

Chris Harman 1942-2009

Tuesday 10 November 2009, by [DUGGAN Penelope](#), [Fourth International](#), [MAASS Alan](#), [Socialist Resistance \(Britain\)](#), [SWP \(UK\)](#) (Date first published: 7 November 2009).

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Supporters and readers of *Socialist Worker* as well as socialists from around the world will be sad to hear the tragic news that Chris Harman died last night in Cairo where he was speaking.

Our condolences go out to Talat, his partner, his children and all his family and friends.

Chris Harman was a towering figure on the left in Britain and he made an immense theoretical and personal contribution to the Socialist Workers Party. He was editor of *International Socialism Journal* and was previously the editor of *Socialist Worker* for over two decades.

He was also an influential and highly respected figure on the international left.

He was greatly loved and will be sorely missed. We will let comrades know about the funeral as soon as we know any details.

There will be a full obituary in the next issue of *Socialist Worker*.

If you would like to send any messages of condolences please send them to martins.swp.org.uk and we will make sure they are forwarded to Talat and his family.

In comradeship

The SWP Central Committee

Chris Harman: a life in the heart of the struggle

Socialist Resistance pays tribute

Duncan Chapel, Liam Mac Uaid

Chris Harman, the editor of *International Socialism* and a central committee member of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), died from a massive heart attack on November 6th. He was 67. We, and others in the Fourth International, join in sending condolences to Chris' family, friends and comrades.

A convinced revolutionary socialist all his adult life, Harman had played a key role in founding *Socialist Worker* and editing it until 2004. Harman was an internationalist from the start. That was reflected in myriad ways, from his participation in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in the late 1960s to the symbolic location of his death: Cairo.

Harman was a polymath, gifted as an author, speaker, editor, leader and economist. His book *The Lost Revolution: Germany 1918 to 1923* is a powerful tool for revolutionary socialists. His greatest work, *A Peoples' History of the World*, is invaluable. He was also outstanding as an activist and leader of the SWP and its forerunner, the International Socialists. Harman played a major role in helping the organisation develop its political direction and in explaining its choices to a radical audience. His famous 1990-91 debate with Ernest Mandel on the bureaucratic Stalinist dictatorships in *Quatrième Internationale* was translated into English and is still in print as *The Fallacies of State Capitalism*. His analysis of the SWP split from Respect was valued even by those who opposed the SWP's decision: it was translated by *Inprecor* and published in *Respect: Documents of the Crisis* as the clearest exposition of the SWP's viewpoint.

Harman took his role as an SWP leader seriously, but that did not stop him from having a transparent and comradely working relationship with socialists outside the SWP. Last month he was an active participant in the IIRE's economists seminar, in which most participants were Fourth Internationalists. While there, he spoke at a public meeting sponsored by *Grenzeloos*, the magazine of the Fourth International in The Netherlands.

As one of our comrades, Clement, put it on hearing the news: "Harman was for me the person from which I discovered Marxism, and which showed and revealed that revolutionary engagement was compatible with highly demanding scientific investigation for understanding and changing the world." Harman's openness, his books and articles, his work in the struggle and the contribution he made to developing the socialist consciousness of tens of thousands of people are a fitting monument to his revolutionary life.

Socialist Resistance editorial board,

November 7 2009.

P.S. This tribute is in Spanish at Foro Anticapitalista. Photos of Chris and others at the economists seminar are online at <http://bit.ly/2oFMZv> while the speeches by Chris, Claudio Katz and Michel Husson are available as audio files at <http://bit.ly/4fmACP>.

* Duncan Chapel is a member of the International Viewpoint editorial committee. He serves on the executive committee of the British Section of the Fourth International, Socialist Resistance, and the commission of the International Institute for Research and Education.

* Liam Mac Uaid is an editor of Socialist Resistance and a member of its executive committee. His blog is online at liammacuaid.wordpress.com

A powerful voice for international socialism

Alan Maass honors the life of a revolutionary who contributed to the tradition of international socialism for half a century.

November 9, 2009

CHRIS HARMAN, a leading British socialist and author of dozens of books and pamphlets on politics, economics, history and the Marxist tradition, died of a heart attack on Saturday at the age of 67.

His death—while in Cairo to speak at the Socialist Days conference—comes as a terrible shock to the many socialists in Britain and around the world who were influenced by him. We are deeply saddened by the sudden loss of this revolutionary who was a vital participant in the struggle for a new world for half a century.

Harman was born to a working-class family in Britain and attended the London School of Economics, where he was drawn to radical politics. He was part of the British campaign against the Vietnam War, called the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign—one of the central struggles that contributed to the re-emergence of a new revolutionary left in Britain.

By the early 1960s, he had joined the International Socialists (IS), an organization, later renamed the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), in which he remained a leading figure all his life.

The IS stood out from other socialist groups in Britain because it not only opposed capitalism in the West, but the Stalinist tyrannies in the USSR, China and other countries that falsely called themselves socialist. Internationally, the IS and SWP were among a current of socialist organizations—the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the U.S., which publishes SocialistWorker.org, among them—that took up the slogan “Neither Washington nor Moscow, but International Socialism.”

Harman was a prolific writer for the publications sponsored by the IS and SWP. He was the editor of *Socialist Worker* newspaper in Britain for almost all the years between 1976 and 2004, when he started editing *International Socialism Journal*, the SWP’s theoretical quarterly.

HARMAN WAS the author of books on a vast array of topics. He expanded on the analysis first put forward by Tony Cliff of the IS that Russia and the so-called socialist countries modeled on it were, in reality, state capitalist—ruled not by private capitalists, but state bureaucrats who were driven by military competition with the West to preside over a society of exploitation and oppression that had much more in common with Western-style capitalism than differences. Harman’s *Class Struggles in Eastern Europe* brilliantly documents both the repressive systems in the USSR’s satellite countries of the East and the rebellions from below against them.

Harman was known throughout the international left for his contributions to Marxist economic theory. In addition to his role in the debates over how to apply Marxism today, he was also a talented popularizer of the ideas of the socialist tradition, with a knack for making sometimes complex concepts accessible—something that showed through in short books like *How Marxism Works* and *Economics of the Madhouse*.

Harman’s writings also took up history. His book *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* brought together the stories of struggle and revolution from the U.S., Europe and far beyond to present an

inspiring picture of the international radicalization of the 1960s and early 1970s. One of his last books was *A People's History of the World*, literally an attempt to present a Marxist understanding of human history from the first examples of settled societies thousands of years ago to the international capitalist system of today.

As a veteran of past struggles and a penetrating writer, Harman had an influence outside Britain on socialists committed to the tradition of international socialism—the ISO in the U.S. among them. Harman came to the U.S. numerous times in the 1980s and '90s to speak for the ISO, and his articles for Britain's *Socialist Worker* often appeared in our own paper.

In the difficult period following the retreat of the struggles of the 1960s and early '70s, Harman helped us in understanding what needed to be done to uphold the tradition of revolutionary socialism and organize new struggles during the conservative era of the 1980s and the contradictions of the 1990s.

Despite differences between our organizations, the ISO has continued to be guided by the tradition of international socialism that Harman stood for and contributed to his whole political life. We mourn the loss of this committed revolutionary—and will honor his contribution by continuing the struggle for international socialism.

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

9th November 2009

Socialist Workers' Party
London
Britain

Dear Comrades

We have heard with sadness of the death of Chris Harman while participating in the Cairo conference.

All revolutionary socialists must appreciate Chris's whole-hearted commitment to the struggle and the many contributions he made to it through his party activity and publications, despite the political differences that could also exist.

We particularly appreciated his participation in our recent international seminar on the crisis, and will be publishing his contribution along with the other material produced by the seminar.

The Fourth International and its national organisations extend our warmest comradely solidarity to Chris's family and to the comrades of the SWP and the IST in this difficult moment of great loss,

Revolutionary greetings

Penny Duggan

on behalf of the Bureau
