Betsy McDonald: 45-year cadre of Socialist Workers Party

BY BETSEY STONE

LOS ANGELES — A meeting to celebrate the life and political accomplishments of Betsy McDonald was held here Dec. 13. McDonald, a 45-year cadre of the Socialist Workers Party, died Dec. 7 in Tucson, Arizona, at the age of 95.

As participants entered they saw a display highlighting events in McDonald's political life, including a message from Isabel Garcia, Guadalupe Castillo and Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith, members of the Coalition of Derechos Humanos in Tucson, which organizes in defense of immigrant workers.

"From our earliest memories of you, protesting the Vietnam War, supporting the struggle in the national liberation movement in Mexico, fighting against police abuse, to every action and social movement in Arizona," they wrote, "your image as a fierce fighter for full cultural and economic justice for all will remain with each and every one of us."

Born in 1920, McDonald lived through the hardships of the 1930s Great Depression. During World War II she was in the WAVES, the Navy women's auxiliary. She raised six children.

A collage sent to the meeting by her daughter Jan McDonald included a description by Betsy about how she got involved in working-class struggles in Tucson in the 1950s. "My first political activity was picketing the segregated Pickwick Inn," she recalled. "I finally came to realize that the only thing that could explain that level of racism is that we live in a class society."

In the 1950s and '60s Betsy earned respect as a worker fighting for workers' rights, Mexican American and anti-Vietnam War movements," Dave Prince, a member of the Socialist Workers Party's National Committee, told the meeting. "She became convinced working-class revolution is not a dream, but can be reality," Prince said. Others on platform, from left: Dan Fein, Willie Cotton and Ellie Garcia.

Confidence in working class

"She chose to build a revolutionary party looking to the example of the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik party led by Lenin. To have confidence that the working class can take on and win that struggle here, that it’s not a dream, but can be a reality," said Prince.

McDonald rejected the CP’s support for the capitalist Democratic Party. At the same time she continued to work with everyone she could, including members of the CP, without compromising her principles, Prince said.

In 1978 and in 1980 McDonald worked with members of the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialist Alliance, as the party expanded its work in the Southwest. They included Morris Starksy, a member of the University of Arizona and a Navy ROTC member when he first met her.

"From our earliest memories of you, protesting the Vietnam War, supporting the struggle in the national liberation movement in Mexico, fighting against police abuse, to every action and social movement in Arizona," they wrote, "your image as a fierce fighter for full cultural and economic justice for all will remain with each and every one of us."

In 1968 McDonald campaigned for Socialist Workers Party candidates Fred Halstead for president and Paul Boutelle for vice president. "Betsy made a political decision in the face of big developments in the class struggle in those years that was to guide her life and conduct from then on," Prince said.

Betsy McDonald, left, campaigns in Los Angeles, chaired the meeting. When the party made its turn to industry, Garcia said, she was working as a farmworker organizer. They won some important victories, and then saw this channeled by the union leadership into support for the Democrats. McDonald convinced her that she should be in the party and its work in industry.

McDonald's contributions as a cadre of the Socialist Workers Party for 45 years. "She became convinced working-class revolution is not a dream, but can be reality," Prince said. Others on platform, from left: Dan Fein, Willie Cotton and Ellie Garcia.

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