

Remarks by David North at the conclusion of the international memorial meeting for Helen Halyard

David North
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We are publishing here the summation given by David North to the memorial meeting for Comrade Helen Halyard held on December 3. Helen, a leading member of the Socialist Equality Party (US) and the International Committee of the Fourth International for more than half a century, died suddenly on November 28 at the age of 73.

We have spoken of Comrade Helen, first and foremost, as a political person, as a political collaborator, as one who played a significant role in the development of our movement, and whose contribution to the building of the Trotskyist party throughout the world will have enduring significance.

There are two phrases that come to mind. One was said by Cannon. I think he was quoting another when he said, “With the love of comrades, we shall change the world.”

Trotsky, somewhat more reserved but no less passionate, said that there is a French saying among revolutionists that “the party is a great friendship.” But then he added, “for there to be a great friendship, there must be a great selection.”

Helen had passed through the selection made by the historical process, which determines why one or another person becomes a political leader of great significance. The combination of personal qualities, historical experiences, subjective forces—all of this has a somewhat unpredictable character. It is part of the contradictions of the historical process.

We are not individuals. As Marx said so profoundly, we are all an ensemble of social relations. We are products of our time. We are products of the experiences through which we pass. We express not only ourselves, but the strengths and weaknesses of the

class we strive to represent and serve and lead.

I speak now from the standpoint of the generation that joined the party when Helen joined it, those of us who passed from youth, who met when we were in our early 20s and now are in our 70s. We know each other well, strengths and weaknesses. There are very few secrets that are kept for so long a period of time.

All the comrades who have spoken of Helen today have spoken of her effect on politics, on history and on themselves. She is part of our lives, she will always be part of our lives, and she will be part of the lives of those who continue this work for many years to come.

We are entering into revolutionary struggles, and I tend to think that the conquest of power will come perhaps sooner than many can imagine. The capitalist system and its leaders are rotting on their feet. The crimes which they are now committing are of such a character that they can never be forgotten, let alone forgiven. We all are perhaps familiar with what John Brown had to say about the remission of sins. “Woe to him who giveth offense”—that was Lincoln. Brown said, “there is retribution,” and that will come.

But that great retribution will not be of a personal character. It will be achieved through the working class, through the struggle of workers all over the globe who will come to recognize ever more clearly the necessity to put an end to capitalism, to its barbarism.

And within that context, within the context of present developments, it is not out of place that we have placed so much emphasis on the struggle against nationalism, for internationalism. After all, what we are witnessing today, the horrific crimes committed by Israel, are all the more terrible in that they are being justified by invoking crimes that were committed against the

Jewish people by the Nazis. What is being done by Zionism demonstrates the deeply reactionary, barbaric role of nationalism—this discredited and obsolete political ideology in the present epoch.

Zionism is only the most complete expression of this degenerate world outlook, and it is the outlook of a ruling class whose historical function has been completely exhausted.

Yes, the building of the party is a difficult challenge. It is not easy. It is not easy to educate masses of workers, but that work of education is not being conducted by ourselves alone. Capitalism itself is a great educator. The masses of the world are being reminded why there was a Russian Revolution, why Marxism became a political force that inspired millions throughout the world. And all that Marxism contains, all that it teaches, is expressed today in the Trotskyist movement.

Listening to the contributions that have been made by comrades throughout the world, of many different ages—from 96 and 82 to the relative youngsters in their early 70s and 60s, and all those who are just in their early 30s and 20s—one is struck by the power and the clarity of all these contributions. What they really mean is that something profound is at work among masses of people. If we are an ensemble of social relations, then what we say and how we express ourselves, the ability to express ourselves, demonstrates something that is taking place among the masses.

If Helen were with us and she had heard these contributions, she would understand that. She would be pleased by the many good things that were said about her, perhaps somewhat put off by what she would say was excessive flattery. But she would have to recognize the power of what comrades have said, the way they have woven together the tapestry, the warp and woof of objective and subjective conditions. She would understand that this would mean something profound is underway.

The political situation is now advancing rapidly. So our task is to carry forward that work. What we said today we meant. We are proud to have been Helen's comrades, to have worked with her, to have assisted her and been assisted by her. So now, we must carry this work forward in the United States and throughout the world.



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