct dialogue with both Soviet and American authorities. He was part

of a delegation of the Fellowship of Reconciliation to Moscow in 1987 to look at the developing situation.

He also wrote extensively and helped organized protests against post-Cold War conflicts, including the NATO air strikes against Serbia, the US conflict in Afghanistan, and the airstrikes, embargoes and ultimately the invasion and occupation of Iraq. David had been a member of the American delegation from the Fellowship of Reconciliation which visited Iraq after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait but before "Desert Storm". A year earlier he was a member of an FOR team that visited Libya, again seeking to open doors for dialogue.

David has also been active in electoral politics, working to bring a radical voice to the mainstream. He first ran for Congress on the Socialist Party of America ticket in 1958. Ten years later he ran for Congress on the Peace and Freedom ticket, winning 5% of the vote. In 1980 and 2000, stood as the Socialist Party's candidate for President of the U.S., and in doing so become the first openly gay candidate to run for that office. In 2004 he accepted the Green Party nomination for Senate, running an anti-war campaign against New York Democratic incumbent Chuck Schumer. During that election, he won nearly 40,000 votes.

David's most important contributions to the peace and social justice movements lie in his booming oratory, powerful writing style, sharp analytical mind, and tireless skill at coalition building and organizing. In addition to the hundreds of speeches, media interviews, and panel presentations he has made over the past sixty years, he has written countless articles and monographs for a wide variety of publications. His most important contribution to political theory and leftwing politics lies in his distinctive blend of pacifism, humanism, anti-authoritarianism, and socialism. In 1970 he published his classic book, *We Have Been Invaded by the Twenty-First Century*, a collection of essays providing an insightful analysis of U.S. and global politics during the turbulent decades of the 1950 and 1960s. His widely-read pamphlet, *The Philosophy of Nonviolence*, has become one of the definitive works on pacifism in the late twentieth century.

David has also been very active in the U.S. Socialist Party, serving two terms as its co-Chair. Despite holding strong views on politics, activists recognize David as one who constantly seeks to find common ground among the disparate groups that make coalition-building a challenge – even when dealing with those whose ideologies he questions. He also never allowed his strong criticism of U.S. foreign policy to translate into uncritical support for the victims of U.S. intervention. For example, although he actively challenged U.S. military actions and economic sanctions against Iraq throughout the 1990s (culminating in the 2003 invasion), he publicly criticized Saddam Hussain as a tyrant. He has also been steadfast in his refusal to support the authoritarian policies of foreign governments, even as he stood in solidarity with their desire to avoid U.S. interference in their internal affairs.

Although David had never hidden his homosexuality, neither had he made any public statements about it and was not directly involved in the gay liberation movement. He one major - and important - contribution was his article in WIN magazine (published by War Resisters League) in 1969, a "gay liberation issue" with pieces also by Paul Goodman, and by Allen Ginsberg (a friend of David's). Except for Allen Ginsberg, who had led the way, David's article was the first

time a public figure had written openly about his own homosexuality. (He wrote about it again, but much later, in an article called "Queer Reflections" in *New Politics* magazine, volume XII, no 1, 2008.

David serves on the board of the A. J. Muste Memorial Institute and the board of the Cooper Square Mutual Housing Association, and on the board of the New York Bromeliad Society.

He lives in the East Village of New York with his two Siamese cats, Shaman and Peggy Solomon.