

“The essence of Helen Halyard is that she was party, she was cadre”

Cheryl Crisp
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We are publishing here the tribute to Helen Halyard given by Cheryl Crisp, the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party of Australia, to a memorial meeting for Comrade Helen held by the Socialist Equality Party (US) and the International Committee of the Fourth International on Sunday, December 3.

On behalf of the Socialist Equality Party in Australia, I want to join my comrades in the US SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International internationally in conveying my deepest condolences on the sudden death of comrade Helen Halyard.

The aging process is, unfortunately, accompanied by the more frequent attendance at funerals, and I have remarked more than once that one often learns more about a person at his or her funeral than was known before it, which is a pity. While this will undoubtedly also apply to elements of Helen’s life, the essentials are already known.

The essence of Helen Halyard is she was party. She was cadre. When she made the decision to join the Young Socialists in 1971, then the Workers League, it was a decision for life. She devoted her entire adult life to the building of the revolutionary party and the political education and training of the workers and youth who joined to ensure the socialist perspective was possible.

When discussing the life of comrade Tom Henehan, another cadre of the Workers League, following his assassination in 1977, Michael Banda, then the general secretary of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) in Britain, described cadre in the following way: “Revolutionaries are not born. They are forged. They are trained out of the experiences of this movement, out of the intervention of its leadership, out of the whole struggle of past generations.” Comrade Helen is an example of that forging and training.

I first met Helen in Britain at the WRP College of Marxist Education in Parwich, in, I think, 1980, some years before the 1985–86 split with the WRP. It was my first international school, and as was to become a regular feature at the introductory meeting, the comrades in attendance from the different sections, including the British, were warned by the WRP leaders in charge that it was impermissible to discuss any aspect of the experiences of our sections with each other. This was purportedly for security reasons, but, in fact, had far more to do with the nationalist perspective and divisions that the WRP fostered within the IC.

It was an excruciatingly difficult instruction to abide by, and when Helen and I found ourselves in our dormitories, our discussions would invariably turn to the interventions, problems and experiences of the party. After all, that was our life. In the event our paths crossed at subsequent schools, our discussions would continue. Her advice was immensely appreciated, and I found our discussions of imperishable assistance.

It took the defeat of the national opportunism of the WRP by the internationalists of the ICFI, in the split, to transform the relationships between the sections of the ICFI to those of what is now a truly internationalist organisation, with a level of collaboration that is unprecedented in the socialist movement. This was certainly enabled by the leaps in technology, but, most importantly, by the reestablishment of the basic tenet of the Trotskyist movement—that it is internationalist in program and organisation.

That transformation was expressed very markedly by comrade Helen. In 1988, when Ed Winn and Barry Grey stood as the presidential and vice presidential candidates for the Workers League, it was a truly international campaign, in which numbers of comrades from the IC sections, including from Australia,

participated. Comrades remarked that comrade Helen's engagement, interest, advice and collaboration were a highlight of the campaign. Her explanation of the history of the American working class and its struggles has been commented on by more than one comrade who participated in that campaign.

In 1992, when Helen, as the Workers League presidential candidate, travelled to Australia in the last leg of a month-long international tour that encompassed Britain, Germany and Sri Lanka, it was a further expression of the close integration and collaboration of the IC sections.

The comrades in the US had asserted correctly that every person on earth should have a vote in the American elections, as everyone around the world is impacted by the outcome, as is the American working class.

In addition to the thousands of workers and youth she met and spoke to in those countries, Helen met hundreds of postal workers, rail workers, metal workers, teachers, students and youth in Australia. She spoke to packed public meetings in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. She also made sure to speak to comrades in the party. She was interested in the cadre, who are the pledges for the future.

Helen's tour took place in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, which had been greeted by a wave of triumphalism from bourgeois spokesmen and academics as the "end of history," the end of socialism and the triumph of capitalism.

The International Committee counterposed to such hollow prognoses that of Marxism. In fact, the end of the Soviet Union at the hands of the Stalinist bureaucracy expressed the bankruptcy not just of Stalinism, but of all national-based political programs, organisations and economies. The dissolution of the Soviet Union by the venal bureaucracy was the confirmation of Leon Trotsky's warning that unless the working class removed the bureaucratic excrescence through a political revolution, the bureaucracy would inevitably preside over the liquidation of the gains of the 1917 October Revolution.

The deepening crisis of capitalism was evident, as comrade Helen's tour highlighted. The situation was sharply expressed in the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq, which was to become the first of unending military

conflicts, as US imperialism sought to resolve its crisis by means of the sword. As Helen explained, the "imperialist war in Iraq marks a new period of barbarism against the masses worldwide... The attitude of the US ruling class to the masses and youth in Iraq is not different from its attitude to the working class and young people in the United States.

"Thousands of young people in the US are given the choice to either remain permanently unemployed, secure some job in a fast-food restaurant or join the military to be used as cannon fodder for a tiny handful of billionaires."

"The solution for the working class," she insisted, referencing the uprisings against the police murder of Rodney King in LA, "is not spontaneous rebellion, but a political struggle against the capitalist state as a whole, and that is what our election campaign is seeking to initiate and build up."

That analysis stands. The crisis of capitalism has deepened, and the wars are becoming more frequent and terrible, as demonstrated in the genocide taking place in Gaza by the Israeli government, supported by every single imperialist government on earth. The world is seeing, in real time, through social media, the real face of capitalism. There is not one rule for the Palestinians and another for the Australian, American or European working class.

The perspective to which Helen Halyard committed her entire adult life, the fight to build the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution, for the overthrow of a despised and bankrupt capitalist system and the establishment of a socialist society, is the example and lead to which millions of workers and youth will turn in the next period.

It is the Helen Halyards of the world they will hold aloft.

Thank you, comrades.



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