Dave Hughes 1948 -1991

Dave Stockton

Dave Hughes was one of the founders of Workers Power and for 15 years a central leader, writer and activist in the workers movement before his death in August 1991. Here, Dave Stockton, a founder member of Workers Power, remembers his contribution to our political tradition.

TWENTY YEARS AGO ? whilst a team of Workers Power comrades were working on production of our theoretical journal Trotskyist International, we were shocked to hear that our comrade Dave Hughes had suddenly died. Dave had been very ill for over six months ? with an extended period in hospital - but had recently shown some signs of improvement.

Only two weeks before he had attended the five day Workers Power summer school in Birmingham and participated in the discussions and activities not only with members from Britain but with large numbers of our comrades from Austria, Ireland, France and Germany. One of the central themes of the school was the mounting crisis in Gorbachev’s USSR, and Dave’s presentation of his analysis of the roots and dynamism of that crisis over the preceding six years was a memorable highlight of the whole school.

Indeed, from the foundation of Workers Power (1975) and of the MRCI, the predecessor of the League for the Fifth International (1984) Dave had written extensively on both on Russian history (The Road to Red October [3]) and the contemporary Soviet Union. He was the inspiring spirit and principal author of The Degenerated Revolution [4] (1983) the book in which Workers Power elaborated its theory of the post-war expansion of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, East Asia and Cuba.

Thereafter, Dave went on not only to analyse the developing crisis in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union but also to develop and elaborate the programme of political revolution first outlined by Trotsky for the Soviet Union in the Thirties to make it operable in contemporary conditions.

Unlike many others who called themselves Trotskyists, Dave was not deceived by the unparalleled opening up of debate after the rise to power of Mikhail Gorbachev. He firmly insisted that there would be no successful self-reform by the bureaucracy; that only a political revolution, such as Trotsky had envisaged, one carried through by Soviet workers themselves, could save the planned property relations ? the remaining gains of the October Revolution.

Dave devoted all his considerable intellectual powers and organisational skills to the fight for that revolution. He visited the USSR and made contact with socialists and with workers from the newly emerging workers’ movement. He argued that, unless Soviet workers adopted the goal of overthrowing the ruling bureaucracy and instituting democratically centralised planning, then not only a return to the market but the restoration of capitalism was inevitable. This would, he believed, bring catastrophic suffering with it. On this - though after his death - he was proved right.

In 1987, Dave predicted the failure of Gorbachev’s project - not simply because of the conservatism of the
parasitic bureaucracy or because of the market infatuation of the academic intelligentsia who then formed Gorbachev?s cheerleaders, but because the working class would not be harnessed to this project. He wrote in *Gorbachev and the Soviet Working Class* [5] (Permanent Revolution no 6 Autumn 1987) Gorbachev asks the workers to participate in a charade of breathing life into the moribund planned economy. In return they are offered absolutely nothing materially. Where are the new goods in the stores? Where are the improved quality goods? Where is the evidence that anything really can and will change? Not only can he offer little. The workers have learnt to discount the bureaucracy?s promises. ?You make it work, then we?ll participate? is the most oft lamented expression of working class low morale? that the hack journalists of the perestroika have resorted to.?

But Dave warned too that this cynicism ? historically rooted in the defeats suffered by the working class and its Bolshevik Leninist vanguard at the hands of Stalinism, is also a serious roadblock on the path of independent Soviet working class political struggle.?

Alas, this roadblock was not removed in time. The new unions fell under the influence of Boris Yeltsin and the neoliberal intellectuals who shifted to his side from the temporizing figure of Gorbachev. In October 1990, Dave warned of ?... the misleadership of the new confederation of labour which has enormous illusions in the fast track to marketisation. There is an acute crisis of leadership which can only be resolved by a revolutionary Trotskyist party and programme. This must set as its aim the overthrow of the bureaucratic caste that is restoring capitalism.? (In Workers Power no 135)

In March 1990 Dave also wrote a resolution for our international organisation, the League for a Revolutionary Communist International, which accurately predicted the course of events;

?Faced with this growing crisis of bureaucratic rule and the threat of revolution, the Stalinists may launch a pre-emptive strike in the form of a bonapartist coup by Gorbachev or by one of his opponents. But in a period of mounting mass struggles this could be only a temporary bureaucratic solution: there would inevitably be a massive protest and resistance. The crackdown would probably be defeated and usher in a dual power situation such as occurred in Eastern Europe in 1989.? *The Death Agony of Stalinism: The Crisis of the USSR and the Degenerate Workers? States* [6]. Resolution adopted by the International Executive Committee of the LRCI, 4 March 1990

Dave did not live to witness and analyse the final collapse of bureaucratic rule and the giant steps towards restoration. His funeral took place on the very day of the collapse of the coup of the so-called hardliners.

Certainly we missed his wisdom and practical skills in the years that followed. But, for twenty years now we have carried on our work on the foundation which he laid. At the moment we are working on a second edition of the Degenerated Revolution, expanded to cover the crisis of the bureaucratic economy, the political crisis of Stalinism and the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe, the USSR and China. Needless to say we will dedicate this book to the still living memory of our dear comrade and friend, Dave Hughes.

1991 Obituary for Dave Hughes [7]

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