

= Tom Kahn =

Tom David Kahn (September 15 , 1938 ? March 27 , 1992) was an American social democrat known for his leadership in several organizations . He was an activist and influential strategist in the Civil Rights Movement . He was a senior adviser and leader in the U.S. labor movement .

Kahn was raised in New York City . At Brooklyn College , he joined the U.S. socialist movement , where he was influenced by Max Shachtman and Michael Harrington . As an assistant to civil rights leader Bayard Rustin , Kahn helped to organize the 1963 March on Washington , during which Martin Luther King delivered his " I Have a Dream " speech . Kahn 's analysis of the civil rights movement influenced Bayard Rustin (who was the nominal author of Kahn 's " From Protest to Politics ") .

A leader in the Socialist Party of America , Kahn supported its 1972 name change to Social Democrats , USA (SDUSA) . Like other leaders of SDUSA , Kahn worked to support free labor @-@ unions and democracy and to oppose Soviet communism ; he also worked to strengthen U.S. labor unions . Kahn worked as a senior assistant to and speechwriter for Democratic Senator Henry " Scoop " Jackson , AFL ? CIO Presidents George Meany and Lane Kirkland , and other leaders of the Democratic Party , labor unions , and civil @-@ rights organizations .

In 1980 Lane Kirkland appointed Kahn to organize the AFL ? CIO 's support for the Polish labor @-@ union Solidarity ; this support was made despite protests by the USSR and the Carter administration . He acted as the Director of the AFL ? CIO 's Department of International Affairs in 1986 and was officially named Director in 1989 . Kahn died in 1992 , at the age of 53 .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

Kahn was born Thomas John Marcel on September 15 , 1938 , and was immediately placed for adoption at the New York Foundling Hospital . He was adopted by Adele and David Kahn , and renamed Thomas David Kahn . His father , a member of the Communist Party USA , became President of the Transport Workers Local 101 of the Brooklyn Union Gas Company .

Tom Kahn was a civil libertarian who " ran for president of the Student Organization of Erasmus Hall High School in 1955 on a platform calling for the destruction of the student assembly , because it had no power " , an election he lost . In high school , he met Rachelle Horowitz , who would become his lifelong friend and political ally .

= = = Democratic socialism = = =

At Brooklyn College (CUNY) , the undergraduate students Kahn and Horowitz joined the U.S. movement for democratic socialism after hearing Max Shachtman denounce the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary : Shachtman described

rolling Russian tanks ... defenceless Hungarian workers and students fighting back with stones ... a heroic people ? s crushed hopes , and ... our democratic socialist links to those hopes . Freedom , democracy ? they were not abstractions ; they were real and could therefore be destroyed . Communist totalitarianism was not merely a political force , an ideological aberration that could be smashed in debate ; it was a monstrous physical force . Democracy was not merely the icing on the socialist cake . It was the cake ? or there was no socialism worth fighting for .

As young socialists , Kahn 's and Horowitz 's talents were recognized by Michael Harrington . Harrington had joined Shachtman after working with Dorothy Day 's Catholic Worker 's house of hospitality in the Bowery of Lower Manhattan . Harrington was about to become famous in the United States for his book on poverty in the United States , *The Other America* . Kahn idolized Harrington , particularly for his erudition and rhetoric , both in writing and in debate .

= = = Civil rights = = =

As a leader of the American socialist movement , Michael Harrington sent Tom Kahn and Rachelle Horowitz to help Bayard Rustin , one of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement , who became a mentor to Kahn . Kahn and Horowitz were affectionately called the " Bayard Rustin Marching and Chowder Society " by Harrington . Kahn helped Rustin organize the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington and the 1958 and 1959 Youth March for Integrated Schools .

= = = Homosexuality and Bayard Rustin = = =

As a young man , Tom Kahn " was gay but wanted to be straight ... It was a different world then " , according to Rachelle Horowitz . He had a short relationship with a member of the Young People 's Socialist League (YPSL) :

Although everyone active in the movement was aware of it , [before 1956] he was never explicitly out of the closet . He took his sexual orientation as an affliction , a source of pain and embarrassment . In part , perhaps , because he was so unreconciled to his longings , he limited himself for a long time to brief encounters . But then he became involved with one of the YPSL ' s and was compelled to seek the counsel of a psychiatrist to explain his unfamiliar feelings . The diagnosis , he told me , was ? you ? re in love . ?

Tom Kahn was " very good looking , a very attractive guy " according to longtime socialist David McReynolds , who is also an openly gay New Yorker . Kahn accepted his homosexuality in 1956 , the year that Kahn and Horowitz volunteered to help Bayard Rustin with his work in the civil @-@ rights movement . " Once he met Bayard [Rustin] , then Kahn knew that he was gay and had this long @-@ term relationship with Bayard , which went through many stages " , according to Horowitz , who quoted Kahn 's remembrance of Rustin :

When I met him for the first time he was a few years younger than I am now , and I was barely on the edge of manhood . He drew me into a vortex of his endless campaigns and projects ... He introduced me to Bach and Brahms , and to the importance of maintaining a balance in life between the pursuit of our individual pleasures and engagements in , and responsibility for , the social condition . He believed that no class , caste or genre of people were exempt from this obligation .

However , cohabiting in Rustin 's apartment proved unsuccessful , and their romantic relationship ended when Kahn enrolled in the historically black Howard University . Kahn and Rustin remained lifelong friends and political comrades .

= = = Howard University = = =

Kahn , a white student , enrolled for his junior and senior years at Howard University , where he became a leader in student politics . Kahn worked closely with Stokely Carmichael , who later became a national leader of young civil @-@ rights activists and then one of the leaders of the Black Power movement . Kahn and Carmichael helped to fund a five @-@ day run of Three Penny Opera , by the Marxist playwright Berthold Brecht and the socialist composer Kurt Weill : " Tom Kahn ? very shrewdly ? had captured the position of Treasurer of the Liberal Arts Student Council and the infinitely charismatic and popular Carmichael as floor whip was good at lining up the votes . Before they knew what hit them the Student Council had become a patron of the arts , having voted to buy out the remaining performances . " Kahn and Carmichael worked with Howard University 's chapter of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) . Kahn introduced Carmichael and his fellow SNCC activists to Bayard Rustin , who became an influential adviser to SNCC . Kahn and Rustin 's emphasis on economic inequality influenced Carmichael . Kahn graduated from Howard in 1961 .

= = = Leadership = = =

Kahn (along with Horowitz and Norman Hill) helped Rustin and A. Philip Randolph to plan the

1963 March on Washington , at which Martin Luther King , Jr. delivered his " I have a dream " speech . For this march , Kahn also ghost wrote the speech of A. Philip Randolph , the senior leader of the civil @-@ rights movement and the African @-@ American labor movement . Kahn 's analysis of the civil @-@ rights movement influenced Bayard Rustin (who was the nominal author of Kahn 's 1964 ? 1965 essay " From protest to politics ") , Stokely Carmichael , and William Julius Wilson .

= = = League for Industrial Democracy = = =

Kahn was Director of the League for Industrial Democracy after 1964 . Beginning in 1960 , he wrote several LID pamphlets , many of which were published in political journals like Dissent and Commentary , and some of which appeared in anthologies . Kahn 's The Economics of Equality LID pamphlet gave an " incisive radical analysis of what it would take to end racial oppression " .

= = = Student League for Industrial Democracy : Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) = = =
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Before Kahn became LID director in 1964 , he was involved with the Student League for Industrial Democracy , which became Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) . Along with other LID members Rachelle Horowitz , Michael Harrington , and Don Slaiman , Kahn attended the LID @-@ sponsored meeting that discussed the Port Huron Statement . Kahn was listed as a student representative from Howard University and was elected to the National Executive Committee . The LID representatives criticized the Port Huron Statement for promoting students as leaders of social change , for criticizing the U.S. labor movement and its unions , and for its criticisms of liberal and socialist opposition to Soviet communism (" anti @-@ communism ") . Kahn believed that the SDS students were " elitist " , being overly critical of labor unions and liberals , and attributed upper @-@ class origins and Ivy @-@ league schooling to them , according to Port @-@ Huron activist Todd Gitlin , who observes that Kahn was the son of a " manual laborer " .

LID and SDS split in 1965 , when SDS voted to remove from its constitution the " exclusion clause " that prohibited membership by communists , against Kahn 's arguments . The SDS exclusion clause had barred " advocates of or apologists for " " totalitarianism " . The clause 's removal effectively invited " disciplined cadre " to attempt to " take over or paralyze " SDS , as had occurred to mass organizations in the thirties . Afterward , Marxism Leninism , particularly the Progressive Labor Party , helped to write " the death sentence " for SDS . Nonetheless Kahn continued to argue with SDS leaders about the need for accountable leadership , about tactics , and about strategy . In 1966 , Kahn attended the Illinois Convention of SDS , where his forceful arguments and delivery overwhelmed and were resented by the other activists ; Kahn was then 28 years old .

Kahn 's determined style of debate emerged from the socialist movement led by Max Shachtman . Kahn expressed his admiration for Shachtman 's intellectual toughness in his 1973 memorial : " His answers , of course , could not always be correct . But they were on target and always fundamental . "

= = = Social Democrats , USA = = =

Kahn and Horowitz were leaders in the Socialist Party USA , and supported its change of name to Social Democrats , USA (SDUSA) , despite Harrington 's opposition . Ben Wattenberg commented that SDUSA members seemed to be

... ingeniously trying to bury the Soviet Union in a blizzard of letterheads . It seemed that each of Tom 's colleagues ? Penn Kemble , Carl Gershman , Josh Muravchik and many more ? ran a little organization , each with the same interlocking directorate listed on the stationery . Funny thing : The Letterhead Lieutenants did indeed churn up a blizzard , and the Soviet Union is no more .

I never did quite get all the organizational acronyms straight ? YPSL , LID , SP , SDA , ISL ? but the key words were " democratic " , " labor " , " young " and , until events redefined it away from their understanding , " socialist " . Ultimately , the umbrella group became " Social Democrats , U.S.A " ,

and Tom Kahn was a principal " theoretician .

They talked and wrote endlessly , mostly about communism and democracy , despising the former , adoring the latter . It is easy today to say " anti @-@ communist " and " pro @-@ democracy " in the same breath . But that is because American foreign policy eventually became just such a mixture , thanks in part to those " Yipsels " (Young People 's Socialist League) , with Tom Kahn as provocateur @-@ at @-@ large .

On the conservative side , foreign policy used to be anti @-@ communist , but not very pro @-@ democracy . And foreign policy liberal @-@ style might be piously pro @-@ democracy , but nervous about being anti @-@ communist . Tom theorized that to be either , you had to be both .

It was tough for labor @-@ liberal intellectuals to be " anti @-@ communist " in the 1970s . It meant being taunted as " Cold Warriors " who saw " Commies under every bed " and being labeled as ? the unkindest cut ? " right @-@ wingers " .

Kahn worked as a senior assistant and speechwriter for Senator Henry " Scoop " Jackson , AFL ? CIO Presidents George Meany and Lane Kirkland , and other leaders of the Democratic Party , labor unions , and civil rights organizations . He was an effective speechwriter because he was able to express ideas to an American audience , according to Wattenberg .

= = = Estrangement with Harrington = = =

Another protégé of Shachtman 's , Michael Harrington , called for an immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam in 1972 . His proposal was rejected by the majority , who criticized the war 's conduct and called for a negotiated peace treaty , the position associated with Shachtman and Kahn . Harrington resigned his honorary chairmanship of the Socialist Party and organized a caucus for like @-@ minded socialists . The conflict between Kahn and Harrington became " pretty bad " , according to Irving Howe .

Harrington handed former SDS activist and New York City journalist Jack Newfield a speech by AFL ? CIO President George Meany . Addressing the September 1972 Convention of the United Steelworkers of America , Meany ridiculed the Democratic Party Convention , which had been held in Miami :

We heard from the gay @-@ lib [gay @-@ liberation] people who want to legalize marriage between boys and boys , and between girls and girls ... We heard from the people who looked like Jacks , acted like Jills , and had the odor of Johns [customers of prostitutes] about them .

This gay @-@ baiting taunt was attributed to Kahn by Harrington , and repeated by Newfield in his autobiography . Maurice Isserman 's biography of Harrington also described this speech as Kahn 's self hatred , as " Kahn 's resort to gay bashing " .

The blaming of Kahn for Meany 's speech and Isserman 's scholarship have been criticized by Rachele Horowitz , Kahn 's friend , and by Joshua Muravchik , then an officer of the Young People 's Socialist League (1907) . According to Horowitz , Meany had many speechwriters ? two specialists besides Kahn and even more writers from the AFL ? CIO 's Committee on Political Education (COPE) Department . Horowitz stated , " It is in fact inconceivable that Kahn wrote those words . " She quoted a concurring assessment from Arch Puddington : [Isserman] " assumes that because Kahn was not publicly gay he had to be a gay basher . He never was . " According to Muravchik , " there is no reason to believe that Kahn wrote those lines , and Isserman presents none . "

Harrington failed to support an anti @-@ discrimination (gay rights) plank in the 1978 platform of the Democratic Party Convention , but noted his personal support after being criticized in The Nation . Along with others in the AFL ? CIO and SDUSA , Kahn was accused of criticizing Harrington 's application for his Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee to join the Socialist International and to organize a 1983 conference on European socialism ; Harrington complained for six pages in his autobiography The Long Distance Runner , and " brooded " about Kahn 's opposition , exaggerating the importance of the Socialist International to America , according to Isserman 's biography . In 1991 , even after Harrington 's 1989 death , Howe warned Harrington 's biographer , Maurice Isserman , that Kahn 's description of Harrington " may well be a little nasty " and " hard line " .

= = = AFL ? CIO support for free trade @-@ unions = = =

After becoming an assistant to the President of the AFL ? CIO in 1972 , a position he held until 1986 , Kahn developed an expertise in international affairs . In 1980 AFL ? CIO officer Lane Kirkland appointed Kahn to organize the AFL ? CIO 's support for the Polish labor @-@ union Solidarity , which was maintained and indeed increased even after protests by the USSR and Carter administration .

= = = Support of Solidarity , the Polish union = = =

Kahn was heavily involved in supporting the Polish labor @-@ movement . The trade union Solidarity (Solidarno??) began in 1980 . The Soviet @-@ backed Communist regime headed by General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law in December 1981 .

In 1980 AFL ? CIO President Lane Kirkland appointed Kahn to organize the AFL ? CIO 's support of Solidarity . The AFL ? CIO sought approval in advance from Solidarity 's leadership , to avoid jeopardizing their position with unwanted or surprising American help . Politically , the AFL ? CIO supported the twenty @-@ one demands of the Gdansk workers , by lobbying to stop further U.S. loans to Poland unless those demands were met . Materially , the AFL ? CIO established the Polish Workers Aid Fund . By 1981 it had raised almost \$ 300 @,@ 000 , which was used to purchase printing presses and office supplies . The AFL ? CIO donated typewriters , duplicating machines , a minibus , an offset press , and other supplies requested by Solidarity .

It is up to Solidarity ... to define the aid they need . Solidarity made its needs known , with courage , with clarity , and publicly . As you know , the AFL ? CIO responded by establishing a fund for the purchase of equipment requested by Solidarity and we have raised about a quarter of a million dollars for that fund .

This effort has elicited from the Soviet Union , Czechoslovakia , East Germany , and Bulgaria the most massive and vicious propaganda assault ... in many , many years . The ominous tone of the most recent attacks leaves no doubt that if the Soviet Union invades , it shall cite the aid of the AFL ? CIO as evidence of outside anti @-@ Socialist intervention .

All this is by way of introducing the AFL ? CIO ? s position on economic aid to Poland . In formulating this position , our first concern was to consult our friends in Solidarity ... and their views are reflected in the statement unanimously adopted by the AFL ? CIO Executive Council :

The AFL ? CIO will support additional aid to Poland only if it is conditioned on the adherence of the Polish government to the 21 points of the Gdansk Agreement . Only then could we be assured that the Polish workers will be in a position to defend their gains and to struggle for a fair share of the benefits of Western aid .

In testimony to the Joint Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe , Kahn suggested policies to support the Polish people , in particular by supporting Solidarity 's demand that the Communist regime finally establish legality , by respecting the twenty @-@ one rights guaranteed by the Polish constitution .

The AFL ? CIO 's support enraged the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union , and worried the Carter Administration , whose Secretary of State Edmund Muskie told Kirkland that the AFL ? CIO 's continued support of Solidarity could trigger a Soviet invasion of Poland . After Kirkland refused to withdraw support to Solidarity , Muskie met with the USSR 's Ambassador , Anatoly Dobrynin , to clarify that the AFL ? CIO 's aid did not have the support of the U.S. government . Aid to Solidarity was also initially opposed by neo @-@ conservatives Norman Podhoretz and Jeane Kirkpatrick , who before 1982 argued that communism could not be overthrown and that Solidarity was doomed .

The AFL ? CIO 's autonomous support of Solidarity was so successful that by 1984 both Democrats and Republicans agreed that it deserved public support . The AFL ? CIO 's example of open support was deemed to be appropriate for a democracy , and much more suitable than the clandestine funding through the CIA that had occurred before 1970 . Both parties and President Ronald Reagan

supported a non @-@ governmental organization , National Endowment for Democracy (NED) , through which Congress would openly fund Solidarity through an allocation in the State Department 's budget , beginning in 1984 . The NED was designed with four core institutions , associated with the two major parties and with the AFL @-@ CIO and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (representing business) . The NED 's first president was Carl Gershman , a former Director of Social Democrats , USA and former U.S. Representative to the United Nations committee on human rights . From 1984 until 1990 , the NED and the AFL ? CIO channeled equipment and support worth \$ 4 million to Solidarity .

= = = = Director of the AFL ? CIO 's Department of International Affairs = = = =

In 1986 Kahn became the Director of the AFL ? CIO Department of International Affairs , where he implemented Kirkland 's program of having a consensus foreign policy . Working with leaders from member unions , Kahn helped to draft resolutions that represented consensus decisions for nearly all issues .

Kahn acted as Director of the AFL ? CIO 's Department of International Affairs in 1986 , after Irving Brown suffered a stroke and resigned that same year ; after Brown 's death in 1989 , Kahn was officially named the Director .

= = = Living with AIDS = = =

Earlier in 1986 , Kahn had learned that he was infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) , " which was then a death sentence " . Kahn longed to spend his remaining years with his " new and most beloved partner " , who was " the love of his life " . However , he accepted the office of Director out of a feeling of duty , knowing that he was taking " a job that would most surely work him to death " . He warned his co @-@ workers that his terminal condition would bring intellectual degeneration , and asked that they monitor him for signs of debilitation . An upgrade of the International Department 's computer systems was to have allowed Kahn to work from home .

Kahn died from acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) in Silver Spring , Maryland on March 27 , 1992 , at the age of 53 , after having been cared for by his partner and supported by his friends and colleagues . He was survived by his partner and also his sister and his niece . Kahn planned most of his own memorial service , which was held in the AFL ? CIO headquarters .

= = Works = =

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= = = Photographs = = =

Picture of Tom Kahn ? with Rachelle Horowitz , James Farmer (CORE leader) , and Ernest Green ? at 1964 World 's Fair , protesting poverty , before their arrest. in Levine , Daniel (2000) . Bayard Rustin and the civil rights movement . New Jersey : Rutgers University Press. p . 352 . ISBN 0 @-@ 8135 @-@ 2718 @-@ X.

Tom Kahn with Donald Slaiman of Social Democrats , USA .