

“We must carry forward Helen Halyard’s life and work through the struggle of the ICFI for the victory of socialism throughout the world”

Joseph Kishore
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We are publishing here the tribute to Helen Halyard given by Joseph Kishore, the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (US), to a memorial meeting for Comrade Helen held on December 3.

Dear Comrades and friends,

I am currently en route to Sri Lanka. The conditions for speaking to this meeting are not ideal, but I am honored to be able to participate in this very important and historic event.

What can one add to the previous statements of comrades about Helen? She was an extraordinary comrade, an extraordinary person. The adjectives used by comrades in today’s meeting give a sense of her character: principled, self-sacrificing, warm, dedicated, cultured, honest, devoted, empathetic, blunt, unpretentious, tenacious, generous, optimistic, and, in the revolutionary and materialist sense, the “real thing,” the “genuine article.”

Comrade Helen Halyard reflected the strength of the party and, in turn, imparted her strength to the party, in many different ways. As Comrade North noted, a full summary of Comrade Halyard’s influence would require a review of the history of the Trotskyist movement over the past half-century. She played an important role in the struggles of the Workers League and the International Committee, in the fight against Wohlforth’s renegacy and the struggle, led by Comrade North, against the national opportunist degeneration of the Workers Revolutionary Party. She was centrally involved in the fight to expose the political assassination of Comrade Tom Henehan, in the campaign to free Gary Tyler, in the opposition to the victimization of Roger Cawthra and Mary Coleman, in countless strikes and struggles of the working class, and, of course, in the early election campaigns of the Workers League.

My own experiences with Helen began shortly after I came into contact with the movement. She was one of the first comrades I met in Detroit, in 1999. The discussion we had addressed many issues with which, at that point, I had very little familiarity: Pabloism, the Socialist Workers Party, the history of our party, Trotskyism, the Russian Revolution. I stayed with her and Comrade Tim when working for a summer at the plant. I recall not only the many political discussions, but also the immense amount of literature, books and pamphlets, that filled their basement and shelves—something that I came to learn was a common feature in the houses of comrades.

It is impossible to recount all the discussions, all the many elements of the work of the party she contributed to in the years since I became national secretary—the development of the work in Detroit, the Committee Against Utility Shutoffs, the fight to defend the Detroit Institute of Arts; the finance work, which involves critical discussions with contacts and supporters. If it was necessary to make a call to an important contact to have political discussion, one could always rely on Comrade Helen.

I think she took most pride, however, in her work in politically educating the younger members. Up until the final week of her life, despite many health problems, she participated in educational classes of the South and Southeast branches. She took very seriously the responsibility of the older generation to bring to the newer generations the experiences of the past. The comrades have spoken often of her indispensable role in providing guidance and leadership.

As comrades have reviewed, Helen was won to the party through a political struggle, against Pabloism, against black nationalism and its promotion by the Socialist Workers Party. Having been won to the party,

she *fought* for the program of the party, guided by the understanding that there was no higher personal responsibility or personal satisfaction.

What imparts to the Trotskyist movement its strength, its endurance—an endurance that is imparted to the cadre who are won to the movement? It is the correspondence of the program of the party with powerful revolutionary tendencies in the objective situation.

This correspondence developed through different historical periods, during which it was more or less evident. There were periods in history when the Trotskyist movement was isolated, when the forces of reaction were able to deliver it terrible blows. The movement persisted and fought, animated by revolutionary optimism in the role of the international working class, convinced that the course of events would, as Trotsky put it, leave of the old organizations not one stone upon another. And so it has.

Traveling to Sri Lanka, I have been thinking of the trip Helen herself took just over three decades ago, as part of the party's powerful presidential election campaign in 1992. I have been thinking about the movement and its strength, which is so much tied up with its international character.

We are a party with powerful historical roots, as Helen would so often emphasize. We are a party of history. We strive at every point to connect the present with the immense experience embodied in the history of the movement itself. This is so closely tied to the party's international character, its international perspective.

Marxism—and Trotskyism is the Marxism of the 21st century—is based on irreconcilable opposition to all forms of nationalism, of which racial politics is one expression. Marxism is a movement based on the common interests of workers of all countries, of all races. The proletariat has no fatherland.

How powerfully this perspective corresponds to objective developments today! The contradictions of the capitalist system are driving the ruling class to barbarism, to reaction, to war and genocide, to fascism and authoritarianism. But the working class, the American and international working class, is a social power of enormous and growing force.

In her remarks in Sri Lanka in 1992, Comrade Helen explained: “The growth of global economy strengthens the working class, creating the objective conditions to unite workers across national boundaries. It is only the Fourth International that builds a world party in the struggle for world socialism.”

This point was made seven years after the split with the

Workers Revolutionary Party, as the International Committee of the Fourth International analyzed the significance of globalization, of revolutionary changes in technology and communications. It was six years before the founding of the *World Socialist Web Site*, which has created the conditions for an extraordinary integration of the work of the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

Over the past three decades, these tendencies have grown enormously. Global internet usage has increased from only 3 percent in 1996 to more than 65 percent today. The international perspective of the party corresponds powerfully to reality.

The perspective of Pabloism, the orientation to the national bureaucracies, to Stalinism, Castroism, Maoism, to all the supposed alternatives to the building of a revolutionary leadership of the working class, has ended in shipwreck. There is an immense working class that is entering into struggle and the perspective of the party is winning a growing audience. The International Committee is growing and expanding throughout the world, as this meeting has powerfully demonstrated.

We understand, as Trotsky explained, that the crisis of mankind is ultimately reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership.

Comrades, in her life and in her political work, Comrade Helen fought untiringly for the perspective of Trotskyism. We mourn her loss, as a comrade, as a friend. It is our task to ensure that her life and work are carried forward, with increased devotion, through the political struggle of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International, and the victory of socialism throughout the world.



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