

Guy Charron, 1962-2014: Canadian fighter for Trotskyism

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It is with immense sadness that the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) announce the death of Guy Charron, a leader of the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) and a daily collaborator in the work of the WSWWS.

Guy drowned Monday, July 28, in the Atlantic Ocean off North Carolina, where he was vacationing with his family. He was just 51 years-old.

Guy's death is a cruel blow to his family and friends and to the party and cause to which he dedicated his life—the socialist emancipation of the working class.

His contributions to the work of the ICFI, the SEP of Canada and its predecessor, the Workers League of Canada, span a period of almost 30 years.

Guy was active in all facets of the work of the SEP, from the elaboration of its political line and other leadership discussions to the distribution of leaflets among students and in working class neighbourhoods. He wrote some 70 WSWWS articles, initially under the byline Guy Leblanc and thereafter under his given name. The last article he wrote, published in English on March 27 and in French on March 19 of this year, was entitled “Quebec elections: The issues facing the working class.”

Many of these were significant articles, including exposures of the predatory actions of Canadian imperialism and its armed forces in Afghanistan, Haiti and the Middle East, appraisals of important working class struggles, and examinations of the ever-rightward shift of Quebec's political elite, including the trade union bureaucracy.

Nevertheless, Guy's articles hardly constitute a true measure of his contribution to the work of the WSWWS. He played a pivotal role in the French WSWWS, which began daily postings in 2005. Guy either translated or edited the translations of countless articles, as well as engaging himself in the daily technical work to maintain and update the site.

In a condolence message, Antoine Lerougetel, who collaborated with Guy over the past decade in developing the French page of the WSWWS as a daily source of Marxist analysis, observed: “In the early period of our collaboration, we spoke very frequently, even, for some periods, every morning... Guy conceived of this work as an essential internationalist collaboration, a contribution to allying the European and North American working class on the basis of a world revolutionary socialist perspective. Often, our discussions, very early in the morning for Guy, developed into broader discussions of politics and culture. In this way, I got to know and appreciate not only his acquired culture, but also his curiosity and interest in all aspects of human culture—the sciences, the arts, philosophy and their history.”

Guy was born on September 8, 1962 in Hull (Gatineau), then a

predominantly poor working class city, situated on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River, directly across from Canada's capital.

Guy himself grew up in a household of modest means. His grandfather was illiterate, a social blight quite common among impoverished French-Canadian workers and small farmers until the post-World War II era. Financial pressures in Guy's home were particularly severe after his parents separated when he was around ten years old.

Guy became increasingly politically aware and active in the first half of the 1980s, a period characterized in Canada, as in all the advanced capitalist countries, by an ever-widening bourgeois counter-offensive against the working class.

In Quebec, the Parti Québécois (PQ) government of René Lévesque turned viciously against the working class, slashing social spending, imposing concessionary contracts on public-sector workers by government decree, and threatening to fire teachers en masse when they rebelled against wage-cutting.

In the first half of the 1970s, Quebec had been the site of some of the most explosive struggles of the North American working class, including a spontaneous general strike in 1972. The union bureaucracy, with the aid of the Stalinists and Pabloites, politically emasculated this militant movement by harnessing it to Quebec nationalism and the big business PQ. Terrified by the rebellious mood of the Quebec workers, the union officialdom in English Canada and the social democratic politicians of the New Democratic Party (NDP), for their part, worked to quarantine and smother this working class upsurge.

Central to Guy's attraction to the ICFI and the Workers League was their implacable fight for an international socialist perspective—to unite workers around the world in the struggle to overthrow capitalism. Guy, in his early twenties, politically repudiated Quebec nationalism and the Quebec petty-bourgeois nationalist milieu. For the remainder of his life, he was bitterly hostile to all attempts to use nationalist appeals to divide the working class.

Guy first came into contact with the Workers League in 1985-86, as the International Committee was exposing and defeating the British Workers Revolutionary Party's abandonment of Trotskyism. Guy would later explain that what ultimately convinced him to become a Trotskyist and a member of the Workers League was translating *How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism, 1973-85*. Published in June 1986, this document made a detailed critique of the WRP's tactical opportunism and abandonment of the international socialist strategy of Permanent Revolution.

Guy played an important role in the Workers League's intensification of its struggle to forge the unity of US and Canadian

workers against the ruling elites on both sides of the border in response to the 1987 Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA). This required a political offensive against the unions and the NDP, which opposed the FTA on a chauvinist and reactionary economic nationalist basis, aligning themselves with the Liberal Party and the weaker sections of Canadian capital, which feared for their profits if exposed to increased competition from the US.

At this time, Guy was sharing with his then-partner, Maryse, responsibility for raising their young twin boys, Simon and David. Guy nonetheless immersed himself in political work, beginning a study of the history of the Trotskyist movement that would remain a major intellectual focus and source of political strength in subsequent decades.

Employed as an orderly at one of Montreal's largest hospitals, Hotel-Dieu, Guy led the party's intervention among public-sector workers. In 1988-89, he fought to prepare workers for an impending confrontation with the provincial government, which had armed itself with a series of anti-strike laws, and with the union leadership, which made no mention of these laws precisely because they had no intention of challenging the government. Ultimately, in the name of "social peace," the unions torpedoed a mass strike.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and related events in the 1990s required the Trotskyist movement to deepen its understanding of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the role of socialist consciousness in the struggle of the working class. Intense discussion and careful study of the work of the IC (including David North's report to the 12th IC Plenum, held in 1992, "After the Demise of the USSR: The Struggle for Marxism and the Tasks of the Fourth International") clarified Guy as to the link between the struggle to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership and the effort to revive a socialist culture in the working class. Guy threw himself heart and soul into the work of the party and the WSWS and thereafter played an ever more important role.

During the 1990s Guy had returned to school, studying first chemistry and then developing a passion for physics. At the Université de Montréal he became involved in research on medical imaging. By the time of his death, he was employed as a medical physicist in the radio-oncology department of one of Montreal's two major teaching hospitals.

While working at the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal (CHUM), Guy regularly participated in scientific conferences and research projects, and on occasion taught courses in his field of specialization.

Guy's was a mentally-taxing, high-pressure job. His tasks included determining the appropriate doses of radiation to be given to cancer patients and maintaining the high-technology machines used in the medical-imaging of cancer tumors. Errors could have catastrophic consequences for those being treated.

Frequently he put in ten-, even twelve-hour work days. Yet, through it all, he fought to make himself available for political work, including SEP (Canada) leadership discussions.

Such was his enthusiasm that comrades had on occasion to remind Guy not to overestimate the time and energy he could devote to political work, since, albeit from the best of intentions, this could result either in his failure to complete tasks or his driving himself too hard.

Guy was a joyful person, equipped with a caustic sense of humour. As noted above, he had great knowledge about a large array of subjects, including history, science, art and philosophy, was ever-

eager to share that knowledge, and always intellectually curious.

Guy took pride in the way he had chosen to lead his life. He was self-sacrificing, but there was no trace of martyrdom in his attitude. His readiness to give of himself was born of a generosity of spirit, theoretically and politically leavened by a Marxist understanding of the crisis of capitalism and the decisive significance of revolutionary leadership.

As one who had the privilege of working with Guy intimately for many years and to call him both a comrade and close friend, I would venture to say that the last years of his life were among his happiest. His work as a medical physicist, while exacting, gave him a fair measure of social and intellectual satisfaction.

A little more than four years ago, he found a new partner, Viviane, herself a medical doctor. Reflecting on Guy's life, she emphasized that his passionate commitment to the SEP and the Fourth International was bound with his love for his family—especially his two sons and four grandchildren—and his determination that they should live in a better world, free of want and oppression.

Last but not least, Guy was gratified by the expansion of the influence of the ICFI and the WSWS, while recognizing the immense challenges involved in overcoming the legacy of Stalinism and imbuing the working class with socialist consciousness.

Guy played a major role in the SEP's intervention in the six-month-long 2012 Quebec student strike, helping write, produce and distribute articles and leaflets arguing for students to turn to the working class as the only force with the social power to defeat the austerity agenda of big business. As the SEP had warned, in the absence of such a socialist perspective, the unions, with the student associations acting as their political appendages, isolated the students' struggle and harnessed the mass opposition to the Charest Liberal government to the election of a right-wing PQ government.

Guy took a keen interest in the education of younger members, taking the time to patiently work through historical and theoretical issues, whether it be explaining the fundamentals of historical materialism or the significance of the ICFI's struggle against Pabloite opportunism.

In the very last weeks of his life, Guy was involved in discussions aimed at implementing the decision of the recent IC Plenum to make the ICFI "the international centre of revolutionary opposition to the resurgence of imperialist violence and militarism." He was very enthusiastic about related initiatives to strengthen the theoretical and political foundations of the SEP of Canada and expand its work.

Guy's life was tragically cut short—a huge loss to his family, friends and the revolutionary party that he had made the center of his life. There is no doubt he had much more to give personally and politically.

That said, his was a full life, which left its mark on the work of the SEP and ICFI to forge the political instrument for the revolutionary mobilization of the international working class, and, therefore, its legacy will endure.



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