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David McReynolds, Socialist Activist Who Ran for President, Dies at 88

By **Jacey Fortin**

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David E. McReynolds, a pacifist, socialist and sometime political candidate whose activism spanned many decades, died on Friday in Manhattan. He was 88.

The War Resisters League, where Mr. McReynolds had been a staff member, confirmed his death. He was taken to Mount Sinai Beth Israel hospital after falling in his Manhattan apartment, a friend, Bruce Cronin, said.

Mr. McReynolds was best known for his demonstrations against the draft during the Vietnam War, his advocacy of pacifism and denuclearization, and his two bids for president in 1980 and 2000 as an openly gay man running on the Socialist Party USA ticket.

“He’ll be known for the lifetime of leadership and the pacifist movements that, to a large degree, he defined in the post-World War II, Cold War era,” said Professor Cronin, the chairman of the political science department at City College of New York. “But what I think helped to define him was that he was as much a humanist as he was an activist.” He had met Mr. McReynolds at a denuclearization rally in the 1980s.

Mr. McReynolds spent almost four decades as a staff member for the War Resisters League, a pacifist organization based in New York City. His activism took him around the world for demonstrations and meetings as a member of delegations in Libya, Japan, Vietnam and other countries.

“There were all these things that made him a giant in antiwar and civil rights and social justice,” his cousin Dusty Kunin said on Friday.

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He was also a photographer, a writer and a music aficionado who regularly hosted friends at his home for discussions about art, life and politics.

David Ernest McReynolds was born on Oct. 25, 1929, in Los Angeles. He was raised as a Baptist and was once affiliated with the Prohibition Party, he told *The Village Voice* in a 2015 interview.

Mr. McReynolds, who was the oldest of three children, described his childhood as “pretty protected.” His father’s job as head of the local water reserve and his family’s access to his grandfather’s farm and livestock helped insulate them from the worst effects of the Great Depression, *The Voice* reported.

By the time he attended the University of California, Los Angeles, in the early 1950s, he had become an active socialist and an ardent pacifist.

This was during the era of McCarthyism, and the government took notice of his activities. Mr. McReynolds would later write that the F.B.I. had compiled hundreds of pages of files on him, which he obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request.

His work spanned myriad issues. He demonstrated in favor of civil rights and against the Korean War in the 1950s, so that by the time widespread antiwar sentiment had gripped young activists during the 1960s and ’70s, he was an experienced protester.

Mr. McReynolds was known as a mediator with a human touch, and much of his organizing work took place behind the scenes. But he occasionally appeared in news reports, including the time he publicly burned draft documents during Vietnam War protests in 1965.

He first gained wider public attention as a candidate for Congress in 1958. He ran as an openly gay candidate for president in 1980, and again in 2000, although he did not make gay rights a central issue in either campaign.

By the time of his last presidential bid, he was 70 and technically retired from his position as a field secretary with the War Resisters League.

“I think we have a title for me,” he said at the time. “I’m an emeritus of some kind. I’ll have to ask someone up front what my title is.”

Mr. McReynolds resigned from the Socialist Party in 2015 after he was censured for two comments he had made on social media. In one, he expressed concern over Islamist extremism following a terrorist attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, a newspaper in Paris. In the other, he used the word “thuggish” in reference to Michael Brown, the unarmed black teenager who was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Mo.

“The failure of the Socialist Party, its tendency to substitute a kind of left rhetoric for serious analysis, is to be regretted because if ever we needed a democratic socialist movement it is today,” Mr. McReynolds wrote after his resignation.

He is survived by a sister, Elizabeth Gralewski, and a brother, Martin McReynolds.

On Friday, the War Resisters League said in a statement that Mr. McReynolds was on its staff until 1999 but had remained a member of the league's community throughout his life, adding that he "will be remembered for living radical pacifism."

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