

Remembering Fred Hirsch, my friend and mentor

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I was saddened to learn of the death of my friend and mentor, Fred Hirsch. I first met Fred in about 1963 when our family moved from Hayward to San Jose, California. I was about 6 years old. I was a frequent visitor at the Hirsch household. Fred and his wife Ginny took care of me when my Mother was ill. That was in about 1965. I remember it well.

They say that behind the activities of every good man is a good woman. That was certainly true in Fred's case. In 1974 when Fred wrote his famous pamphlet, *The AIFLD in Latin America* it was Ginny, a member of the OPEIU who proofread and typed everything. Everything about that pamphlet was union! Written by a member of UA Local 393, typed by a member of OPEIU. And union printed. (UA is the United Association of Plumbers; OPEIU is the Office and Professional Employees International Union.)

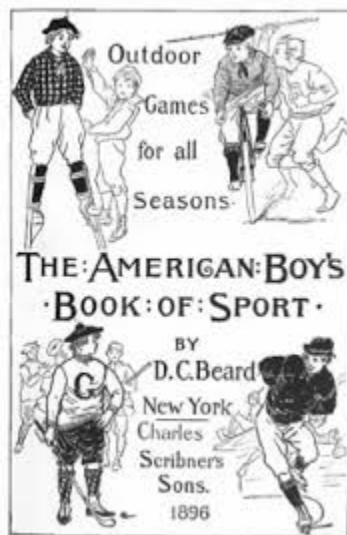
At that time, the AFL-CIO (we called them the AFL-CIA) was run with an iron fist by George Meany, who supported the war in Vietnam. While Meany was doing that, Fred and the other principled trade unionists were passing resolutions in their local unions against the war. Fred had a rare quality, which was that he organized across different constituencies and managed to work simultaneously in the trade union movement, the civil rights movement, and the various national liberation movements, and to interconnect them all. Not many people on the left had that ability the way that Fred and Ginny did. Fred and Ginny did all this while raising three daughters, Liza, Laurie, and Leslie. Not an easy task.

Fred introduced me to trade unionism when he took us kids out in a panel truck and dropped us off in front of various supermarkets on the east side of San Jose. We were armed with leaflets about boycotting California table grapes. Ever present was Fred with his Greek sailor's hat decorated with all the union and movement pins of all the activities he was involved in. Fred went to Bogota, Colombia to participate in the resistance movement. He went to Chile in 1973 to protest the Coup against President Allende. He was very proud of his pin that he wore on his hat from the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) in Chile.



When Trade Unionists for Action and Democracy (TUAD) was formed as a response to the reactionary, class collaborationist politics of the AFL-CIO, Fred became the Chair of the San Jose Chapter. My family moved to Los Angeles in 1969 and as a teenager, I got involved in TUAD and the local Communist Party. That was in 1971. I was in “intermediate” school, which is pure hell! In the U.S. intermediate schools are now called “middle” schools. That year, the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) was formed as a kind of Joint Council between the California Teachers Association (CTA) and the California Federation of Teachers (CFT). There was a strike in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) that year and many of the UTLA teachers found their way into TUAD.

Fred loved the outdoors. He loved fishing and the kinds of activities that he grew up with in his native New York. My own father liked baseball and American football. When Fred was taking care of me, he showed me the game of Mumbly Peg in our back yard. I got my first pocketknife. Then I learned whittling.



Fred would come over and have long philosophical talks with my Dad over glasses of Red Mountain wine. After a while, Fred’s dog Coco had puppies, and of course, every child needs a dog, especially a young boy such as me. Once my Dad was sold on the idea of Joe having a dog, Fred convinced my Dad that a little boy dog needs a little girl dog to keep the little boy dog company! We ended up with two Shepard Husky puppies.

In 1969 when we moved to Los Angeles, we said our goodbyes to Fred and Ginny, and we were only able to take one dog with us. His name was Teddy Bear. Great dog!

In 1973, I started volunteering with the United Farm Workers (UFW) in Los Angeles and I kept up my participation in the TUAD as Fred had taught me. I can still hear him: never ask the members to do something that you are not willing to do yourself. Fred led and taught by

example. He started by teaching us how to do leafleting properly. There was a technique to it. So, in my early years, I did a lot of leafleting. While other kids played baseball, football and basketball, my sport was politics and trade unionism. I didn't actually join a union until I graduated college and became a member of the American Federation of Musicians, Local 47.

In 1968, my Dad ran for Santa Clara County supervisor. Fred was his campaign manager and used his organizational "constituency" skills to build an electoral coalition that included a broad cross section of people. Fred got my Dad to endorse the UFW grape boycott and got labor support for his campaign. Geoff Boehm, editor of the Labor Council newspaper, *Union Gazette* and his wife Marge were introduced to my Dad by Fred. A lot of good things happened during that campaign, and Fred was a big part of that. There is this quote by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. which sums up everything: *"As I have said many times, and believe with all my heart, the coalition that can have the greatest impact in the struggle for human dignity here in America is that of the Negro and the forces of labor, because their fortunes are so closely intertwined."*

TUAD was of course, working directly with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). The AFL-CIO, through its American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) which Fred helped to expose, was in direct opposition to the WFTU. Independent unions like the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE) that used to make up the old CIO before its merger with the AFL in 1955 remained staunch supporters of the WFTU and TUAD. *Labor Today* was the publication of Trade Unionists for Action and Democracy. We distributed it every month for as long as it came out. There were TUAD caucuses in several unions including the United Steelworkers (USWA), the United Auto Workers (UAW) the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and several of the building trades unions, including Fred's own Plumbers Union (UA). These were powerful voices in the trade union movement against war and militarism, racism, for civil rights, and Fred was right there in the leadership. I observed and I learned. After the TUAD went out of existence and *Labor Today* ceased publication, I drifted. I lost contact with Fred and I didn't see him for a long time, until one evening, I went to a political function in Los Angeles, and was surprised to see him there. I was very happy. We talked over old times and he came over the next day to visit with my parents. That was a great day.

Now Fred is home, and I am too. In the memory of both Fred's, Fred Hirsch and Fred Gaboury we are again publishing a new and improved LT in 5 languages all around the world. I am sure they would be proud of this new project, which we will continue for as long as we can. Fred Hirsch and Fred Gaboury knew each other. Fred Hirsch wrote for LT and Fred Gaboury as its last Editor. We still have the same class oriented trade union approach. Rest well my friend Fred. ;Fred and Ginny Hirsch PRESENTE!