

A fighter for revolutionary socialism

Raúl Rizik: 1947-2013

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The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee mourn the death of comrade Raúl Rizik, revolutionary, writer, actor, accomplished interpreter/translator, master teacher and dedicated family man.

His heart gave out Wednesday night as he was leaving the gym, most probably a consequence of his long battle with diabetes and other chronic health problems. Raúl was part of an extended family that included several siblings living in Washington, Baltimore and Santo Domingo. He was close to all of them. In California he is survived by his wife, Barbary and two adult children, Daniel and Sara.

Raúl, writing under the name Ramón Valle, authored 48 articles for the WSWS, beginning with an account of an interview in December 2003 with immigrant worker Fernando Suárez del Solar, father of Jesús Suarez del Solar, one of the first US soldiers to die in that year's US invasion of Iraq, and ending in April 2012 with a masterful article written with Richard Adams on a Los Angeles revival of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. Fitting bookends, these two political commentaries shows Raúl's connection with the working class and of his appreciation of the crucial role that culture must play in the training of revolutionaries.

In between, among articles on film, theater and worker's struggles, are those that Raúl wrote with David Walsh on the Writers Guild and the Screen Actors Guild between June of 2007 and June of 2009. Included in these articles is an account of the evolution of the bitter strike of screenwriters between October 2007 and January 2008.

Read as a unit, this series of articles chronicle the deliberate betrayal of the writers by their own leadership and by the Los Angeles trade unions. These articles, which were handed out to workers at the picket lines, are must reading for all workers. As a member of the Screen Actors Guild, Raúl waged an intransigent fight against the SAG leadership, their treacherous isolation of the writers, and their subservience to the Democratic Party. He told a SAG meeting in July 2008:

"My strategy calls for socialist policies. Right now people

are angry and involved in struggle everywhere. Here in Los Angeles, longshoremen, teachers, University of California workers, nurses and janitors are all engaged in one form of labor strife or another. Those are the people we must reach out to, not depend on Democratic or Republican politicians, who are the instruments of the very same conglomerates we are fighting. The writers had the overwhelming support of the public, not just here in Los Angeles but throughout the country. We can and must reach out to them and shut the city down if necessary."

These important articles are characteristic of his political work. Raúl participated in almost every campaign involving Spanish-speaking immigrant workers, including a series of interviews in the area of Maywood among immigrants from Mexico and Central America in 2012 during the campaign of SEP presidential candidate Jerry White.

A large part of his work was as a Spanish translator of the political perspectives of the SEP and the writings of David North, Nick Beams and other leaders of the International Committee. Raúl dedicated countless hours to translations.

In addition Raúl participated in the elaboration of political perspectives for Latin America, and in the Marxist education of new comrades. All this Raúl accomplished while working numerous jobs in acting, teaching, interpreting and translating, and helping raise a family.

Comrade Raúl was born in Santo Domingo in 1947. In 1960, he and his family moved to Washington DC, where he attended high school and first developed his love of acting. Later he studied at the University of Maryland and earned a Masters in bilingual education.

Raúl entered politics as part of the wave of revolutionary class struggles that shook the world in the 1960s. At campuses across the United States and other countries this was a tumultuous period. The University of Maryland was no exception.

Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo was assassinated in 1961, a year after the Riziks left for the United States. Trujillo had been a loyal and brutal servant of US imperialism since the US occupation of the Dominican

Republic from 1916 to 1924. During his government of 30 years over 50,000 were killed, including the infamous massacre of tens of thousands of Haitians at Perejil in 1937. In Santo Domingo itself, members of Raúl's extended family suffered under and opposed the hated military dictator.

Trujillo was replaced by a populist regime headed by Juan Bosch, whom the US State Department immediately began to undermine. To preserve Trujilloism against a popular rebellion, US President Lyndon Johnson ordered the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965 and installed Joaquin Balaguer, whose regime proceeded to carry out a war against working class opposition. It is no exaggeration to say that he butchered the flower of that country's youth at the service of US corporate interests.

The year 1965 also saw the massive escalation of US involvement in Vietnam. It was a time of mass demonstrations for civil rights in the South, such as in Selma, Alabama, led by Martin Luther King Jr. and others.

It was under those circumstances that Raúl took the road of political struggle at the University of Maryland. As with many of his fellow students, he saw through the lies of US imperialism, repudiated the invasion of the country where he had been born and became involved in the movement against the war in Vietnam.

This led him, first to the petty-bourgeois radicalism of the Students for a Democratic Society, then to the Maoist Progressive Labor Party, before he was won over to the revolutionary perspective of Trotskyism. He joined the Workers League in 1972, on the basis of the fight for the permanent revolution and against the betrayals of Stalinism.

In this period, the FBI spied and infiltrated the anti-war movement, and Raúl came to its attention. In 1973, he was arrested as a result of his political activities after speaking at a large anti-war demonstration, and he was accused of violating the terms of his visa. This began a lengthy legal struggle for his right to remain in the US. Despite his marriage in 1978 to his lifelong companion, Barbary, a US citizen, which normally would have given him rights to permanent residency, Raúl's case continued until 1985. Deportation to Balaguer's Dominican Republic would have meant a death sentence.

Raúl left the Workers League for a period of time beginning in the late 1970s, but he remained an active supporter. He supported the struggle in the Fourth International against Pabloism and against the degeneration of the British Workers Revolutionary Party, and was energized by the victory in 1985 of the orthodox Trotskyists of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

He and his family settled in Los Angeles in 1989, where, as a character actor, he acted and participated in the

production of many TV and film episodes. He also continued to act in the theater. He rejoined the Socialist Equality Party in the early 2000s, animated by the growth of the class struggle and the developing crisis of American and world capitalism.

In addition his political work, Raúl worked as an interpreter and translator and taught interpretation and English as a Second Language to immigrant workers and youth for the Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles City College, Cal State Los Angeles, and UCLA Extension. He received many notes of appreciation and great reviews from these students, of which he was rightfully proud. His sensitivity to the life struggles of his students no doubt contributed to his popularity.

Raúl understood the importance of culture. He appreciated and loved Shakespeare and Brahms, both of whom he considered representatives of a human culture that transcended national particularities. He participated in the development of the Gala Spanish Theater in Washington DC and helped popularize and produce important Spanish-language works, such as Mario Vargas Llosa's *Señorita de Tacna*.

One of Raúl's greatest strengths was the passion with which he defended the Trotskyist principles of revolutionary socialism and internationalism. He had a quality, a human warmth, that came both an intellectual and emotional identification with the strivings of the oppressed.

Raúl's persistent political work has helped develop the foundation for a new revolutionary movement in Latin America and the United States. His concern for immigrants, his willingness to translate the most difficult articles, particularly those elaborating political perspectives and theoretical and historical issues, were combined with his frankness and openness as a friend.

Raúl found his place in the revolutionary socialist movement, and dedicated the lion's share of his life to it, because he understood that the development of revolutionary ideas takes place within an international party. He will be greatly missed.

The WSWS invites its readers to submit their experiences and memories of Comrade Raúl in the comment section below.



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