

# David Edward Hyland: March 7, 1947 — December 8, 2013

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It is with great sadness that the *World Socialist Web Site* informs our readers of the death of Comrade Dave Hyland, aged just 66 years.

Dave's lasting political legacy is that in 1985-1986 he led the faction of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) that declared its support for the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and opposed the efforts of the party's central leadership, Gerry Healy, Cliff Slaughter and Mike Banda, to liquidate the Trotskyist movement in Britain and internationally.

He became the national secretary of the International Communist Party and, for a shorter period, its successor, the Socialist Equality Party, before retiring as a result of ill health.

Dave was born in Stretford, Manchester to Freda, a nurse, and Jack, a former seaman from Liverpool turned waiter on the railways. He was very influenced by his father, who was on the left of the Labour Party and an active trade unionist, having been involved in the rank-and-file national strike by rail dining car workers in October 1959.

When Dave was 11, his family moved to West Harrow in London. He left school just before his 15th birthday and began work at Associated Electrical Industries. That same year he met his wife and partner for the rest of his life, Eileen. They were soon married.

He worked at a number of jobs, on the buses as a conductor, at IBM, and then at Kodak in 1971. A working class militant, he led a strike at IBM, a non-union employer, and at Kodak became a shop steward for the Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT) and a delegate on its general council.

It was here that Dave first came into contact with members of the Socialist Labour League (SLL), forerunner of the WRP. The SLL had won significant influence in the ACTT, but it was its analysis of Stalinism that had the most impact on Dave, who was finally able to place his past conflicts with union officials in an historical and international context.

Dave joined the Socialist Labour League in 1972 and quickly became Kodak branch secretary and North West London area secretary of the SLL. At work, he led a fight against Kodak's company union and built a factory branch of the WRP. For his political and union activities, he was victimized and sacked in 1976.

There would be many political conflicts with the WRP leadership in subsequent years, but the basis of such disputes could never be clarified. In 1983, now on the Central Committee, he was

sent to become Yorkshire area secretary and as a result was deeply involved in the 1984-85 miners' strike and in building a significant base for the party among workers and youth.

Unknown to the WRP membership, the party's pronounced opportunist drift had led to a growing divergence with the Workers League in the United States. In 1982, Workers League National Secretary David North had set out to initiate a discussion within the International Committee, submitting a detailed critique of Healy's *Studies in Dialectical Materialism* and its relationship to the party's shift away from its Trotskyist axis.

The documents written by North were suppressed by the WRP leadership, with threats to expel the Workers League from the ICFI. But in the aftermath of the defeat of the miners' strike, an unprincipled faction fight erupted in the WRP leadership that finally allowed the sections of the International Committee access to North's critique and enabled them to politically intervene.

The most significant response to the political critique of North and the ICFI's intervention in the crisis of the WRP came from Dave Hyland.

Amid the eruption of factional conflict in the WRP, Dave had been made aware of grave abuses by Healy of his political authority. Dave had led the demand for an investigation by the party's Control Commission and sought a political accounting of why this had taken place.

In mid-September of 1985, he obtained a copy of North's critique. Having studied it, he understood for the first time that a principled opposition to the WRP's political degeneration had emerged within the ICFI and that the necessary fight for a political reorientation of the WRP could be carried out only on an international basis. Dave took the decision to contact the Workers League on October 9.

Subsequently, as we wrote in *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party (Britain)*, "Hyland and two other Central Committee members sought minority status as the WRP (Internationalists), based upon recognition of the political authority of the International Committee. Their petition was accepted on November 9, 1985... The support for the WRP (I) confirmed the correctness of North's refusal to be pushed by the Healy/Banda/Slaughter clique, in 1982 and 1984, into a premature split. Notwithstanding the years of centrist backsliding, it proved that there remained a sizeable constituency for Trotskyism within the WRP."

Dave's decision to contact North made possible the reorientation

of a significant section of the British membership as conscious internationalists. In the coming months, he worked with ferocious determination to clarify, educate and convince the WRP cadre. The WRP (I) won a clear majority of the WRP's membership, particularly in the working class and in the Young Socialists.

Assembling in London on October 23, 1985, the ICFI insisted that the crisis in the WRP was rooted in a longstanding drift away from the programme and perspective of Trotskyism and urged a return to the principled struggle the WRP leadership had waged against Pabloite revisionism.

On October 25, ICFI delegates passed a resolution expelling Healy from the world movement. Healy responded by engineering a split the very next day, securing the backing of the Spanish and Greek sections.

The ICFI delegates rejected the efforts of the WRP leaders to use the international movement for their opportunist and factional ends. In a second resolution, the ICFI identified the fundamental characteristic of the WRP's degeneration as its refusal to subordinate itself to the discipline of the international movement and insisted on the re-registration of the WRP's membership "on the basis of an explicit recognition of the political authority of the ICFI and the subordination of the British section to its decisions."

On December 16, 1985, an International Control Commission investigating the crisis in the WRP issued an interim report that found the party had "carried out an historic betrayal of the ICFI and the international working class" in abandoning "the theory of permanent revolution," for which the entire leadership of the WRP was politically responsible.

The ICFI suspended the WRP as the British section prior to the convening of an IC Congress. It called upon the leaders of the WRP to work loyally with the International Committee "to overcome as quickly as possible the existing problems which are the legacy of the nationalist degeneration of the WRP under Healy, to reassert the basic principles of internationalism within the WRP, and on this basis restore its full membership in the International Committee of the Fourth International."

At the ICFI meeting in London, there were four delegates from the WRP. Three of them—Cliff Slaughter, Tom Kemp, and Simon Pirani—opposed the resolution on the basis of utterly opportunist and nationalist positions. They would not accept any restraints by the international Trotskyist movement on the WRP's now open reorientation to Stalinist and Pabloite organisations.

Dave Hyland was the only WRP delegate to vote for the resolution, insisting that the defense of Trotskyism in Britain required the repudiation of national opportunism and the acceptance of the political authority of the International Committee.

The Slaughter-led faction of the WRP responded with factional hysteria to the principled actions of the ICFI. However, its anti-ICFI campaign was opposed by Dave, whose internationalist faction grew steadily in strength—especially among the core working class cadre of the WRP in the Yorkshire area.

On February 8, 1986, the WRP leadership—realizing that it did not control a majority of the organization—barred members of the WRP (Internationalists) from attending the party's congress and called the police to enforce the decision. The following month, the

International Communist Party was formed as the new British section of the ICFI.

Dave worked for the next twelve years under politically tumultuous and often very difficult conditions to build a Trotskyist tendency in the British and international working class. He was animated at all times by a profoundly held conviction in the correctness of the historically derived programme of the ICFI.

However, Dave's health was to deteriorate massively. Aged 40, he had been diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis. The disease was extraordinarily aggressive and, combined with other complications, including those resulting from medical negligence, left him with severe and debilitating health problems. He retired for some years from active politics, but never wavered in his support for the party and for the international.

None of his comrades in Britain will forget Dave's determination to attend the founding conference of the Socialist Equality Party of Britain in October 2010, driven by ambulance in a wheelchair and hooked up to an oxygen supply. Neither will they fail to appreciate how he continued to write articles under such restrictions—defying the expectations of the medical profession, which predicted that he would be dead many years ago.

Our condolences at this time go out to Eileen and to their children, Julie, Tony, Claire and Paula.

Dave represented all that was best, indeed noble, in the British working class. He was a man of indomitable courage and deeply held principles, ready to give everything, while demanding nothing for himself in return, in the struggle for socialism. He will be remembered with pride and respect.



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