

# David Neita: January 5, 1948 – October 30, 2025

David North  
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David Neita, who played a leading role in the Workers League (predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party) during the 1970s, died on October 30 in Los Angeles at the age of 77. Diagnosed in the 1980s with multiple sclerosis, Dave's health deteriorated significantly in recent years.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, in January 1948, Dave was a remarkable representative of a generation of black youth whose political development occurred amidst the explosive civil rights struggles of the 1960s and the Vietnam War. The conclusions he drew from both events led him to join the Trotskyist movement in the autumn of 1970.

While Dave respected the integrity of Martin Luther King, he did not believe that the reformist program of the civil rights leader represented a realistic, let alone adequate, response to the crisis of American society. And though Dave attended rallies addressed by Malcolm X in Harlem and Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant district, and respected the speaker's eloquence, he did not agree with the nationalist program and perspective of the Black Muslim movement.

In 1967 Dave was drafted into the army and sent to Vietnam. The searing experiences of the war profoundly affected him physically, emotionally and politically.

Shortly after arriving in Vietnam, Dave witnessed the interrogation of a Viet Cong prisoner by an officer of the South Vietnamese puppet army. The prisoner refused to give any information. When the officer put a gun to the young fighter's head and threatened to shoot him, the prisoner spat in his face. It was only the intervention of Dave and other soldiers that prevented the sadistic officer from murdering the fighter. From that point on, Dave felt deep empathy for the struggle

being waged by the Vietnamese against imperialism, and believed that the United States was engaged in a reactionary and futile war.

In January 1968, Dave's battalion was deployed to the city of Hue, which witnessed the fiercest fighting of the Tet Offensive launched by the North Vietnamese army. Initially, Dave's battalion remained on the outskirts of the city while the Marines were chosen to spearhead the US efforts to regain control of Hue.

Dave would later recall watching with horror as the bodies of hundreds of dead and wounded Marines were evacuated from the battle zone. Dave's battalion was then ordered into the city. Half way across the bridge, Dave's closest friend, who was only a few feet in front of him, was hit by machine gun fire. Dave managed to pick his comrade up, and he carried him back to a helicopter for evacuation. In later years, when Dave recounted the event, he assumed that his friend had been killed. But in 1977, he was astonished to receive a letter from the soldier, who had been successfully operated on and survived. It had taken him years to locate Dave, to whom he owed his life.

Though not wounded in battle, Dave's health was undermined by the war. Like so many US soldiers, he was exposed to Agent Orange, and this may have damaged his immune system and led to his subsequent development of multiple sclerosis.

Not long after returning from Vietnam, Dave came into contact with the Workers League (WL). His decision to join the WL was greatly influenced by his reading of a pamphlet titled "Black Nationalism and Marxist Theory," authored by Tim Wohlforth, who was then the national secretary of the Workers League. The pamphlet reflected the critical influence of the Socialist Labour League, the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, upon the

Workers League. While Dave had previously resisted nationalist politics, the Workers League provided him with a theoretical understanding of the role of the international working class in the struggle for socialism.

In 1973, when the Workers League acquired a printing press, Dave was assigned the position of first pressman. Though he lacked formal training, he developed the skills necessary to run the press and print the *Bulletin*, which became a twice-weekly publication in October of that year.

In the aftermath of Wohlforth's desertion from the Workers League, Dave played a major role in overcoming the political and organizational crisis created by the destructive practices of Wohlforth and his companion, the provocateur Nancy Fields.

However, toward the end of the 1970s, Dave entered into a period of mounting personal and political crisis. The right-wing political environment of those years affected Dave. An ever more noticeable skepticism about the prospects for revolution in the United States began to erode his generally optimistic outlook. There is no question that a major factor in his increasing disorientation was the retreat of the Workers Revolutionary Party from the Trotskyist principles that it had defended for so long against Stalinism and Pabloite revisionism. Dave deeply respected the leaders of the WRP, especially Gerry Healy and Mike Banda.

But their glorification of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) confused and disoriented Dave. The WRP's elevation of bourgeois nationalism and its "armed struggle" against imperialism undermined Dave's confidence in a perspective based on the central revolutionary role of the working class in the United States and the other imperialist countries.

Dave's deteriorating health certainly exacerbated his political difficulties. The initial symptoms of what would be eventually diagnosed as multiple sclerosis began to manifest themselves. A physically imposing man who stood well over six feet, Dave began to suffer episodes of recurrent pain and weakness, for which doctors provided no clear explanation. By late 1978 Dave exhibited signs of depression. At that time the illness that would come to be known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was poorly understood. The term itself did not come into common use until the following decade. Many veterans only manifested signs

of psychological distress years after returning from Vietnam, a condition known as late-onset PTSD.

In January 1979 Dave resigned from the Workers League.

However, Dave never repudiated the principles and program that he had defended while a member. In 1986, in the aftermath of the split in the International Committee, he contacted the Workers League and stated that he supported the fight that it was conducting against the WRP's betrayal of Trotskyism. In October 1997, he traveled to Detroit to attend a memorial meeting held by the SEP to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the assassination of Tom Henahan, whom Dave had known and greatly respected.

Earlier this year, Dave contacted me. He stated in the most emphatic terms his outrage and disgust over the scurrilous attack on Gerry Healy in the fraudulent biography written by the anti-Trotskyist historian Aidan Beatty. While Dave understood and agreed with the fight that had been conducted by the ICFI against the WRP in the 1980s, he still viewed Healy as a great working class leader who, in his best years, had made an immense contribution to the building of the Trotskyist movement.

We spoke over the telephone several times, and Dave expressed the hope, with which I concurred, that we might have a chance to meet again. Unfortunately, the opportunity did not arise.

Many decades now separate us from the years when David Neita was a member of the Workers League, but his contribution to the party during its formative years should not be forgotten.



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