

A Tribute to Helen Halyard (November 24, 1950–November 28, 2023)

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The unexpected and sudden death of Helen Halyard at the age of 73 deprives the working class in the United States and throughout the world of a courageous and selfless fighter for socialism. Her passing is at the same time an immense personal loss for her comrades in the Socialist Equality Party (US) and the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, many of whom worked closely with Helen for decades and even an entire half-century.

Since first joining the Workers League (predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party) in 1971, Helen played a critical role in the work of the Trotskyist movement. Politically radicalized by the mass civil rights movement and the struggle against the Vietnam War, she was deeply rooted—intellectually, culturally and emotionally—in the heritage and fighting traditions of the most advanced sections of the African-American working class.

Even before joining the Workers League, Helen identified the struggle against racial oppression within the United States with a broader international class struggle against capitalism and imperialism. That inherent tendency led Helen to break with all forms of nationalist politics and join the Workers League. Her turn to the Trotskyist movement was of the most conscious character. Helen emphatically rejected the opportunist adaptation to black nationalism espoused by the Stalinist Communist Party and the Pabloite Socialist Workers Party.

A thorough review and summation of Helen's historical role in the Trotskyist movement, spanning 52 years, is beyond the scope of this initial tribute. Her party comrades are still processing the shock of today's terrible loss. But what must be stated is that the history of the Trotskyist movement in the United States is inextricably bound up with the life of Helen Halyard.

A revolutionary party educates its members. But the political, social, cultural and moral character of the party is, in turn, profoundly influenced by the character of its cadre. This is especially the case with Helen. Her personality displayed a remarkable fusing of immense energy, exceptional intelligence, passionate devotion to the socialist cause, commitment to principles, intellectual integrity, personal generosity, humor and kindness. Helen was at the center of all the critical experiences of the Trotskyist movement and major episodes of the class struggle over the last 50 years.

The older members of the SEP who had the privilege to work with Helen for so many years have lost a trusted comrade and beloved and irreplaceable friend. The younger members have lost an inspiring teacher.

But Helen Halyard's life work will live on in the work of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International and the struggles of the working class.

The World Socialist Web Site will publish a longer obituary of Comrade Helen Halyard, along with tributes from the ICFI, in the coming days.



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