

“Helen was a true comrade, who was willing to sacrifice so much, even her life, like Tom Henehan”

Gary Tyler
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The following tribute to Helen Halyard was sent by Gary Tyler to Larry Porter, the assistant national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (US). Helen, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for half a century, died suddenly on November 28 at the age of 73.

Helen played a major role in the fight carried out by the Workers League, the predecessor to the SEP, and its youth movement, the Young Socialists, to free Gary, who was framed up in Louisiana at the age of 16 for the shooting of a white youth during the integration of Destrehan High School. Tyler was convicted by an all-white jury and sentenced to death.

The Young Socialists publicized Gary’s case throughout the United States, distributing tens of thousands of fliers and thousands of copies of a pamphlet explaining the case, and winning support from broad layers of workers as well as union leaders representing many millions.

The campaign culminated in a march through Harlem in 1976 in which hundreds of youth participated. Helen and Tom Henehan—a leading member of the Workers League who died in a political assassination in October 1977—led this campaign. Helen formed a close relationship with the Tyler family, particularly Gary’s mother Juanita. Helen visited her in Destrehan, and Juanita Tyler came to Detroit for a Young Socialists conference where the defense of Gary Tyler was the main focus.

When the US Supreme Court issued its ruling in 1976 reestablishing the death penalty but striking down mandatory sentencing laws like those in Louisiana, Gary was taken off death row. He remained in prison

however for 41 years, despite court findings that his original conviction was unconstitutional. He was released only in 2016, after the Supreme Court struck down life sentences without parole for those, like Gary, convicted as juveniles.

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Hi Larry,

I am very sorry to hear about the unfortunate passing of Helen. I most distinctly remember meeting her back in 1976 when she bravely visited me in Convent, Louisiana. I admired her strength and tenacity in getting the story out about what happened to me. She was highly respected and loved by my family, and especially became close to my mother.

I am forever grateful for the endless support and dedication she unselfishly rendered to the campaign to free me. She was a true comrade, who was willing to sacrifice so much, even her life, like Tom Henehan.

Once again, we lose another soldier in the struggle. May her soul rest in peace. Thanks for informing me of this tragic news. My heart is heavy tonight.

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We encourage our readers to watch the interview below with Gary Tyler and to read this article to learn more about his frame-up and struggle for freedom.



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