

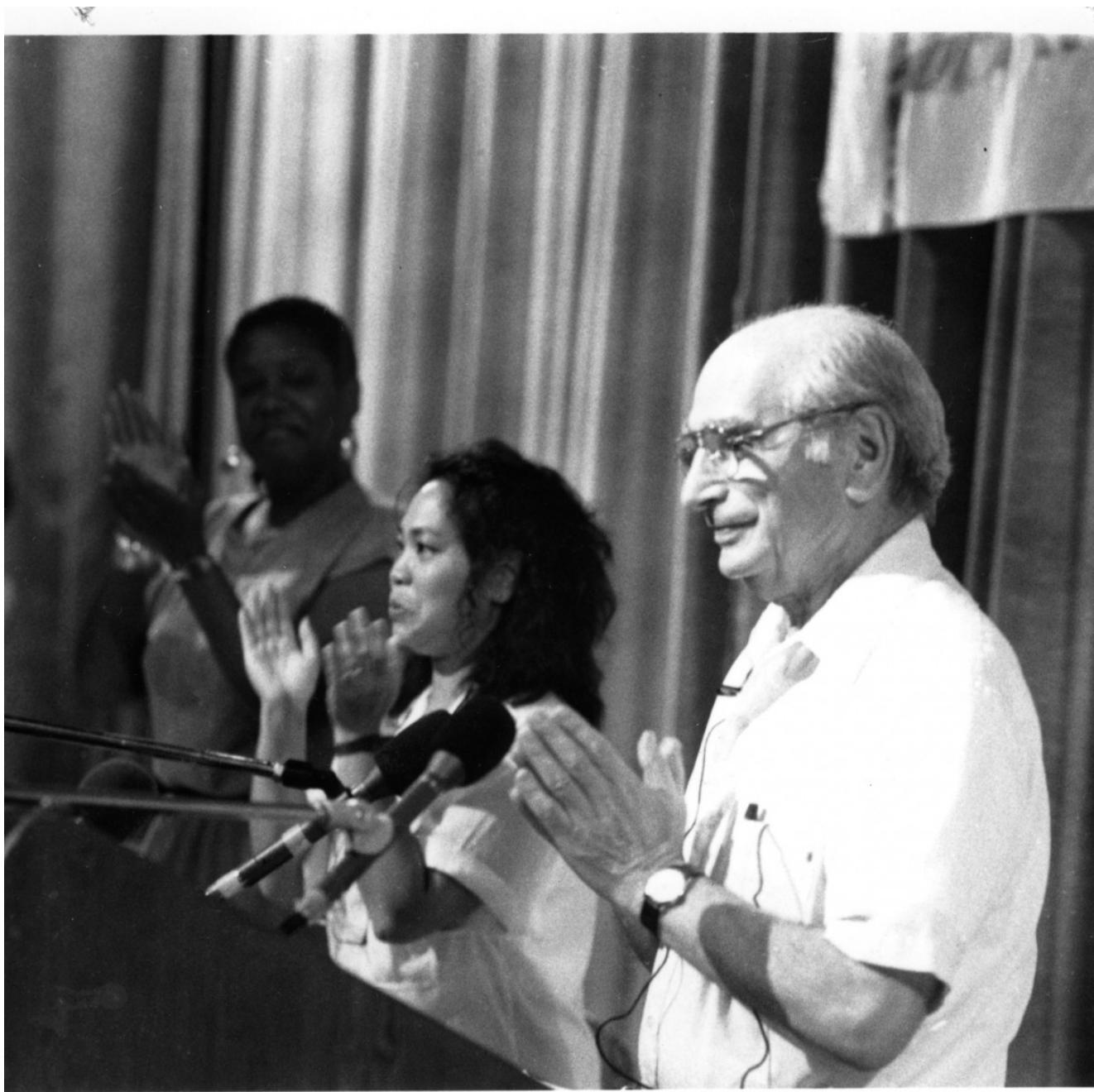


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Farewell to a revolutionary: Rochester's Lydia Bayoneta

written by Scott Scheffer

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Lydia Bayoneta, center, on stage with Sam Marcy.

Lydia Bayoneta, 79, of Rochester, New York, died on Dec. 18 after a long illness. Revolutionary struggle was her life's work, and for years, she could be spotted at any progressive action on the street or in a meeting hall in Rochester. She gave

much to the working-class movement and will be greatly missed.

Bayoneta was born in the Philippines and came to the U.S. with her family in the 1950s. Coming from a country colonized by the United States and influenced as a young adult by Black and Brown liberation struggles, the anti-Vietnam War movement in the U.S., and the emerging LGBTQ+ and women's movements, Bayoneta became an ardent communist and working-class leader. She was a partisan of U.S. Marxist leader Sam Marcy and became an integral part of an important branch in Rochester.

During her decades of political work, Bayoneta helped to organize anti-war demonstrations, fought against city budget cuts that threatened to close recreation centers for youth, and took part in the fight against racism and police brutality.

She helped to found and organize the People's Energy Committee. PEC meetings attracted primarily struggling women from Rochester's impoverished Black and Puerto Rican communities. Together, they fought the Rochester Gas and Electric company that had been turning off people's utilities, even in the harsh Rochester winters. They held picket lines and sit-ins and took arrests. They finally forced the utility into an agreement prohibiting shut-offs in the winter months. The agreement was called the "Nero agreement," named after Erskine Nero, one of RG&E's shut-off victims, who was enlightened by the whole process and joined the revolutionary struggle.

In 1982, when the infamous Zionist general Ariel Sharon pulled back the Israeli Army to allow their fascist allies in Lebanon to attack the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, Bayoneta helped to organize a mass meeting to expose the role of the U.S. in the oppression of the Palestinian people and their complicity in the murder of up to 3,500 people in the camps.

When Rochester City Council refused to consider a proposal to recognize Gay Pride,

Bayoneta was among the loudest in a raucous crowd. This was part of a struggle that was a milestone for the LGBTQ+ movement.

Sam Marcy often coached activists to be “mild in manner and bold in matter.” That was Lydia Bayoneta. She was kind and gentle with most people, and at the same time, passionate in her hatred of racism, quick to anger, and capable of channeling her anger into expert organizing and sometimes actual fighting.



Bayoneta, left of center with fist raised, confronting the KKK in Houston, 1977.

In 1977, she went to Houston, Texas, for the National Women’s Conference to promote a working-class agenda for women: free, safe abortions, no forced sterilization, and for a society where all women can raise healthy children. At the main convention site, a street battle erupted when a KKK-Christian Defense League

unit marched outside. Bayoneta was among a group of women who surrounded and scrapped with one of the KKK organizers, who had to be rescued by the police. Another time, when a drunken bar patron in Rochester yelled a racial slur at her after an organizing meeting in the office next door to the bar he came out of, she got out of her car and put up her fists, challenging the racist to a fight. He backed away.

Bayoneta led one of the first classes after “Struggle for Socialism/La Lucha por el Socialismo” was founded in 2018. Her decades of experience and study were evident. She spoke at length about Lenin’s perspective on economism, which was an attempt by opportunist social democrats to steer the Russian revolutionary movement toward organizing workers for narrow economic gains, setting aside revolutionary politics. Bayoneta expertly explained Lenin’s view that the revolutionary struggle must not be postponed by confining workers’ efforts solely to achieving improved wages and working conditions.

With Gene Clancy, her comrade and life partner of 59 years, who also died this year, Bayoneta helped educate many in the revolutionary struggle of the working class. They were working-class leaders who led by example. She was widely admired, and her militant spirit and contributions to the class struggle will not be forgotten. Lydia Bayoneta, Presente!



In Houston, outside National Women's Conference.



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