

A HISTORY OF STRUGGLE

RACHEL HUNTER died at 2am on 19th May at the hospital where she worked 24 years ago.

Rae was born in 1917 on 10th December she was active in the Trotskyist and Labour movement for 55 years.

Rae was introduced to the Trotskyist movement by her sister, Ann Keen, who had become a convinced Trotskyist through discussions with Heaton Lee.

The "Lee Group" came as part of a new influx of Trotskyists from South Africa.

Ever since 1934, groups from the two small Trotskyist organisations there had been coming to Britain as it became all the more clear that real activity in South Africa could only spring from the black workers themselves rather than from the privileged minority of white workers.

Rae's family had moved to South Africa when she was six. She lived there with her parents, brother and youngest sister for ten years. By 1933 they were back in London for a year before her father, a church minister, gained a parish in a small Cornish village.

Rae had wanted to take up nursing but was unable to do so until her mother died in 1936. She moved to London and began training to become a state enrolled nurse at St Charles' Hospital, North Kensington.

Ann Keen had broken her from religion and Rae applied to join the Workers International League (WIL) in 1937 after witnessing the appalling conditions of the working people also attended the hospital.

During the war, Rae fought in the engineering factories (see separate article) against the social patriot and stalinist line.

In 1953 Rae rallied to the defence of Trotskyism against the then leader of the Fourth International, Pablo.

At the Labour Party conference of 1954 the National Executive Committee banned "Socialist Outlook". There were 1,700,000 conference votes against the banning but it was carried following a three month campaign. Rae was expelled the same year along with Bill Hunter and others because of their association with the paper.

In 1956 Rae and Bill moved to Liverpool with their two young children.

Rae became well known in the Mersey-

side area. She was well known for selling the paper and her consistency.

She became well known amongst the dockers, the building workers and the youth.

She participated in building up a big Trotskyist youth movement in the late 1950s and 1960s. It was a period in which there were fights all around and workers were keen to learn.

She took an active stand against the Malvinas (Falklands) war.

She was an active member of one of the biggest area support groups during the miners strike of 1984/85 in a city which brought in £17,000 per week.

In February 1988 Rae left the Workers' Revolutionary Party and helped form the International Socialist League which joined the International Workers League (Fourth International). She was made honorary president at our first conference.

In order to contribute to the development of the International at the age of 72 Rae went with her husband to live in Argentina for a year.

Even after she came back and suffering from ill health, Rae continued to enjoy participating in political meetings and in discussing with workers the way she had all her political life.



A HISTORY OF ONE PERSON AND A

We re-produce the following article in which Sue Gwyer interviewed Rae in 1987 for the Workers' Press which at the time Rae and ourselves were part.

"My first taste of politics came when I attended classes given by Ralph Lee in the basement of the Paddington headquarters of the WIL. At the time the Spanish Civil War was very much at the forefront of a lot of discussions.

"I used to attend the classes on my day off from the hospital. Heaton Lee, whom Ann was living with, had a lot of political discussions with me and Millie Lee (Kahn), wife of Ralph Lee, became a close friend.

"I was impressed by the internationalism of the WIL and was convinced of the Trotskyist line - after the Anarchists and Communist Party had been discredited by the analysis of the Spanish Civil War."

To begin with the WIL published a duplicated journal for Labour Party work in Paddington called "Searchlight" with Gerry Healy as editor.

In December 1937 Ralph Lee obtained an old printing press, already 80 years old, and repaired it to bring out the first copy of a theoretical journal "Workers International News".

In September 1938 "Searchlight" was replaced by "Youth for Socialism", a more general production intended for work in the Labour League of Youth.

Rae succeeded in unionising some of the nurses and the WIL press was making an impact, but she didn't finish training.

"With the onset of the war by 1940 a large number of working-class women were going into the engineering factories as the men were conscripted. The hospitals were evacuated from central London, in anticipation of bombing, to the country.

"Instead of being isolated politically out of London and with middle-class women who went in for nursing in those days, I decided to go into the factories.

"I joined the Municipal and General Workers' Union, which was the only one that recruited women, when working at Sunbeam and Talbot. This was a large factory which used to make cars but was turned over to aircraft and munitions for the war. There were men in the factory but they were skilled and were in the AEU

FROM ARGENTINE COMRADES

We can't express what we are feeling into words. But we all truly feel that we have been able to live for a time and that of the most vital and extraordinary because of her courage, her strong convictions, her ideas, according to her ideas and her struggle, a strong sense and affection helped us to luckily have her paintings before us.

(engineering union) or sheet metal workers' union.

"I recruited a lot of women to the union as the working conditions were terrible. The summer of 1941 was very hot and there was little ventilation in the factory.

"I took up a fight through the union for better working conditions. Eventually the management had to knock a wall down to improve the ventilation. - I was unpopular with management."

When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June of 1941 the Communist Party of Great Britain had a sudden change of political and industrial policy. The WIL turned to the CP rank and file in - opposition to the new line which was that the class character of the war had now changed and it was a democratic war against fascism.

TREBLED

The circulation of the press trebled. "Youth for Socialism" became a four page newspaper addressed to the broader labour movement with the title of "Socialist Appeal". An emergency leaflet of the WIL drew the industrial lessons of the new CP turn before even the CP had worked them out:

"To support Churchill" stated Socialist Appeal, "means to act as strike-breakers for the bosses and help to impose a reactionary regime in Britain" so that CP militants "must act as bosses" agents in imposing speed-up and all other impositions on the backs of the workers."

This statement could not have proved



HISTORY OF THE WORKING CLASS



ing now. It is too difficult to put our sadness
it was a privilege to have known Rae and to
share our daily work with her. She was one
man beings that we have known. She carried
er consistency, her energy, her desire to live
e as a Trotskyist into her daily activities. Her
a lot. We are going to miss her a lot. We
as a token of her love and understanding.

more correct. The CP put all their efforts behind collaborating with the bosses to "produce" for the war effort. The new mechanism of class collaboration became the "Joint Production Committees".

How did the change of the Stalinists' line on the war affect Rae?

"The Stalinists initiated a National Shop Stewards' Conference which took place in the Stoll Theatre, London in October 1941. As a shop steward and sitting on the West London Area Shop Stewards' Committee I was delegated to the conference. There were about 1,400 delegates from all over the country and I had my speech ready for an intervention."

"The conference was called to promote the Stalinist line on production and was chaired by Walter Swanson the Stalinist shop steward at Napiers. He made it clear that it was called to "survey concrete instances of how co-operation with the management had increased production."

"The response to Swanson's appeal for accounts of such concrete instances was negligible. The majority of reports related instances of management refusing to co-operate and of using increased production to cut wages and undermine working conditions. All known opponents of the policies of the Stalinist platform were suppressed.

"I was called to speak, mainly I think because I was a woman and young. The Stalinists didn't know me.

"I gave a speech attacking the joint production committees. Swanson attacked me saying I only represented 38 workers.

"But these 38 shop stewards on the West London Area Committee - of which he was chair! The capitalist press attacked me and supported Swanson."

SPEECH

In her speech to the Stoll Conference Rae said:

"I have only been a year in industry but I have been in long enough to know that the chaos in industry is not caused by the workers but by the incompetence and lack of planning on the part of the bosses, their managers and foremen. . . Some delegates have argued that we can increase output by means of production committees composed of delegates of workers and bosses.

I know from my own experience that the bosses will not co-operate with the workers on this issue. They would brook no interference with their rule.

Where these committees are set up the bosses will attempt to use them to paralyse the independent action of the workers who can only agree to production committees which are completely under their control. The bosses will use the workers reps on these committees precisely as the capitalist government is using the Labour and trade union leaders: to impose restrictive legislation which they could not otherwise operate.

There are only two methods of increasing production. The one alternative is that of Nazi Germany where production is or-

ganised through complete destruction of all working class rights.

The other alternative is the establishment of workers control which would not only increase production but would safeguard and extend the rights we have won through years of struggle.

If this conference gives a lead, and I hope that it will for a movement in the trade unions and factories for the control of production through factory committees it would be the first serious blow struck against Fascism and in defence of the Soviet Union"

"After the Stoll conference I was witch-hunted out of Sunbeam and Talbot's. I was off sick with acute bronchitis and when I returned to work they moved me to the paint department and soon after shut it down."

The Communist Party then put out a leaflet stating: "They are a virus which must be cleared out of all contact with working class organisations. TREAT A TROTSKYIST AS YOU WOULD A NAZI." The atmosphere of the Moscow Trials had reached Britain for sure."

After getting kicked out of Sunbeam and Talbot's Rae moved up to Renfrewshire in Scotland where she got a job in Babcock and Wilcox which made ships' boilers.

RAE - THE PERSON

CELIA RALPH

Rae was born in 1917. She spent her younger days in South Africa, the youngest of a large family. Her memory of beautiful birds and flowers as a child stayed with her all her life.

Rae loved life. As a child, a nurse, a mother, a wife, a factory worker, a fighter she took from each an understanding and feeling which she never lost.

Rae had a rare gift - what ever happened to her she took from it only the good. Her life was not an easy one but whatever it threw at her she remained consistent. She took pleasure from the simplest of things - the joy of watching children, a bird, a flower, cooking a meal or painting a picture, many things that we do not give much attention to. She sometimes looked at a flower or plant as though enjoying as though it was the first time she had seen it.

Her deep feeling for the sick, the elderly, the disabled would sometimes effect her so deeply that she would cry. By this I mean when she saw the suffering of Iraqi children, or the malnutrition of African people.

Her frustration and sadness was due to her inability to be as active as she had been when she was younger.

She was one of the most consistent people I have met in my life, consistent in her love, consistent in her work.

She accepted people were different, she never tried to moralise concerning those around her.

She was never bitter or hated anyone. She saved that for those in power.

Many workers in Liverpool don't know her name but they remember a little white haired old lady with her hair clipped on the top of her head was always here or there. She was always seen selling papers at the same time in the same place. She always had time for everyone.

Others remember that she taught them a lot, helped them read, line by line if necessary to help them understand.

Typical comments are:

"I learnt a lot from her",

"She was like a mother to me",

"I searched every house in the flats to find her because I wanted to discuss with

RAE HUNTER



A TROTSKYIST IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT FOR OVER 54 YEARS



the women who was selling those papers",

"She went through Ten Days that Shook the World, line by line when we didn't understand. Then she would use a dictionary and if we still didn't understand she would try again."

Rae would discuss politics everywhere.

What has attracted workers and fighters to Rae in the last fifty years is that she continuously fought for principle and she had the courage to carry it through - in small ways and big ways.

Workers knew that if you needed a bed or a meal Rae would always share what she had.

She is no longer with us, in a physical sense, this is what is difficult to bear now, but time will help us and Rae will always be with us.

Rae helped me to be myself and to love life and to fight for it. This I think was her

greatest contribution. We have her painting and we have her memory, but most of all some of her will stay with us. Nothing could take that away.

She took a piece of all of her life right through to her death. It showed in her ability to listen, to understand, to support.

She was as fresh as the first day she started out. Her fight came from her great love of life.

She fought for principle and consistency all her life.

Rae had a full life. As the nurse at the hospital said where she died. Rae was a tough old lady. She was. She was also a sweet old lady. And we will all miss her.

Our characters and our futures will be fuller if we take her strength, her courage and her principle with us. That is the best way to appreciate Rae by what we do in our lives.