

CYNTHIA BALDRY



LAST NOVEMBER 19th, Cynthia Baldry, a member of Workers Fight, died in Liverpool. Aged 26 at her death, she had suffered since the age of 19 from a rare and incurable disease which finally killed her, lupus erythematosus.

Her political life spanned five years of gradual physical deterioration. Yet it was by any standards a life of intense activity and dedication to the cause of socialism and the groups she joined to fight in that cause—first the IS group and then Workers' Fight. In the last months of her life, after she had partly recovered from a severe crisis early in the year, her comrades had to conspire against her to stop her doing routine and exhausting political work — despite the fact that exhaustion was a major threat to her existence, and intense political activity on top of her work as a teacher rendered her at least as vulnerable as a guerilla fighter. Forced finally to limit her political activity, she immediately embarked on a study of the Bevanite movement. She was dead within a month of starting that project, but though hospitalised much of the time, she completed three in a planned series of short articles on leaders of the labour movement.

The respect and affection in which she was held, way beyond the ranks of Workers' Fight, was shown when 150 people attended the commemoration meeting for her on 29th November—CP building workers, members of the different revolutionary tendencies, brothers and sisters from the NUT and people from the estate where she lived.

Not only respect and affection, but also understanding. The commemoration was a frankly political meeting. Some fellow tenants, politically sympathetic but uncommitted, collected £10 and donated it to Workers' Fight in honour of Cynthia Baldry. People who were not committed to her politics nevertheless understood perfectly well that Cynthia Baldry was first of all a fighter for her ideas, and it was not possible, in death as in life, to separate her from those ideas and the organisation she saw as embodying them.

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To list the achievements of such a short span — 26 years of life, less than 4½ years in revolutionary politics — would usually produce a brief and trivial chronicle. Not so here —and what she did achieve is the measure of the tragic loss and waste which her death is.

Her parents had been members of the Communist Party in South Africa, and it was after some years of acquaintance with revolutionary politics that she joined the International Socialism group in 1971. In late 1972 she joined WF, and from 1973 until her deteriorating health forced her to stand down at the 1975 conference, she was a member of WF's National Committee.

During the Fisher-Bendix occupation in 1972 she was one

of a group of IS comrades assigned to go through the files of the company. She was also active in the NUT, being one of the "Liverpool 12" whom local union bureaucrats tried to victimise in 1975. She was active in the tenants' association during the rent strikes in 1972, as well as being heavily involved in the battle over closure of Shotton steelworks.

Most importantly, she initiated, and for the first period sustained almost single-handedly, the campaign in support of the 24 Shrewsbury pickets.

For reasons which are still obscure, the 'Morning Star' at first refused to publish reports of the frame-up being arranged by the police. Articles sent in by CP members were repeatedly 'lost'.

Cynthia started the defence campaign in the pages of Workers' Fight. She wrote and WF printed the first leaflets published by the locally-based defence committee set up on her suggestion. She continued to play a central role until the CP decided that it was, after all, interested, and took control of the campaign, pushing aside Cynthia as a Trotskyist political enemy.

There was an appropriate sequel. After Cynthia's death the Workers' Fight National Committee submitted the following obituary notice as a paid advertisement to the "Morning Star":

"Cynthia Baldry, aged 26, died Liverpool, November 1975, of a rare and incurable illness.

A Revolutionary Communist; initiator of the campaign to publicise the political conspiracy against the "Shrewsbury 24" and to rouse the labour movement in their defence; fighter for the rebirth of a mass communist women's movement; an unbreakable proletarian militant until her last days.

Grieving for her loss and in homage to her memory, we offer our condolences to her parents and to John Bloxam".

The "Morning Star" rejected it, sending us back a rewritten version. They insisted on deleting the reference to Shrewsbury and decreed that Cynthia should be represented as fighting for, not a communist, but a 'left-wing' women's movement.

They insisted — these newly 'liberal' Stalinists — on censoring the obituary of a class fighter: while they had published an article (presented as is usual with the 'Morning Star' as an interview) by UCATT General Secretary George Smith. Over Shrewsbury, Smith issued a circular telling UCATT members to treat the case as a legitimate criminal prosecution on which no trade union action should be taken. Cynthia's activities had led to the exposure of this circular on the front page of Workers' Fight.

Like Cynthia's friends on the estate, her political enemies

also understood that she could not be separated from her politics. Impossible for us to publish an obituary notice without mentioning her role in the Shrewsbury affair; impossible for them to accept the true account without conceding a lot politically to Cynthia, her politics and her organisation. In its own way, the "Morning Star" paid a tribute to Cynthia Baldry — the tribute of a snarling cur capable of licking the boots of trade union scabs like George Smith, while suppressing the facts of the work of a dead militant in fighting to defend that scabs framed-up members. From them, that's the only tribute Cynthia Baldry would have wanted or accepted.

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Within the WF National Committee, Cynthia Baldry played an important role. At an important NC discussion on the policy to be put forward by WF at the rank and file trade unionists conference organised by IS in March 1974, Cynthia intervened decisively to counter comrades who vacillated on including the abortion rights question in our platform. Later in 1974, she played a vital role in reorienting the WF women's fraction away from a lurch towards petty-bourgeois feminist ideas of self-improvement within capitalism. Ever honest, probing, open-minded and intensely serious, on these and many other occasions she helped focus the group politically.

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The way Cynthia Baldry came to us was typical too. In 1972 WF had consolidated in the months following our expulsion from IS. But at a cost. Inevitably people buckled and broke; people willing to join an opposition tendency within IS found intolerable the rigours of building a tiny independent organisation. Some just dropped away; a few returned to IS.

At that time, too, IS was not yet the wholly bureaucratized sect it is now, nor had it entered into its ultra-left binge of today. Everything seemed to revolve around the industrial struggle and IS was firmly focused on that struggle. Cynthia Baldry had been heavily involved, through IS, in some of the most exciting events — such as Fisher-Bendix. Workers' Fight in Liverpool had one member!

To come over to us at that time, in those circumstances, in that city, indicated either indifference to the class struggle that IS SEEMED fully immersed in or else a profound ideological commitment to think things through with political rigour and to be governed by a logic of political ideas irrespective of any personal consequences. Cynthia did not abandon the positive side of IS work, the working class orientation common to IS and WF (but within which IS had massively more scope, size and 'credibility') and continued it in such activity as the Shrewsbury 24 campaign. But she understood, grasped and lived by the central truth for

communists, that programme and politics are decisive. Starting from defence of WF against our expulsion by IS and opposition to IS's shameful line on Ireland, she thought things through politically; she decided that IS was wrong and WF right, and she drew practical conclusions.

So she left IS, numbering half a hundred in Liverpool and set out to build a branch of WF, which didn't quite number a hundred nationally. In all this she acted together with her companion John Bloxam.

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Cynthia's portrait as a person is best drawn in the words of a letter from her mother to John Bloxam, read out at the Liverpool commemoration meeting.

"Please make it a happy occasion and don't let anyone feel gloomy — let them feel glad to have known her and more determined to do better for the movement and to use all of themselves — brains and bodies — to forward the work. Whoever saw her gloomy? She was eager and looked forward without fear to the future. And to learn from her friendliness to trust people and to be glad about the happiness she spread around."

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The first issue of "International Communist" carries an obituary of Cynthia Baldry. The first issue of its lineal predecessor, Workers' Fight, in January 1972, carried an obituary of our comrade Peter Graham, assassinated by pseudo-political gangsters in Dublin in October 1971.

The death of Peter Graham as a direct result of activity, while trying to find a mode of communist action in partly unexplored territory, is easier for us to accept than the death of Cynthia Baldry, struck down not by the bullets of political enemies, but by the blind laws of chance. It would be easy for those of us for whom Cynthia's death was not just the loss of a valuable comrade, but also a deep personal bereavement to shout in anger at a situation of life in which such monstrous things happen, that indeed it is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing".

Easy and tempting — but it would be a betrayal of Cynthia Baldry. The struggle for socialism is the struggle to put mankind in control of itself and its situation including mastering disease and eliminating the arbitrariness and blindness that now makes death, not the end of a natural ageing, but something arbitrary and savage, perpetually lying in ambush. Cynthia Baldry gave her life to that struggle

Adolf Yoffe wrote in 1927, before killing himself:—

"It is more than 30 years since I embraced the view that human life has sense only in so far as it is spent in the service of the infin-

ite — and for us mankind is the infinite. To work for any finite purpose — and everything else is finite — is meaningless”.

Cynthia Baldry's short life did have a meaning. She gave it a meaning: the meaning Yoffe talks of, the only meaning it can have, now.

Cynthia did not live to see the qualitative transformation which the fusion of WF and WP created for the politics she spent her last years fighting for. As we will continue to fight for those politics, Cynthia's life will continue to have a meaning. Her contribution to its development means that in the I-CL much of the essence of Cynthia Baldry lives on. We will see to it that it does.

Political Committee of the I-CL