

# “Building the world party was Helen’s goal in life, to which she made an indelible contribution”

Patrick Martin, Esther Galen  
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*We are publishing here the tribute to Helen Halyard written by Patrick Martin, a member of the US editorial board of the World Socialist Web Site and a member of the Workers League and Socialist Equality Party for 52 years, and Esther Galen, a member of the Workers League and Socialist Equality Party for 53 years. Comrade Helen, a leading member of the SEP (US) and the International Committee of the Fourth International for more than 50 years, died suddenly on November 28 at the age of 73.*

We are among Helen’s oldest comrades and friends. Esther knew her for 51 years, and Marty for 50, and both of us collaborated closely with Helen throughout our entire adult lives. She is irreplaceable, both politically and personally.

Helen was, as many others paying tribute to her have said, a representative of the finest attributes of the American working class. She was intransigent in her outrage over the brutality of American capitalism, whether expressed in police violence and frame-ups, or the murder of strikers on the picket line, or the savagery of imperialist war, from the Vietnam War, which contributed to her initial radicalization, to the US-backed genocide in Gaza, during her final months.

This opposition was combined with an understanding that the working class in the United States could only overcome the most powerful imperialist ruling class in the world as part of an international struggle, mobilizing workers on every continent in a united struggle for socialism.

In country after country, workers of every type, with various languages and customs, are being assembled by the ICFI into the most powerful force on earth, an international, class-conscious revolutionary movement

of the working class. This was Helen’s goal in life, to which she made an indelible contribution.

Helen brought into the party not only her amazing energy and determination, but intellectual stature and a continuous desire to learn and to transmit that learning to others. She was both educated and an educator. Nothing gave her greater happiness than the “aha” moment when workers or youth entering the party began to fully grasp the significance of the international revolutionary perspective, so that their understanding began to reflect their objective class position.

For that reason, the attack on Marxism by the leaders of the Workers Revolutionary Party aroused in her a furious class response. She hated the mystification of dialectics that was employed by Healy, Banda and Slaughter to conceal their scrapping of the historically developed program and perspective of the Fourth International and justify a practice based on the grossest forms of opportunism.

Helen had spent a year carrying out political work in the British section, and this gave her an insight into the crisis and decay of the WRP that contributed to the development of the Workers League’s fight against it. It also reinforced her conviction that the world party had to be exactly that: a party in which each cadre in each section was linked to every other comrade around the world in a common struggle.

As someone won to the Fourth International by the fight which Healy had led in his best years, Helen welcomed the resurgence of that struggle for principles that was taken up throughout the ICFI in 1985-86.

During that period, Helen was the assistant national secretary of the Workers League, taking great responsibility for the party work during Dave North’s

travel to Britain and other sections to consolidate the gains of the split with the WRP opportunists and develop the perspective and cadre of the international movement.

Marty worked closely with Helen as the *Bulletin* spearheaded the party's many interventions in the working class during a series of class battles in the 1980s. And they held innumerable discussions on political developments, both in the editorial work and on the party's Political Committee.

Esther regarded Helen as her closest comrade from the earliest days of their political activity. They campaigned at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, along with Tom Henehan, and in building the Young Socialists in Brooklyn. At one point in Manhattan, they were roommates.

They later worked together on such projects as the publication of the memoirs of Nadezhda Joffe, daughter of leading Trotskyist Adolf Joffe, *Back in Time: My Life, My Fate, My Epoch*. When Nadezhda traveled to the US to promote the publication of her memoir in English, Esther and Helen helped organize and participated in a well-attended book launch in Manhattan.

Helen was a real "people person," as they say, a very outgoing personality. She loved political campaigning, whether it was speaking to workers and youth attending a meeting or selling the *Bulletin* to workers going into their jobs, whether it was in the US or Sri Lanka or Germany or anywhere else. She brought the party's perspective to life, in the fullest sense.

She was patient while politically educating workers, building relationships that lasted years. She was respected for her firmness, including her intransigence on raising funds to sustain the party. She knew what sacrifices workers would make, and had no reluctance in asking for them.

Helen was also a dear friend and she and Esther shared moments of disappointment, heartbreaks and joys. When our girls were growing up, they could always confide in Helen and visit her when they needed a break, or a different take on their problems.

One of the worst consequences of the COVID pandemic has been the enforced separation of party members, particularly those at greatest risk because of their age and health. But Helen was in our "bubble," and we were still able to talk and see her even when she

was ill. These memories will remain with us as long as we live.



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