

Tribute to Helen: Beverly Lozano, a supporter from California

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We are publishing here the tribute to Helen Halyard written by Beverly Lozano, a supporter of the World Socialist Web Site. 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.

Helen Halyard's decision to join the Trotskyist movement was a highly conscious political act initially prompted by her political radicalization under the combined impact of the civil rights struggles and the movement against the war in Vietnam. However, unlike many of her contemporaries who were similarly radicalized, the path she took lasted a lifetime, and avoided the errors into which so many of us wandered—"third world" nationalism, identity politics, and adherence to the two-party system.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were experienced as a time of great hope for lasting social change. However, unlike the Trotskyist movement led by the International Committee of the Fourth International, the efforts were largely idealistic, and had neither a theoretical framework, an organizational structure, nor a strategic plan. Participants relied mostly on quickly planned demonstrations and inspiring slogans focused on the present moment: "Dare to struggle, dare to win!" Seize the moment, win the day!"

It seemed at the time that with faithful repetition of these slogans, we could permanently alter the social and political landscape, and eventually stop marching up and down in the streets. On the other hand, theory, organizational structure and strategic plans were superfluous (and unexciting). The few of us who suggested seeking the roots of war and poverty in the capitalist system itself were criticized by the proponents of spontaneity, whose worst insult was to

accuse us of suffering from a "program mentality." We lost the debate. The war and the draft wound down, modest measures for "affirmative" action were legislated, and we could at last move on with our lives—pursue a career, acquire a house, and settle down in middle age to middle class life.

For a large segment of this cohort, the "Movement" was over—won and done. In the words of WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North, we indulged in "unwarranted euphoria" when rewarded with the successes of the sixties and early seventies, while today, "confronted with setbacks," we stand incredulously by as state legislatures and the US Supreme Court cancel what we thought would never be undone.

Helen, however, never lapsed into the unwarranted euphoria of early accomplishments, nor did she capitulate to the discouragement of today's setbacks. Instead, she devoted herself to uniting the entire working class on the basis of a long-term strategy. This was no idealistic slogan in which one "seized the moment," but instead a program to abolish capitalism and establish a socialist society. We can therefore be sure that Helen Halyard was neither surprised nor discouraged to witness in her lifetime the recent undoing of past "successes." As she said to the Emergency Conference Against War in 2007:

Our long-term strategy is the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of socialist society. There are no easy answers to the problem and the conditions of oppression that face millions all over the world ... There are no answers outside the independent mobilization of the working class.

Today, we celebrate Helen Halyard as a comrade unafraid to address “problems and conditions of oppression” for which there are “no easy answers.” She was well able to work on a global scale. However, it may not be well known that, even with a task of that magnitude, Helen took time to reach out to individuals with whom her work brought her into personal contact, however distant.

I am one of those fortunate ones. A few years older than Helen, I live a rather isolated life in rural California. The nearest town is politically conservative, and the Tea Party signs previously posted around the landscape have now been replaced at downtown businesses and residential neighborhood by the equally right-wing icon of the “Don’t Tread on Me” flag.

However, several years ago, my isolation was mitigated when I happened to find the *World Socialist Web Site*, and after becoming a regular reader, had occasion to call with a question. Helen answered the phone, and given the shared political experiences of our youth, we struck up a conversation.

Realizing that I was living a solitary existence in what Marx and Engels termed “the idiocy of rural life” (*The Communist Manifesto*), Helen asked if she might call me from time to time. I was pleased, and despite her workload, I would hear from her every month or so. Gradually, Helen Halyard’s voice became for me the human voice of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party. What might otherwise have simply remained a computer screen of news articles came to life as an organization of like-minded others working to “abolish capitalism and establish a socialist society.”

There were times when our conversations had to be short, but Helen always let me know that she’d call back, and she always did ... until recently. In mid-October, we spoke briefly, but given her busy schedule, we agreed to talk another time. Some weeks went by without my hearing from her, until on December 2, I decided to call her myself, even if she was busy. But first, I thought I’d go to the website and look at the day’s articles so that we could talk about the latest news.

The headline of the leading article was heartbreaking: “Helen Halyard (1950-2023), a life dedicated to the liberation of the working class.” I was too late—there will be no more calls. Helen is gone, but

despite that sad fact, I still hear her voice declaring the answer to the problem and conditions of oppression that face millions all over the world—that is, “the independent mobilization of the working class.”



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