

Edwin Soto (1953-2026): Transit worker and lifetime supporter of the fight for socialism

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Edwin Soto, who joined the Trotskyist movement as a teenager in New York City more than 50 years ago, died last month at the age of 72.

Edwin was a member of the Workers League, the forerunner of the Socialist Equality Party, for two decades. Both of his parents had come to the US mainland from Puerto Rico. He joined the socialist movement in 1973. He was part of a layer of the working class, including many African American and Hispanic youth, who became politically aware at a time of imperialist war in Vietnam and mass civil rights struggles in the US, the unraveling of the postwar capitalist boom, and the growing crisis of the two-party system of capitalist rule. Edwin was convinced by the struggle of the Trotskyist movement against the betrayals of Stalinism, Pabloism and petty-bourgeois nationalism.

In the 1970s, Edwin was on the staff of the party print shop for a number of years. He fought alongside Tom Henahan, the leader of the Young Socialists (the predecessor organization of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality), who was the victim of a political assassination on October 16, 1977.

Edwin actively sold the *Bulletin*, newspaper of the Workers League. He worked closely with Helen Halyard, the assistant national secretary of the Workers League and then the Socialist Equality Party, who died in 2023. Edwin participated in both the 1984 and 1988 presidential election campaigns of Ed Winn, the transit worker who became a leading member of the Workers League. Ed Winn won election to the Executive Board of the Transport Workers Union (TWU), where he fought against the betrayals of the union bureaucracy.

At the time of the decisive split in the world Trotskyist movement in 1985-86, Edwin stood with the majority of the International Committee of the Fourth

International against the Workers Revolutionary Party leadership, which had capitulated to Stalinism and bourgeois nationalism.

Although Edwin was not formally affiliated to the SEP in the last decades of his life, he remained a dedicated supporter of the program he had embraced as a youth. He attended most public meetings of the SEP and continued to support the party financially. Equally important, he continued to work closely with the SEP in the struggle among transit workers.

Just two months ago, Edwin did not appear as scheduled for an SEP intervention at a mass meeting of TWU Local 100, due to the illness that led to his death about a month later after he suffered a major stroke.

Edwin had himself become a transit worker in the 1980s, first as a car cleaner and then a train operator. He worked in the New York City subway system for more than three decades before he retired around 2020.

Edwin's years as a transit worker witnessed an endless series of concessions contracts. Only the Workers League and then the Socialist Equality Party, with his active participation, fought consistently against these concessions. The union, which had earlier secured contract improvements, at least to a limited extent, had by that time become—along with the rest of the AFL-CIO—essentially adjuncts of the Democratic Party and big business as a whole.

Major cutbacks in real wages and living standards have been imposed on transit workers, including wage hikes below the rate of inflation, productivity drives in which the union is paid off if it can convince workers to take less sick time and show up for work more often, and the fact that 15,000 retirees have been forced to accept reductions in Medicare coverage under so-called Medicare Advantage plans. Medicare Advantage amounts to backdoor privatization of Medicare, with

insurance companies increasing their profit margins by denying approval for important and necessary medical procedures. Retirees do not have the right to vote on contracts.

The powerful strike of transit workers in 2005 was shut down by the bureaucracy after only three days. By this time New Directions, the opposition faction within the union bureaucracy, had won the leadership of TWU Local 100, and it was these phony “lefts” who proceeded to sell out this important struggle. The SEP fought to expose these pseudo-lefts who falsely claimed to be socialists while they adapted to the Democratic Party and the needs of the oligarchy that was cementing its grip on New York City.

During this time, Edwin Soto fought alongside other members and supporters of the SEP in transit to win fellow workers to the socialist program that had first attracted him to the Trotskyist movement.

Today, as the daily war crimes and outrages of the Trump presidency underscore the growing dangers of world war and fascism, the significance of Edwin’s political commitment becomes all the more clear. The perspective that he fought for until the end of his life will animate and guide the struggles of millions of workers and youth in the fight for international socialism, the only alternative to capitalist barbarism and the threat to human civilization.



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