

“If we were going to ask Helen serious questions, we were going to get serious answers”

Bryan Dyne
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We are publishing here the tribute to Helen Halyard given by Bryan Dyne on behalf of the “Party kids.” Bryan, whose parents are long-time members of the SEP in the US, is a science writer for the WSW. Bryan delivered his remarks to a memorial meeting for Helen held on December 3.

Comrades, family and friends,

My name is Bryan Dyne. Thank you all for letting me speak at this memorial meeting for Helen Halyard. I was honored to be Helen’s comrade for the last 13 years. I also, however, had the relatively unique privilege of having known Helen for all my life.

Growing up as a Party kid was a singular experience. My generation was born either just before or in the aftermath of the split between the International Committee and the WRP. Our parents were at the center of the struggle for the survival of the Trotskyist movement, and then, as the fourth phase of the movement began, the immense task of reestablishing the movement on internationalist foundations and being at the forefront of the renaissance of genuine Marxism.

Being children, we, of course, were hardly aware of such things. We did not know Helen as a comrade; she was, instead, “one of the moms,” one of the many surrogate parents and extended family members who loved us as we grew into adulthood, and whom we loved and still love even, as with Helen, after their passing.

And as one might expect, we had many questions for our parents growing up. Above all, why were they always reading? What were they reading? Why were they so interested in history and politics? Why were their names sometimes in the news? We all quickly realized that there were no easy answers and had an

inkling that our parents were much more complex people than just mom and dad.

One of my more memorable experiences as I began to understand more of what our parents did was learning about the history of ebonics. It was something that came up in high school, and when I asked about it, the answer was always, “You should talk to Helen.”

When I did, it was immensely eye-opening. After that conversation, I had a real appreciation of the history of the term, the dangers of black nationalist politics and the political motives behind trying to invent a language. Helen even explained what it meant for a collection of words to be a language, that it isn’t arbitrary, but historically and socially developed. The fact that there are linguistic traditions that stem from racial oppression is a reflection of the class character of American society, not some sort of inherent aspect of being African-American.

There are many other aspects to the question of ebonics that I did not understand at the time, but what I really got from Helen was that I *could* understand if I put in the work.

Don’t forget that this was in the 2000s. The promotion of ignorance was being led by the president of the United States and it was deeply reflected culturally, and still is. Who can really know things? Why not just live in the moment?

Helen made sure we accepted none of this. If we were going to ask serious questions, we were going to get serious answers. Not as children, but as young people who didn’t have the experiences she had, and so it was her duty to share.

At the same time, she did so with a truly stupendous amount of patience and empathy. She understood the

environment in which we grew up and why we might have illusions in black nationalism, the trade unions, postmodernism, etc. And so she was definitely sharp when she needed to be, but never petty. She built us up and passed along her best traits. I never left a conversation with her that didn't involve placing a topic in its historical context and end in some deep thinking on my part.

That was only amplified when I made the decision to join the party. It was only then that I fully realized that in her conversations with the Party kids, Helen always brought her enormous insight into history, politics, philosophy and culture and her deeply historical and deeply materialist perspective. She was forged in the class struggle, the fights with Wohlforth, the split with the WRP and the development of the International Committee afterwards. And these experiences were constantly with her, and helped shape each and every one of us into the best young people I know.

And I made sure to take advantage of it. Helen was a fountain of knowledge and always had time to talk, to educate and to make sure that the lessons she learned as she developed as a comrade were passed on.

And I'll never forget when she casually said to me at the end of the 2010 Congress, "You're still a provisional member? We'll have to fix that." It was one of the proudest moments of my life to be acknowledged not just as her family, but as Helen's comrade.

So while we will never be able to speak to her again, what she has said and done lives on through all of us. She was one of the best humans I've ever known and one of the best humans to have ever lived. We will carry a part of Helen with us always as we work toward the death of capitalism and the establishment of international socialism.

Long live the memory of Comrade Helen!



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