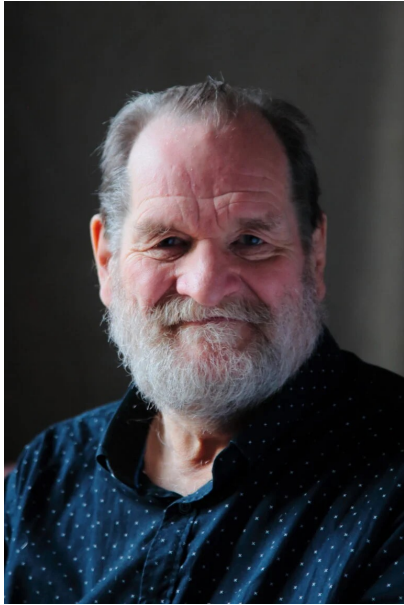


A Tribute to John Molyneux

Mary Smith



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John Molyneux, founder, and editor of this journal, died suddenly on December 10, 2022. It would be hard to overstate how profound is his loss. Each generation of revolutionary Marxists throws up its own greats; he was one of the '68ers', a label he wore with pride. It was the generation radicalised by the anti-Vietnam War movement; when student protestors faced down mounted riot police in Trafalgar Square, and Paris erupted in a revolt that saw ten million workers occupy their factories. John was there, both in Paris and in London, events that were formative in his development as an activist, theoretician, and party builder.

John went on to become a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, author of a dozen books, countless pamphlets, articles, and chapters. An obituary in *Rebel News*, by Seán Mitchell, outlines some of the more colourful elements of John's early life (a 'professional' poker player at 16 years of age!!), and traces aspects of his intellectual development, his writing, and his activism.¹ John remained a proud member of the International Socialist Tendency all his life.

In 2010, John retired from his job as lecturer in the Fine Arts Department of Portsmouth University and came to live with me in Dublin. Although he had enjoyed working with his students, he embraced his newfound freedom from the time-constraints of making a living, and, revolutionary activist to his bones, got stuck in right away. It's mostly about his time in Dublin that this short piece, in memory of John, is written.

John made the most of his new opportunity to write on a whole raft of issues, theoretical and topical, in his new surroundings. He wrote in a simple, direct, yet elegant style, making complicated ideas clear and accessible to 'ordinary' people.

He was a very knowledgeable man, well read in philosophy, history, art, and literature, with a deep understanding of Marx and Marxism, its development and practice through Lenin and Luxemburg, Trotsky and Gramsci, and later Tony Cliff, whose theory of Soviet Russia as ‘state-capitalist’ grounded new generations of socialists. John’s talents were valued highly in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), shortly to become the Socialist Workers Network, and he soon became part of the leadership of the organisation. He edited the SWP newspaper and went on to establish the Irish Marxist Review (IMR) which he edited and contributed to, for over ten years.

John also used the IMR to encourage people who had never dreamed that they could, or should write, to do so. As editor, he provided a platform where emerging talent could publish alongside some of the great Marxist writers of our day – including the late, great, Mike Davis, John Bellamy Foster, and Dave Zirin. Ever the activist, John was also the IMR’s most committed and successful vendor! There were few political meetings, demos, or rallies where attendees were not accosted, in a friendly way, by John with his bag of books, inquiring “Have you got your copy of the new IMR yet?”.

John’s writing in Dublin of course went way beyond his work for the IMR. Within a short time, he had produced a series of excellent pamphlets in response to debates and events of the day: on the role of the media, on anarchism, environmentalism, racism, war, Stalinism. Published in 2012, “*An introduction to Marxist philosophy: The Point is to Change It*” was an extraordinarily concise book through which John used his vast knowledge and skill to demystify and explain challenging philosophical concepts, demonstrating hands down the supremacy of revolutionary Marxist theory, based on practice.

His book ‘*Lenin for Today*’ published in 2017, took a fresh approach to the long-running debate of ‘reform versus revolution’ relating to dashed hopes in SYRIZA, Podemos, the Occupy movement, and urging anew, the dialectical approach of Lenin to advance the struggle to change the world. He enjoyed getting time to write about art, one of his great loves. ‘*The Dialectics of Art*’, published in 2020, is a joy to read, even if you don’t fully ‘get’ art, or agree with his way of defining it, you’ll never look at Michelangelo’s David in the same way again.

But John was not just a writer and theoretician of high standard; crucially, he *intervened* at every level. He was a regular on our local campaign stalls, dropped



leaflets, put up posters, addressed meetings of as few as four or rallies of thousands. He was an exceptionally fine speaker and polemicist – evidenced in many YouTube recordings.

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He was a founder member of United Against Racism (UAR), along with his dearest friend, Memet Uludag. UAR played a seminal role in building the movement leading to the biggest demo against racism and fascism in the history of the Irish State, when on February 18 a march estimated by the Irish Times as being 50,000 strong, chanted ‘Refugees are Welcome Here’, the whole length of Dublin’s O’Connell Street. John would have been chuffed.

The emergence of People Before Profit was to John, the most significant development on the left in a long time, and he played a vital role in shaping its strategy for real change in the Irish political landscape. But as a true Marxist he never neglected his

duty as an internationalist. He saw the issue of climate change as being of supreme importance and he founded and set about building the Global Eco-socialist Network, (GEN) linking activists from all five continents in a network that sought to link the struggle for climate justice with the struggle for socialism.

The outpouring of grief at the news on John’s untimely death reverberated around the world. Tributes and obituaries were posted on social media sites and published in many languages. Memet Uludag created a website where many of these can be seen.²

John has been described as a gentle giant, and that was true, with a generosity and kindness of spirit, always ready to champion the oppressed or just help someone down on their luck. He was also an iron-hard Bolshevik in his soul, uncompromising in his principles and fully

committed to the cause of international socialism. In the class struggle it's often said that 'books are weapons', and if that's so, then John Molyneux has left us a formidable arsenal. He has also left so many of us with fond and proud memories that we will cherish.

We'll miss him, and we'll honour him by carrying on the struggle to 'cleanse the world of evil, oppression and violence' (to paraphrase Trotsky – his hero).

And we'll miss his big, gentle embrace.

Mary Smith

¹ Seán Mitchell. 2022. Marxism with Modesty. Rebel News @ <http://www.rebelnews.ie/2022/12/14/marxism-with-modesty-john-molyneux-1948-2022/>.

² These can be found @ <http://www.rememberingjohnmolyneux.info>.