

Jack (Yankel) Frager January 3, 1903 to March 7, 1998

Cheshire Frager and Ed Stamm

February 2000

Anarchist and labor activist Jack Frager died at the age of 95. Born in Ukraine, in the village of Ismeryuka, raised in Mogeliev-Podolske, he was a youthful participant in the Russian Revolution of 1917. In order to escape being conscripted into the Red or White armies, he fled to Romania, went through Danzig, and made it to Argentina, where he lived for 18 months. While in Buenos Aires, he self-published Gustav Landauer on anarchism, in Yiddish, and never lost his enthusiasm for Landauer's ideas. He arrived in New York in 1923.

Jack was an unhyphenated anarchist. He served on the Committee to Defend Sacco and Vanzetti, made arrangements for Emma Goldman's last U.S. speaking tour, made his own speaking tours of the U.S. during the 1930's, helped found the Libertarian Book Club of New York city in the late 1930's, was on the editorial board of "Freie Arbeiter Stimme" ("The Free Voice of Labor") a Yiddish language anarchist newspaper, was active in the Painters' Union (which included fighting against a Communist takeover, and in later years, against corruption) and taught labor history at Brookwood Labor College. He had a life-long interest in Yiddish language and culture, published Yiddish literature, and was active in the League for Yiddish. An ardent peace activist, he marched against the Vietnam war and nuclear weapons, and was arrested several times. At one demonstration a young woman was crying as they were being taken in. "No tears," Jack exclaimed, "we won't give them that satisfaction! Instead, we sing!" He was last arrested at age 88 during a Hiroshima Day protest, for painting the shadows of bomb victims on sidewalks in New York City. The rain washed away the evidence, so the charges were dropped.

When he was 80, he visited Spain to meet with the resurgent, post-Franco anarchist movement. At 87 he visited Ukraine.

Jack raised a family with his partner, Myra (May Frakt), who he married in 1939. Jack and Myra had three children. He worked as a house painter, then as a foreman and estimator. In 1968 he retired, and he and Myra travelled the country. They settled in Florida in 1980, and in 1985 Myra died. In 1993 his daughter Cheshire brought him back to New York as he began to suffer from Alzheimer's disease. "Daddy was indefatigable," said his daughter Cheshire. "when he sought anti-war and Yiddishkeit groups in Florida and didn't find them, he started them. He never lost his ideas, energy or commitment." In the early 1990's, Jack was on the "Meander Quarterly" mailing list.

The War Resisters' League and the Libertarian Book Club co-sponsored a memorial tribute to Jack on June 9th at the Brecht Forum.

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