

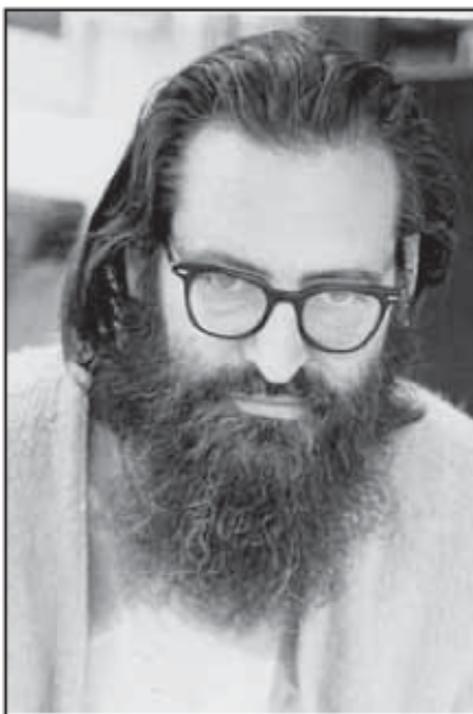
Palo Alto Weekly

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Page 11 Obituaries

Jim Berk

Jim Berk, a key organizer of Stanford University employees in the formation of their first union in the late 1960s, died at his San Francisco apartment Jan. 1 following a brief illness relating to a heart condition. He was in his late 70s. Berk was an electrical engineer who had been involved in the early years of the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC), but he soon became best known for his union organizing efforts — first at SLAC and later at all of Stanford and Stanford Hospital — and for his acerbic personal style. (See Guest Opinion in this week's Spectrum section.) Prior to joining SLAC he worked at the University of California, Berkeley.



At SLAC, he worked on trigger systems, the beginning of the bombardment process for atomic-level particles. He was a native of Chicago and received a degree in electrical engineering from the City College of New York. He moved to the Palo Alto area with his second wife, Ida Berk, who later became active in East Palo Alto community affairs and served on the city's Planning Commission prior to her death in 2003. They divorced soon after moving to the area, however.

Berk later married Glenda Jones, who also was involved in the union-organizing movement and who served as president of the union during its stormiest years. During the stormy, often acrimonious union-organizing years, Berk played a strong role in forming the United Stanford Employees (USE) union in 1968, which voted overwhelmingly in the spring of 1973 to affiliate with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), becoming Local 680. But his personal style and shortfuse temper alienated others in the union and he was forced out in 1978.

The union local later became part of SEIU Local 715. In the early 1990s, Berk moved to San Francisco, where he became involved with community efforts to clean up the neighborhood, targeting trash and graffiti in the South of Market area. He helped form the Safe on Sixth (Street) organization and regularly led clean-up teams through the area. He worked for some time as assistant manager of the Silver Creek Senior Center prior to his retirement.

In his later years, Berk mellowed personally, according to his son Jason Berk of Palo Alto. "He got grandchildren — he became a grandfather, and he calmed down," Jason said. He is survived by another son, Tosha, and two daughters from his first marriage: Linda and Imani Berk. He has three grandchildren, Arthur Berk, 28, Daniel Berk, 21, and Jasmine Berk, 15, the children of Jason and Rosemary Berk of Palo Alto; and three great-grandchildren, the children of Arthur Berk of Albuquerque, N.M.

An outdoor memorial service will be held Sunday, April 2 at 1 p.m. near the Baylands Nature Interpretive Center at the end of Embarcadero Road in Palo Alto.