

Mary Elise Henehan (1925-2008)

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On December 16, 2008, Mary Elise Henehan died at Bronson Hospital in Kalamazoo, Michigan at the age of 83. She was the mother of Tom Henehan, a political committee member of the Workers League, predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party, who was the victim of a political assassination carried out on October 16, 1977 in New York City.

The daughter of E.J. Marin and Margaret Killian, Mary was born in Milwaukee and raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She attended St. Louis University and graduated with a Master's degree in social work. At school, Mary met her husband, a fellow student of social work, Schuyler Henehan, and they married in 1948. Together they had five children.

Following the tragic death of her husband at age 44 from a heart attack, Mrs. Henehan went back to school to update her social work degree. She then worked for the Vicksburg Area Public Schools until she retired in 1993.

Mary Elise Henehan was a warm and compassionate person. Upon learning of Tom's death in 1977, Mary flew to New York City to grieve the loss of her son along with members of the Workers League. While Tom's death at such a young age caused her terrible pain, she found the strength to offer sympathy and understanding to Tom's close comrades.

During his four years in the party, Tom had played a central role in the development of the youth movement in the US and internationally and was particularly active in expanding the Workers League's influence among coal miners in West Virginia and Kentucky. Tom was charismatic and, in the best sense of the word, idealistic. He left an immense and unforgettable impression on all those he knew and worked with.

In 1997, the party held a meeting to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Tom's death. Mary Henehan attended with two of her daughters.

In David North's remarks to the meeting, he said:

"None of us who lived through the events of October 1977 can forget the strength and support that Mary Elise Henehan gave us during what must have been the most terrible week of her life. I realized then that Tom Henehan's extraordinary qualities were due in no small measure to the fact that he was the son of an extraordinary human being."

Mary Elise Henehan is survived by five children—Paul, Anne, Brendan, Matthew and Mary, along with their spouses and her grandchildren.



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