

Obituary to Ross Longhurst aka 'Harry Powell'

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Obituary: Ross Longhurst 1941-2020

It is with great regret that we heard our comrade Ross Longhurst (aka Harry Powell) had passed away on 28th September 2020. Ross was a dedicated Communist and upholding proletarian internationalism when many others discarded it in favour of tailing nationalism of all kinds. Ross remained politically active until the last weeks of his life.

Ross was born in Hastings, Sussex in 1941. In 1959 he moved to London, living in Streatham where he was a member of the Streatham Hill ward Labour Party and was also active in anti colonial and anti racism campaigns and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. This was Ross' first encounter with "Marxism" which was presented in the form of Gerry Healy who was the ward secretary of his Labour Party branch in Streatham and the Trotskyite Socialist Labour League (SLL) that he led. The antics of Healy and the SLL put Ross off this caricature of Marxism and left him with a firm opposition to Trotskyism. He would later have a proper introduction to genuine Marxism Leninism in his involvement in the movement against the imperialist war against Vietnam.

Ross worked at the time in a type face setting factory in Merton. Later he returned to Hastings and worked as a labourer on the building of Dungeness A atomic power station. By this time he was disillusioned with reformist Labourite politics and left the Party and would oppose reformism for the rest of his life. Ross got a place at the London School of Economics in the mid sixties and studied Sociology. He became involved in the student occupations and the campaigns against the Vietnam War. This experience led Ross to understand that Marxism Leninism and its further development by Mao Zedong was the only revolutionary science capable of transforming society towards Communism. This was the time of the Cultural Revolution in China one of the greatest revolutionary movements in history where the masses grasped communist ideology and attempted to take power away from the emerging capitalist class in Socialist China and move towards communist relations of production. This inspired progressives around the world but compared to France, Italy, Scandinavia and Germany had less impact on leftists in Britain which remained under the influence of Labourism, revisionism and Trotskyism. Ross therefore was among those who swam against the tide. He once wrote on the revolutionary nature of Maoism in comparison to the Trots and revisionists:

"...one important reason I became attracted to the Maoist stream of Marxism was the positive attitude it took towards oppressed and exploited people. This contrasted with the revisionist and Trotskyist variants of Marxism which viewed workers and peasants as deserving but

essentially incapable by themselves of taking effective action to defend and advance their interests. According to these types of Marxists it is only the conscious Marxist revolutionaries who have the knowledge and insights necessary to guide the masses into doing what is good for them...Maoism was different because it conceived of the masses as potentially most revolutionary. ”

While being active in various campaigns and working with comrades of other anti revisionist Marxist Leninist groups, Ross did not join any of them until 1974 when he became a member of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist Leninist) led by trade union official Reg Birch which he described as “the best of a bad bunch”. Ross found many of the other groups suffering from idealism especially in the manifestation of a religious outlook and style. The CPB (M L) appeared the most materialist in outlook. At this time Ross was working in education as a lecturer in Sociology in Liverpool and then Nottingham.

In 1976 Ross spoke out at the CPB (M L) congress against the Parties political trajectory into nationalism and economism. The Nottingham branch left and formed the Nottingham Communist Group (NCG). This group developed theoretical defence of revolutionary communism against the new manifestations of revisionism such as the ‘Theory of the Three Worlds’ and upholding the Cultural Revolution and the necessity of violent revolution to bring about the proletarian state.

The NCG attended the founding conference of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM) in 1984. The NCG and Stockport Communist Group would later merge into the Revolutionary Internationalist Contingent in Britain, Ross would be a leading member and while others dropped out over the years Ross was consistent in political activity and upholding Maoism, carrying out solidarity work for the Peoples Wars in Peru and Nepal when many British leftists ignored them or simply didn’t want to know about real revolutions. He travelled to Nepal in 2009 to observe for himself the struggles in Nepal meeting members of the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre).

Ross was a founder member of Revolutionary Praxis after the collapse of the RIC. He helped organise educational studies in Marxism and did much street activity including book sales to propagate communism. Although he was painfully aware that we are currently in very difficult times in regard to the dominance of bourgeois ideology in imperialist countries, he did not give up as many of his contemporaries did and remained a stalwart. He was also consistent in his refusal to capitulate to the tailing of nationalism and reformism as so many on the left have done especially when Corbyn became leader of the Labour Party. He also believed that to articulate a political point or protest you had to be bold. During the Iraq War he and another comrade went to Wootton Bassett. Alone they protested against and called out the crimes of British imperialism against the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan during one of the macabre imperialist publicity exercises of repatriating dead British soldiers by parading the coffins through the town. This protest put them in serious danger of attack by zealous right wing thugs and onlookers but he was not deterred.

Ross would often try to set an example hoping to encourage other leftists to undertake more direct actions, rarely did they follow though which earned them his rightful contempt. Ross' last major act of defiance at the age of 72 was to withhold payment of council tax in protest at austerity cuts implemented by the local city council, again he was the only one in his local anti cuts campaign to take this stand which led him to court and a month long prison sentence. In prison he found much support his action and gave advice to other prisoners. He found many had taken up criminal activities such as drug dealing to support their families and pay mortgages as their wages were too low to survive on.

Eventually he left the local campaigns around nuclear disarmament, the health service and anti cuts because of the pacifism and timidity of the other campaigners. Throughout his life under the name Harry Powell he wrote prolifically on revolutionary theory of Marxism Leninism Maoism and current world events. He never stopped emphasising that communists must listen and rely on the masses and not to take an elitist attitude towards them. During elections he would campaign against voting and expose the false nature of capitalist democracy. He would hold Revolutionary Praxis campaign stalls in run down areas of Nottingham which other leftist groups avoided. He continued until August of this year to hold stalls with communist literature and propaganda from Revolutionary Praxis at local Black Lives Matter protests and anti fascist protests. As he would often say "on with the struggle".

Red Salute to comrade Ross Longhurst