

A comment on David North's review: *Biography as demonology: Aidan Beatty's The Party is Always Right: The Untold Story of Gerry Healy and British Trotskyism*

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24 September 2024

Steve Long has been a member of the Trotskyist movement for more than a half century. His response to Professor Aidan Beatty's demonization of Gerry Healy is especially significant because Comrade Long was among those in the Workers Revolutionary Party who supported the political struggle conducted by the International Committee of the Fourth International against the betrayal of Trotskyist principles by Healy and the WRP.

In the course of his vile diatribe against Gerry Healy, Comrade David North and Trotskyism, and clearly fuelled by the vicious anti-Trotskyists in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and Zionist forces, Aidan Beatty has defamed Healy, describing him, along with other slanders, as a "terrible public speaker". Nothing could be further from the truth.

I recall very well the first time I heard Gerry Healy speak. After leaving school at the age of 18, I was searching for a political organization whose outlook reflected my own conclusion that the capitalist system was unfair, unsustainable and had to urgently be replaced by something better. Anything to do with the reformist Labour Party was out of the question and in 1970 I joined the Young Socialists branch active in the London borough of Kensington.

One of the first events I attended was a meeting held in central London by the Socialist Labour League, the parent organization of the Young Socialists. I entered the meeting room from the back. It was well attended and without chairs—the audience was standing. As the saying goes, one could hear a pin drop. I could hardly

see or hear the speaker and had to manoeuvre through the crowd to get closer to the front. I then saw a short, broad shouldered, balding man in a white shirt with braces and glasses speaking with a voice which gradually became louder and clearer. This was one of the many of such events at which I heard Gerry Healy speak.

The silence on the part of the audience at the start of such meetings was down to the initial effort required to hear the speaker. The silence throughout Healy's speeches reflected the avid attention and appreciation on the part of the audience as Healy clearly and clinically described the political situation and crisis confronting workers in Britain and internationally, which could only be resolved through the construction of an international party based on the lessons drawn from the first successful socialist revolution, in Russia in 1917.

A few weeks after that meeting I was asked to participate in a mass sale of the SLL newspaper, the *Worker's Press*, in the working class neighbourhood of Shepherd's Bush. Around a dozen members had gathered to sell the paper on Saturday morning on the high street. The reason for the mass sale was to ensure the security of members in the course of open work following the stabbing of an SLL member by a member of the Stalinist British Communist Party a few weeks previously.

Younger comrades of the party may not be fully aware of the fact, but during most of the post-World War II period physical attacks and provocations by Stalinists and other enemies of Trotskyism were on the

order of the day. Healy and other leaders of the SLL exuded determination and inspired the confidence that, despite such provocations, it was possible to establish socialism in a country with one of the oldest and best-organised bourgeoisies on the planet.

In his excellent review of Beatty's book David North refers to the play *The Party* by Trevor Griffiths. In 1973 I had the privilege and pleasure of being in the audience in London's West End to watch the outstanding performance by Britain's leading actor, Laurence Olivier, playing the part of Healy. Some background to the play is provided by the left-wing director and producer Tony Garnett.

In his book on the work of the director, author Stephen Lacey describes how Garnett in the late sixties/early seventies:

offered a room at his offices, where he was also living, for regular open meetings on a Friday night. As Garnett explained: "I said we will have regular meetings and we will invite speakers, particularly to the left of the Labour Party, to come and speak, and anybody can come and I'll just lay on a few drinks ... So we asked the IMG [International Marxist Group], and Tariq [Ali] came once or twice—all sorts of people came ... Ronnie Lang was there [R.D. Laing, the radical psychotherapist], Ken Tynan used to come."

At about the same time, Garnett was working with Ken Loach and writer Jim Allen on *The Big Flame*. As part of Garnett's customary exhaustive research methods, he was introduced to Gerry Healy, leader of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), a small Trotskyist political group. After a while, Healy also came to the meetings, and, in Garnett's recollection, soon began to take over: "[after] three or four weeks [Healy] had totally dominated the proceedings and more or less driven away other political elements, and he was holding court mesmerising a lot of people—and then started to recruit from those meetings". (P. 76, Tony Garnett, Stephen Lacey - Manchester University Press, 2007)

At the height of his powers Healy was a remarkable speaker, political leader and writer, capable of communicating highly complex political processes to a predominantly working class audience. His own personal qualities, his fearlessness in the face of political intimidation, his insistence that political allegiance to the party must be translated into political practice, all contributed to ensuring his standing within the working class. At the same time he was part of a leadership that had played an outstanding role in the defence of and advancement of Marxist principles and internationalism in the struggle against Stalinism and Pabloism over the course of three decades. It is only on this basis that one can truly measure the achievements of Gerry Healy.

In his pathological hatred of revolutionary Marxism, Aidan Beatty seeks to bury this history. The subsequent degeneration of Healy and other leaders of the Workers Revolutionary Party can only be understood against the background of the enormous political pressures bearing down on the movement. These political pressures were exhaustively analysed by the leadership of the International Committee following the split with the WRP in 1985 and formed the basis for a genuine renaissance of contemporary revolutionary Marxism, i.e., Trotskyism.

Workers, young people and intellectuals taking up the struggle for socialism must study this history and will undoubtedly treat Beatty's pathetic new book with the contempt it deserves.



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