

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Americas > USA > On the Left (USA) > Biographies, History (Left, USA) > History: SWP and before (USA) > **Caroline Lund-Sheppard, Sept. 24, 1944-Oct. 14, 2006: A Life Fully Lived**

Caroline Lund-Sheppard, Sept. 24, 1944-Oct. 14, 2006: A Life Fully Lived

Sunday 3 December 2006, by [BIDDLE Jennifer](#) (Date first published: November 2006).

Caroline Lund, a long time socialist and union activist, died on October 14, 2006 from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gehrig's Disease. She was 62 years old. Jennifer Biddle met Caroline in 1995 when they did solidarity work together in San Francisco for striking Staley workers. They remained good friends and comrades since.

Contents

- [Life Partnership](#)
- [Going Into Industry](#)
- [Barking Dog](#)

IT'S MY FAVORITE photograph of Caroline: She's just a girl, standing straight up, hands neatly folded in front of her, wearing a long, white tunic, and an exuberantly silly grin.

The minister from her family's Lutheran church is standing right behind her, tall, grave, and imposing above all the other boys and girls who are lined up tidily in two rows to his left. In the center, looming overhead, hangs a large, bare cross. It's Confirmation Day and all these boys and girls have just accepted Jesus Christ as their everlasting savior.

Somehow, though, everything fades into the background and it's only Caroline your eyes see. All the other girls are wearing white shoes and have their hair set in the style of the day — short with tight, little curls — so maybe it's Caroline's black shoes and her long, straight and pulled-back hair that catch your eye?

No, it's her face. Everyone else is solemn and still, but Caroline is not — her mouth and eyes are full of movement. She's giddy with the light of the Lord, some might think. But I know the truth and the truth is why I love this picture so much: Caroline, at 14, is already an atheist.

Caroline Jean Lund, born September 24, 1944, was the first of two girls for Martha and O.P. Lund. Her Swedish-Norwegian upbringing in Minneapolis, she liked to say, was a chapter right out of "A Prairie Home Companion."

Though her dad was a lawyer, and her mother a librarian, and their economic circumstances better than most, from a young age Caroline was aware of how randomly close to the margin of working poverty everyone else was. Caroline's mom instilled a love of books in her, and by the time Caroline abandoned the notion of God, she was reading *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Les Misérables*.

An idealist at 15, she knew she wanted to dedicate her life to help end suffering in the world, but she didn't know what to do. When she graduated from high school her family pushed her to continue her education, and in 1962, Caroline went off to Carleton College, a small liberal arts college just south of Minneapolis.

It was at Carleton where Caroline encountered socialist ideas. For Caroline, socialism opened up a whole new way of looking at the world and understanding it, and she began to get the answers she had been searching for.

Carleton had a very active socialist discussion club, whose members would later become part of the central leadership of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the preeminent Trotskyist grouping in America at the time. Mary Alice Waters, John Benson, Dan Styron, and Doug Jenness could be counted among the members of this club. Jack Barnes, who later became the National Secretary of the SWP, had graduated from Carleton just a couple of years earlier. Barnes and his wife Betsy Stone had founded the socialist club with others.

By her second year in college, Caroline had joined the youth wing of the SWP, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA), and immersed herself in the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky, and jumped into political activity on and off campus.

Caroline's parents did not approve of her increasing involvement with the socialist movement. They stopped supporting her and paying for college. Drawn more to activism than academics, Caroline quit school, worked as a waitress at a diner in Minneapolis, and married, for the first time, to Doug Jenness.

In spite of the fact that Caroline grew up and went to public schools in Minneapolis, she knew nothing about the great Teamster strikes of 1934 until she joined the socialist club at Carleton. The 1934 strikes made the city a union town and the Teamsters one of the most powerful unions in the country.

The leaders of the strike built the Minneapolis SWP branch, and several of them were still active members. People like Ray Dunne, then in his 70s, recounted the days of the strike to younger members, when there was virtually a civil war between workers and bosses. The Minneapolis branch had a strong core of working class leaders like Dunne, who were able to impart socialist politics and organizing skills to new members like Caroline.

In 1965 Caroline and her husband Doug moved to New York City so he could work fulltime for the Young Socialist Alliance. Caroline, temporarily reconciled with her parents, enrolled at Barnard College to continue her studies and do political work.

In 1965 she helped found the Columbia Committee Against the War in Vietnam. She debated Michael T. Klare — now a well-known intellectual — over whether the antiwar movement should call for immediate troop withdrawal in Vietnam (which she was for), or demand that the U.S. should negotiate with the National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese (which he favored).

Caroline also worked closely with radical members of Students for a Democratic Society on the Columbia campus. Though their paths would soon diverge, David Gilbert — who would later join the Weather Underground and serve a life sentence in prison for his participation in a 1981 robbery and murder — was the chairman of the campus antiwar group when Caroline served as its secretary.

On several occasions at SWP forums Caroline had the privilege of hearing Malcolm X speak in person. She remembered him to be very humble and humorous, and said he spoke as if he were one with the audience. "The thing about Malcolm X was you could tell he was seeking the truth," she said. "He didn't presume to know everything. He was not afraid to seek the truth, wherever it might lead him. He was a revolutionary deep down, even before he knew a revolution was necessary."

Life Partnership

It was around this time, in 1965, that Caroline met Barry Sheppard, who was also a young leader in the SWP. They ended their previous relationships, married the following year, and remained comrades and companions for the rest of Caroline's life.

In 1967 Caroline became a fulltime staff person at the SWP headquarters in New York City. She was the Secretary-Treasurer of the Fred Halstead and Paul Boutelle SWP presidential campaign during the 1968 election. Later that year, Caroline and Barry went to Brussels, Belgium to live and work as the SWP's and YSA's representatives to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

It was an exciting time to be a revolutionary in Europe. Near-revolution still echoed from Paris where the May-June student-worker general strike had a profound impact on the continent. The French Trotskyists played a big role in the May-June events, and Caroline and Barry got to know many of them and other socialists in Europe.

In 1970, Caroline and Barry returned to the United States to participate in the student strike against the war that swept the country. Caroline then worked as a staff writer for the SWP's newspaper, *The Militant*. She was officemates with Farrell Dobbs — probably the best-known leader of the '34 Teamster strike and author of four volumes on the strike and subsequent Teamster history. Dobbs loved his scotch, and on occasion Caroline and Barry would join him for one after work.

The SWP was in its heyday — by 1976 it had several thousand members spread across the country, and fully participated in the new movements that blossomed in the wake of the civil rights struggles of the previous decade. Caroline wrote voluminously about the issues that fed the fire of these movements — from women's liberation and abortion rights to the anti-Vietnam war movement, labor politics, and third world struggles for independence.

She covered international events like the 1974 revolution in Portugal, and traveled in Spain to report on the explosive mass movements that developed in the wake of the death of the fascist dictator, Francisco Franco in 1975.

Caroline and Barry returned to Europe as members of the United Secretariat, this time to live and work in Paris, from 1977-80. They were part of a new leadership team, together with younger European leaders including Charles-Andre Udry and Charles Michaloux from Switzerland and France, and Jim Percy and Nita Kieg from Australia. From Paris, Caroline participated in the debates raging among radicals over which way forward for the movements of the 1960s.

Going Into Industry

When Caroline returned to the States in early 1980, the SWP shifted its political focus towards unionized workers. The SWP thought that the 1978 miners' strike, the formation of Miners for Democracy, and the Steelworkers Fight Back Campaign, signaled a new militancy in the American working class.

Never one to sit on the sidelines, Caroline jumped in with both feet. Though she had mainly done office work, Caroline took her first real industrial job at a GM plant in North Tarrytown, New York in 1980. She lost 10 pounds in two weeks she said, "sweating buckets, coming home completely exhausted."

Just as she had thrown herself into books by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky as a Carlton student, Caroline immersed herself in all the key struggles and strikes American workers were involved in

the late 1970s and early 1980s. She did solidarity work for PATCO, Greyhound, Eastern Airlines and Hormel workers.

She also changed jobs frequently, working in seven different unions from 1980 to 1988. Caroline was an autoworker, a garment worker, an electrical worker, a telephone worker, an oil worker, and a steel worker — and a member of the UAW, ILGWU, ACTU, IUE, CWA, OCAW and the USW. Later she would come to think that the SWP policy of moving people from job to job was a terrible mistake, and prevented members from sinking roots in their factories and unions.

In the 1980s the SWP was floundering. Workers were losing key battles, unions were capitulating to employers and the government, and a conservative political shift occurred in the country reflected by the election of Ronald Reagan — all of which the SWP leadership failed to recognize. Both Caroline and Barry found themselves increasingly at odds with the leadership of the SWP over the direction of the group and in 1988 they both resigned.

Caroline and Barry moved from east to west and settled in the San Francisco Bay Area where they could be near their old friend and former SWP comrade Malik Miah, and work with Socialist Action. Caroline found a job at an oil refinery for a short while, and in 1992 at the NUMMI automobile plant. At NUMMI, Caroline was a production worker until early 2006, when she went on disability due to her illness.

Barking Dog

At various times from 1993 to the present Caroline and Barry joined or worked with various groups, including Solidarity, the International Socialist Organization, Socialist Action, and the Socialist Workers Organization. At the time of her death she remained an independent socialist, supporting any effort for a just cause, marching in antiwar demonstrations following the Bush Administration's attack on Iraq no matter who organized them.

Caroline focused much of her energy in her later years on her union work in the UAW. She published one of the best rank and file plant newsletters in the United States, *the Barking Dog*, for eight years. She built up its readership and in the end distributed over 1,000 copies each print run to her coworkers. NUMMI workers loved it, giving it a circulation closer to 5,000 by passing it around the plant.

The Barking Dog defended workers against the company's abuses and criticized the union bureaucrats of the Administration Caucus when they did not. Over time, as Caroline built support for the newsletter, she gave other workers a platform to voice their opinions on everything from speed-ups to contracting out to bureaucratic excesses at union conventions.

The union establishment was not fond of Caroline. Once the President and the Chairman of the Bargaining Committee of her union local threatened her with a lawsuit for a criticism she made of them in the *Barking Dog*. Caroline quickly hired a lawyer to defend her free speech rights, then exposed the President and the Chairman in *the Barking Dog*. Workers were outraged that top union officials would seek to silence a rank and file worker.

Support for her in the plant led to Caroline being elected Trustee for the union local, where she oversaw union finances and sat on the Executive Committee. Through her activism, Caroline developed a reputation in her plant for being fearless, honest, and knowledgeable.

In the last year of its publication, the *Barking Dog* focused on a struggle led by autoworkers at General Motors and the Delphi parts plant. These autoworkers called themselves Soldiers of Solidarity (SOS), and fought the use of bankruptcy to force contracts on workers containing massive

concessions. The *Barking Dog* carried statements by SOS and reprinted news and comments from rank and file newsletters by SOS members.

Above all, 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 said.

“Malcolm X said that this society runs on money. The companies believe that for most people you lay that money down, and your soul goes with it. This is true in the short term. 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 also believed solidarity among workers would eventually win over self-interest, and this would revive the labor and socialist movements. It’s a theme that runs through her experiences in Cuba, a country Caroline and Barry visited together in 1997.

What impressed Caroline most about Cuba were the ordinary people. She loved the children who were so self-confident, healthy, and good-natured. And she had an especially fond memory of a young doctor at a maternity hospital she visited: He could have made many times more his salary being a taxi driver for tourists, but chose instead a career he felt more useful to others.

“From what we saw, the Cubans made progress in creating a new kind of human being,” she said. “Though there’s a real question when Fidel dies: Has there been enough growth of a new human mind set or human culture that will continue to value human needs and progress over profits?” Put simply Caroline was a truth-seeker. In all the ups and downs of her career as a socialist, she never once wavered from the truth she sought in her politics or in the idealism that fueled her passions.

She was also just a great human being — compassionate, pragmatic, courageous, smart, and genuine to the core. I’ll never forget her admonishing me several years ago for worrying that my Pentecostal fundamentalist in-laws were surreptitiously taking my impressionable six-year-old to church with them: “For crying out loud Jennifer, your son should see the inside of a church!”

P.S.

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