

Obituary: Australian Socialist Equality Party member Regina Lohr (June 21, 1956–October 10, 2022)

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It is with profound sadness that we report the death of Regina Suzanne Lohr, a member of the Trotskyist movement for 33 years. Regina died on October 10 in Coffs Harbour, New South Wales (NSW), following a four-year battle with breast cancer. She was 66 years old.

Regina is survived by her long-time partner and comrade Ken Mantell, and her four siblings, Ingrid, Liane, Robert and Irene.

For Regina's parents, Robert and Brigitte, early family life was intimately connected to World War II. In 1944, her father was sent to fight on the Eastern Front against the Red Army until he was wounded and repatriated to Germany. His wound would ultimately result in the loss of his leg.

After the war, the young couple, being Sudetenland Germans, found themselves homeless and moved to East Germany. There Robert trained as an electrical engineer, relocating to Karlsruhe where Regina was born. Karlsruhe was one of the many German cities and towns significantly damaged by British fighter bombers in 1942.

The family emigrated to Australia in 1964, arriving on January 25 on the SS Aurelia. As Regina explained at her 66th birthday celebrations this year, the family's decision to leave Europe at the height of the Cold War was prompted by the 1962 Cuban missile crisis which had brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

Regina was seven years old when the family arrived in 1960s Australia, a very different world to that of her home country, Germany. She recounted that on arrival the family drove around the working-class western and southwestern suburbs of Sydney, marvelling at the lines of fibro-cement sheeting homes which, to the young

European family, appeared as if constructed from stiff cardboard.

The family, now with the addition of Irene, Regina's fourth sibling, finally settled in the southwestern suburb of Picnic Point in Sydney where the Lohr children attended the local schools.

Following high school, Regina worked in the public service, including the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) but was repelled by the brutal treatment staff were compelled to mete out to applicants for welfare payments.

The turning point in Regina's life came in 1989 when she met the then Socialist Labour League (SLL), precursor of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), which she joined in 1990. This was a period of intense confusion for workers internationally, the result of the decision of the Stalinist bureaucracies in the former Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to dissolve the USSR and restore capitalist property relations in both countries thereby eviscerating what was left of the gains of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the "buffer states."

That this occurred without any organised mass opposition by the working class was the outcome of the betrayal of Stalinism, and their acolytes in the Pabloite revisionist organisations, which had thirty years prior broken with Trotskyism. The parties of the United Secretariat led by Ernest Mandel had hailed the emergence of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe as proof of the progressive role Stalinism could play. Mandel's German co-thinkers rushed to the defence of the hated bureaucratic forces in East Germany by joining the government led by the Socialist Unity Party

(SED) of the former GDR.

Only the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, fought Stalinism from the left. The Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (BSA, Socialist Labour League), predecessor of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG, Socialist Equality Party), was the only organisation in Germany to warn of the disastrous results of a restoration of capitalism, without making the slightest concessions to the SED.

In an appeal distributed on November 4, 1989, to a mass demonstration in Berlin, the BSA explained, “Political freedom and democratic rights can be won only through a political revolution in which the working class overthrows the ruling bureaucracy, drives it out of all its posts and establishes independent organs of proletarian power and democracy, workers’ councils, elected by the workers in the factories and neighbourhoods, accountable to them and based solely on their strength and mobilisation.”

It was to this analysis that Regina responded so emphatically. She was not swayed by the wave of capitalist triumphalism that fostered the lie that the collapse of the GDR and the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the end of history or of socialism. Once she understood that, in fact, it was the end of nationalist-based programs and organisations and that only a perspective of socialist internationalism could answer the growing crisis confronting the working class, she never wavered.

Regina worked in the branches of the SLL, then the SEP, which were active in the working-class suburbs of Sydney, campaigning with the SLL’s twice-weekly newspaper *Workers News* and, following the launch of the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) fought to increase the party’s influence among workers and young people. This also included fighting for the party’s policies in the public sector union and assisting with German translations.

For several years, Regina cared for her ageing parents and following their deaths, worked in home care, and then teaching children with learning difficulties. While she excelled in this demanding task, it was cut short by her diagnosis of breast cancer in 2018.

Regina met her diagnosis with the same resilience and determination that characterised her role in the

party. After six months of gruelling treatment, she was given the all-clear in 2019 and moved with Ken to Coffs Harbour.

The reprieve, however, was short-lived when the cancer returned only weeks after they had moved. For the next three and a half years Ken and Regina undertook every possible measure to defeat the disease. This included weekly trips to Tweed Heads, 285 kilometres north, to access treatment which was unavailable in Coffs Harbour Hospital.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic placed unforeseen obstacles to safe and effective treatment in a hospital system crippled by decades of funding cuts. This was especially evident in the regional health system in the mid-north coast of NSW. Despite her ailing health, her hospital admissions were the occasion for Regina to explain to anyone who would listen the possibility and necessity of fighting for scientifically based action to eliminate the virus.

The support of her friends, sister Irene and her comrades gave Regina enormous strength but what sustained her during this difficult period was her belief and confidence in the political perspective of socialist internationalism. She was determined to live so she could contribute to the victory of a socialist future for mankind.

The publication of the 2020 New Year statement authored by David North and Joseph Kishore, titled “The Decade of Socialist Revolution Begins,” prompted Regina to declare, “I want to be around for that.”

Tragically, cancer robbed Regina of that wish. The SEP and the working class has lost a diligent and committed fighter for Trotskyism but her memory and her legacy will live on in the struggles of her comrades and workers against the capitalist system.



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