

## **Britain: Mick Woods (28/12/1954 - 19/7/2018) Comrade, Fighter, Friend**

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### *Mick on anti-poll tax demo*

We are writing to say goodbye to our friend and comrade Mick Woods who has died too young - at the early age of 64 in hospital in Aarhus, Denmark, write Geoff Ryan and Sue Woodford. Mick had longstanding health problems in particular with psoriasis which at times covered his whole body. Because of his psoriasis Mick had to give up a mini-cabbing job as the pain was too much. Recently Mick had developed sclerotic arteries, which eventually led to both his legs being amputated, involving 2 separate operations. We understand he became severely depressed and withdrawn. Certainly in our last phone conversation with him he was finding it difficult to use the prosthetic legs supplied for him and was far from the cheerful Mick that we had always known.

Mick was a member of several left-wing political organisations in Britain, before becoming a member of the Fourth International. He remained a member of the FI after his move to Denmark in the 1990s. Although Mick was certainly able to put forward ideas about Marxist theory he nevertheless preferred action to sitting in meetings. Mick was always in the front line in political campaigns, whether supporting the miners' strike of 1984-85, fighting fascists on the streets when they tried to march through Brick Lane, opposing the Poll Tax, campaigning to save a local library in Brent and many other issues. Mick was elected a Labour Councillor for Carlton (now part of Kilburn) ward in Brent in 1986 as part of a fightback by the left in local government. He and other councillors refused to vote for cuts and were "disciplined" for their principles.

In 1993, Workers' Aid was formed to support the fight to keep Bosnia multinational at a time when it was under siege from the Serbian army, Croatian army, Serb and Croat militias. Mick volunteered to drive aid to the embattled miners of Tuzla in Bosnia. At his funeral in Aarhus, his courage as a convoy leader was emphasised.

And Mick certainly was courageous. Not only did he have to cope with a possible reoccurrence of psoriasis, which had already caused him to give up one driving job, he also had to find a way through territory occupied by Croat militias and the Croatian army, who at the time were attempting to carve up their own piece of Bosnia, to reach the embattled town of Tuzla. And he had to do this when the majority of the convoy opted to return home because of the difficulties laid by Serb and Croat nationalists and the UN in finding an easier route.

For Mick it was important to try to get aid to Tuzla since Tuzla was a working class town in which Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and others fought side by side in trade union militias to preserve the multi-ethnic, working class make up of their town. In Tuzla, Mick and the other members of the convoy, by

then only 3 trucks, were treated as celebrities but that certainly didn't go to Mick's head. He risked his life a further 24 times in getting aid to the workers of Tuzla.

Mick's account of the first international Workers Aid convoy to Bosnia can be found in the 1994 Socialist Outlook pamphlet BOSNIA 1994: Armageddon in Europe. As with most things involving Mick it is rather understated, particularly his own role in getting the convoy to Tuzla. And although he is critical of some of the other organisations involved, particularly the Workers Revolutionary Party, he isn't sectarian about them.

While working for International Workers Aid Mick met Lone, a member of the Danish section of the Fourth International involved in International Workers Aid. He moved to Denmark and they had a daughter, Ina. While Mick and Lone's relationship didn't last he was immensely proud of how Ina developed into an independent politically active woman. In fact Mick was immensely proud of Ina long before she became politically active. It was a sad irony he was not able to hear that she had addressed the final rally of the Fourth International youth camp in Denmark on behalf of the host delegation just 10 days after his death.

But Mick was not just a political activist. He was a very kind and caring person (once you got used to his at times somewhat caustic, but essentially friendly, manner). When he was moving to Denmark he invited us around to his London flat to take whatever we wanted. We relieved him of a bright orange sofa as well as a number of books and some shelves. The books reflected Mick's widespread interest in history, including, for example, a book on a medieval king in what is now Germany and one on the life of a junior officer in the army of the Duke of Wellington during the Peninsular war with Napoleon.

Mick had many interests outside of politics: bridge, football, the Tour de France, pool and, of course, bird watching. Because he worked odd shifts when he was mini-cabbing he was often available for a game of bridge during the day time, much to the delight of a number of his bridge-playing friends. Mick was very patient with people learning to play bridge, probably because he wanted them to continue playing. Unlike pool where he had no time for beginners, probably because he didn't care whether or not they ever played pool again.

Mick was passionate about the Tour de France, watching it on TV as much as he could. Sadly he didn't see a Welshman, Geraint Thomas, winning this year's tour. In football he supported West Ham United, a fairly difficult experience over the last few years.

Above all, Mick was a wonderful raconteur, full of interesting anecdotes. Our daughter loved to listen to him, completely intrigued when he was in full flow. He was extremely knowledgeable about so many things – and if he didn't know he could, and often did, make it up.

The last time we saw Mick was in 2009 when he came to stay with us in Carmarthenshire. Mick and a neighbour built a ramp so that our disabled daughter Tomi could get up into our garden, another example of Mick's kindness. He also insisted on cooking us chilli con carne though Mick being Mick, he had his own recipe which he insisted was the only 'genuine' recipe.

We also went for a meal at a local pub, where Mick ordered Chicken Marengo. Not only did he know the origin of the dish (Napoleon's victory at the battle of Marengo) but insisted that what he was served was not 'proper' Chicken Marengo. (He was probably right about this). Fortunately he kept this complaint to the three of us, without involving the pub staff. But this incident demonstrates Mick's knowledge of the Napoleonic wars, his interest in and knowledge of food – and also how pedantic he could sometimes be.

Mick also took us bird watching, both to a local RSPB reserve and up on the Black Mountain near where we live. He was not only able to spot but to identify different species of bird despite the distance they were away from us, the grass on the mountain, rocks etc. Mick was undoubtedly one of the best people to go bird watching with as you could learn so much from him.

Before he left us Mick did say he might move back to the UK once Ina was grown up, possibly to Carmarthenshire. We don't know how serious he was and unfortunately we will now never know. He is sorely missed: as a comrade, a fighter and a friend.

## **Socialist Resistance**

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- <http://socialistresistance.org/mick-woods-28-12-1954-19-7-2018-comrade-fighter-friend/13120>