Memories of Dave Hyland from the US and Australia

28 December 2013

David Edward Hyland passed away on the night of December 8. He was the leader of the faction of the old Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) of Britain that declared its support for the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and opposed the attempt of the party's leadership, Gerry Healy, Cliff Slaughter and Mike Banda, to liquidate the Trotskyist movement in Britain and internationally. Following the split of the WRP from the ICFI in 1986, he became national secretary of the British section, a position he held until he retired in 1998 due to ill health. (See: "David Edward Hyland: March 7, 1947—December 8, 2013").

Within hours of Dave's death, letters of condolence began to arrive from all over the world, sent to his wife, Eileen, and his children, Julie, Tony, Claire and Paula, and to Dave's comrades in the Socialist Equality Party of Britain. The letters testify to the esteem in which Dave Hyland was held by comrades in the UK and internationally.

Below, we publish more condolences sent by comrades from the United States and Australia addressing Dave's impact internationally.

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Dear Julie,

It was with sorrow and affection that I heard the news of Comrade Dave's death. He played a critical role in the life of both the British section and the international movement as a whole.

My first contact with Dave came by chance, when I was answering the phone at the national office of the Workers League in October 1985, while David North and Larry Roberts were in Britain. A British comrade telephoned, identifying himself as Dave Hyland from Yorkshire and asking urgently to be put in touch with them.

In today's interconnected world, a trans-Atlantic telephone call has no special significance, but in those days it was an uncommon event. It was even more unusual coming from a member of the British section outside the leadership clique of Healy, Banda and Slaughter. For many years, international comrades were prevented from having serious contact with the membership of the WRP, even with leading members in the regions like your father.

This was the first time, so far as any of us could recall, that a member of the WRP had ever called the Workers League national office seeking political discussion with the leadership of our section. It was an enormously encouraging event, demonstrating that we had potential allies within the British section.

Dave pressed ahead in a series of discussions in Britain, beginning a political collaboration between the International Committee and those members of the WRP truly committed to revolutionary socialist politics. This was a turning point in the struggle for Trotskyist principles against Pabloite revisionism inside the Fourth International.

In taking this stand, Comrade Dave was acting not only as a revolutionary workers' leader in Britain, important as that was, but as a Marxist internationalist, opposing the national-opportunist politics of the WRP leadership.

This decision put its stamp on the rest of his political life, more than a quarter century of intransigent struggle as part of the leadership of the International Committee. We have all learned from Dave's example and been strengthened by his contribution to our collective work.

Best wishes,

Patrick Martin

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Dear Julie and Tony,

I wanted to add my own message of condolence to those you have received from your comrades and friends around the world. These messages are testimony

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to the historic role played by comrade Dave Hyland in the life and history of the international movement. Dave defended the heritage of the IC against the nationalist and opportunist politics of the WRP leadership in the split of 1985-86, helping to forge a politically homogeneous world party and paving the way for the renaissance of Marxism that is expressed every day on the WSWS. No small achievement!

Amid the political confusion, rampant subjectivism and renunciation of basic principles being fought for by the WRP leadership, when the crisis erupted in 1985 Dave Hyland's principled stand provided a lead to comrades. When your father read David North's critique of the WRP and agreed with it, he responded as a principled leader, contacting the Workers League to speak with North, re-establishing links with the international, and then fighting for political clarity within the cadre. This showed how Trotskyism, despite the WRP's opportunist backsliding, had sunk deep roots in the cadre and the working class. This tendency found a worthy representative in comrade Dave.

I had the privilege of meeting comrade Dave at the Workers League camp in 1988 and on subsequent trips to Australia where Dave spoke at public meetings. At that camp I remember clearly one night that all of the British comrades were sitting in a circle having a discussion on the grass. The level of discussion was very high at the school and comrade Dave was encouraging comrades to prepare contributions to the discussion.

I remember this clearly because I could hear that some comrades (in those great Yorkshire accents) were saying they didn't think they could contribute anything. Dave was patient and explained the significance of the struggle they had passed through and its connection to the school where we were discussing the historic struggle of the Fourth International and the significance of globalisation (and opposing the nationalist conceptions of Ray Athow). I was really wishing that I was sitting in that circle too and listening to Dave's responses to comrades, because I felt the same but couldn't hear it all from where we were standing! Anyway, Dave always struck me as someone who was approachable and close to the issues and problems in comrades' development.

In the early 1990s, during a trip to Australia, Dave spoke at a public meeting in Sydney and recounted the conditions during which he entered politics. Not just the political conditions narrowly conceived, but the broad social and cultural currents of the time were brought to life as Dave referred to the songs that were jamming the airwaves as the working class entered into struggle. It was clear that the confidence and optimism of those times remained with Dave, becoming firmly rooted in the history and traditions of Trotskyism.

In 1986, I read “How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism” and that document had the force of revelation. That was the first time I found out that there was a line of unbroken continuity between Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, through the post-war period up to this day. The continuity was forged in the struggle against Pabloite opportunism. Things started to make sense. And they have been making sense ever since. And within that framework, the struggle of the British comrades was, and continues to be, nothing short of inspiring.

I learn from your father's obituary by Chris that your parents have been together for some 50 years. That is a great achievement! Clearly a man, and a family, true in big things as in “small”. My thoughts are with you, Eileen, Claire and Paula.

My best wishes always,

Laura

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