

“Helen exemplified what it means to be a party cadre”

Nancy Hanover
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We are publishing here the tribute to Helen Halyard written by Nancy Hanover, a writer and editor for the World Socialist Web Site and a member of the Trotskyist movement in the US for more than four decades. Comrade Helen, a leader 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.

Comrade Helen was a mentor, a collaborator, a confidant, and a very dear friend to me. We had countless meals and almost every significant holiday together. She was part of our extended “family.” Looking through my photos, there are hundreds of them with her, our children and comrades from across the country and the world.

She brought a sensitive intellect, a joyful appreciation of life’s beauty (and that legendary laugh), and a wide-ranging appreciation of art and history into our lives. As others have pointed out, she was a jazz lover. But she also loved Motown, contemporary and classical music. What fun we had seeing the Detroit legend Thornetta Davis crowned “Queen of the Blues!” Helen was so devoted to the arts that she considered relocating to Detroit Midtown just so she could walk to more events at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Most of all, however, Helen exemplified what it means to be a “party cadre.” Her life expresses the significance of the party history, of which she was a bearer and fearless advocate. In the aftermath of the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, many former “socialists” abandoned the claim, preached hopelessness and proclaimed the period “Midnight in the Century.” Helen, on the contrary, was animated by the International Committee’s fight against the post-Stalinist school of falsification and drew new strength from the vindication of Trotsky’s warnings and the

party’s re-doubled ideological struggle against all forms of nationalism.

She bore intense hatred for the upper-middle-class proponents of racialist politics and their promotion of the Democratic Party. Here she also took a stand against historical falsification. Her lecture excoriating the reactionary and divisive notion of Ebonics retains its profound relevance and will educate young people far into the future.

Helen always insisted that race was subordinate to class and on the necessity to unify the working class as a whole against capitalist oppression. In 2015, Helen wrote a tribute to the white civil rights leader Viola Liuzzo, murdered by the KKK in Alabama a half century prior. She met with Liuzzo’s family and visited her grave. Helen enthusiastically participated in the party’s campaign against the falsifications of the *New York Times*’s 1619 Project. She also reached out to, and became friends with, the courageous historian Victoria Bynum, who joined with the party and other principled academics to set the record straight.

Helen devoted over 50 years of her life, her entire adulthood, to the building of a revolutionary, Trotskyist leadership in the working class. She traveled to Dayton, Ohio, to interview Jim Lawrence, formerly an autoworker at General Motors’ Delco Moraine plant and leader of the Trade Union Alliance for a Labor Party, on his lifelong struggle for Trotskyism within the industrial working class. Helen took the *Bulletin*, the *International Workers Bulletin*, and then the *Autoworkers Newsletter* to thousands of autoworkers in Detroit.

Helen won the respect of tens of thousands and the friendships of many. She took a genuine interest in the lives of everyone she met.

How does one account for the ability to live a life

with such internal consistency and principle?

In Comrade David North's tribute to the life of Tom Henehan, written in 1984 to delineate Trotskyist internationalism from the Workers Revolutionary Party's growing adaptation to nationalism, he wrote:

[Tom Henehan's] political development was bound up with the historical struggles that have tempered the Trotskyist movement for nearly six decades and out of which the Workers League itself emerged. The real heart of cadre training is the conscious subordination of all who join the Party to the revolutionary principles through which the historical continuity of the Marxist movement is expressed. By "historical continuity," we have in mind the unbroken chain of political and ideological struggle by our international movement against Stalinism, Social Democracy, revisionism, and all other enemies of the working class.

Helen achieved greatness because she chose to fight for this "historical continuity" from the day she joined at the age of 21 until the day she died. The concept implies no simple "carrying the torch"; it means a continuous and deepening political and intellectual fight. It lives through the flesh and blood of real people. It requires courage, immense creativity and drive—all of which Helen possessed in abundance.

There were so many decisive moments in which Helen played a critical part in fighting for the political continuity of Trotskyism. She was on the Central Committee and voted to suspend Tim Wohlforth as national secretary of the Workers League for his egregious violation of party security. She attended the meeting of the International Committee which launched the historical investigation into the assassination of Leon Trotsky, Security and the Fourth International.

Basing herself on the party's long fight against Stalinism and Pabloite revisionism, Helen supported the immense struggle of the International Committee against the degeneration of the Workers Revolutionary Party. During these years of struggle, we lost not a few party members. Only those, like Helen, who worked

through the political and historical issues, could play their part in maintaining the unbroken continuity of Trotskyism.

As part of this struggle, Helen simultaneously played a leading and very active role in mobilizing the working class and fighting for its political independence. As we have said, there were few campaigns during her long years in the party in which Helen did not play a leading role.

We must honor Helen's life by deepening the fight for Trotskyism and resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership. We do so with the full confidence, as she so often proclaimed, that the working class will rise to its historical task and abolish capitalism.



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