

# Dale Reissner: 1942-1994

Dale Reissner, one of the outstanding cadres of the revolutionary Spartacist League of the 1970s, and the original editor of *Women and Revolution*, died at her home in early January at the age of 51. She suffered fatal hemorrhaging as a result of Crohn's Disease, a terribly debilitating inflammatory bowel disorder, which she had suffered from for 15 years.

At the time of her death Dale was living and working in Campbell, California for Santa Clara County Child Protective Services. In 1988 she completed a Master's Degree in social work at San Jose State University while working full time. In the early 1970s she had obtained a Ph.D. from Rutgers University in Modern European History.

Like so many of her generation, Dale's first involvement with radical politics came in the protest movement against U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. She was active in the women's movement and was won to revolutionary Trotskyism as a member of San Francisco Women's Liberation. She joined the Spartacist League (SL) while in Berkeley, California completing her Ph.D. dissertation. She spent the next dozen years as an active revolutionary militant.

She had formal speaking engagements at Yale, Harvard and other universities, where she gave lectures on "Alexandra Kollontai and the Workers' Opposition;" "Women and the Russian Revolution;" "Marxism vs. Feminism" and "Sex, Class and the Women's Movement." In 1970 the Socialist Workshop published an essay by her, which was reprinted the next year by the New England Free Press, entitled "How the Russian Revolution Failed Women," which posed the problem as follows:

"The new Soviet Government attacked the problem of women's inequality with a thoroughness and enthusiasm which left no doubt as to the seriousness of its commitment; but despite the fact that it has never officially abandoned this commitment, it is clear that the Revolution has failed women."

The essay concluded, "it is impossible to understand the failure of the Revolution for women without understanding the general betrayal of the Revolution itself" by the Stalinist bureaucracy that usurped political power. She argued that the Bolsheviks had been correct in asserting that the fight for women's liberation required participation in a revolutionary workers' party, and that the task, therefore, was to take up the struggle to build an authentically Bolshevik, i.e., Trotskyist, vanguard in the American working class. Unlike many radical academics of her era, Dale took the struggle for socialism seriously. She was a person who did many things well: she was a good paper seller, a good writer and a good public speaker.

Dale's doctoral dissertation was entitled, "The Role of the Women of Petrograd in War, Revolution and Counterrevolution, 1914-1921," and her expertise in this area

provided an important impetus for the launching of *Women & Revolution*, a journal which, under her editorship, was an outstanding organ of Marxism. Dale also served as a member of the SL's Women's Commission. When publication of *W&R* moved from San Francisco to New York, Dale transferred to continue her editorial work with the journal. In New York she also served as a staff writer for *Workers Vanguard*.

In the winter of 1978-79, when most of the left was enthusing over the "progressive dynamic" of Khomeini's struggle against the Shah of Iran, Dale was one of the foremost public representatives of the SL's revolutionary opposition to both the Islamic theocrats and the bloody dictatorship of Reza Shah Pahlavi. She ignored numerous death threats from fanatical Islamic fundamentalists to address meetings on the dire implications of a Khomeinist regime for Iranian women, workers and minorities.

A few years after joining the SL, Dale was elected to the Central Control Commission, an internal party body responsible for "investigating any person or circumstance" it deemed necessary, sorting out internal disputes, and "periodic audits of financial accounts." Membership on such a body within a revolutionary organization requires a reputation for personal honesty, a sense of fairness and political integrity. Dale was recognized as a comrade who had an abundance of all these qualities, and one symptom of the gradual erosion of the revolutionary character of the SL was her displacement from the Control Commission.

By the late 1970s Dale was one of a number of senior SL cadres who were uneasy with the growth of a personalist bureaucratic internal style, centered on James Robertson. Dale eventually fell foul of the regime when she suggested that the SL leadership (including Robertson) should enjoy no special privileges, and should be accountable to the organization, particularly through the Control Commission.

This took place at a time when the Robertson regime was hardening its bureaucratic character, and was engaged in the early stages of a series of purges of leading cadres considered to be "unreliable" from the point of view of the *lider maximo* and his courtiers. Dale's name was added to the list, and a nasty and baseless slander campaign was initiated against her. The leading clique eventually succeeded in driving her out of the organization in 1983.

In the last few years of her life Dale was preoccupied with her illness and her work, and had little energy left for anything else. Yet she never abandoned the revolutionary ideas of her youth. She will be missed by all those who knew her, but her contributions to the revolutionary movement, particularly to the preservation and re-discovery of the tradition of Bolshevik work among women, will live on and help guide a new generation of young communist fighters. We salute her memory. ■