



December 13, 2018

LABOR STUDIES AND RADICAL HISTORY

The Holt Labor Library brings greetings to this auspicious occasion, the celebration of our brother and comrade, Howard Keylor birthday. As Director of the Holt Labor Library and an administrator of the Marxists Internet Archives we, of course, pay serious attention to Bay Area fighters in the class struggle. We will hear from many you here about Howard's leadership both in Local 10 of the ILWU, its International, and his impact around the world, that put this Local on the map around the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980's.

But my remarks are more personal since it would be impossible to add to the political and trade union side of the accolades Howard is receiving. When I moved to the Bay Area in the early 1980's from NYC, I knew the "movement" here, the left, the trade union labor movement, was very politicized and very active. Of course even before Howard's making-of-the-motion for his union not to unload ships from or bound to S. Africa, Howard was well known. I had seen photos of him in various left journals (This was before the internet remember).

I was a member and shop steward in IBEW Local 1245, working at PG&E's Potrero Power Plant. It is here where I first met Howard, and our Chair for today's event, Jack Heyman. How did that happen? The plant leased Pier 70 which was about 1/4 mile from the plant itself. We unloaded fuel oil and diesel fuel, usually in 25,000 barrel increments, sometimes more. I met Jack there when he floated in on a barge of 25,000 barrels of jet fuel for our gas turbines. This was around 1986 or so, right before Howard retired. One day that year we were taking on fuel oil for our boiler (which we burned in the winter when gas supplies were restricted) and I went out to handle the operations end of the unloading. Naturally we would get there before the tanker arrived. There was a single lone dark blue or black Dodge panel van at the end of the dock with some ol' geezer sitting in the slide door way of the van reading a book. Due to the hazards of the pier, I wandered over expecting to have to tell the person to leave the pier, it wasn't "public" like a park that it was unsafe to hang out here.

This turned out to be Howard though I didn't realize it at first. With about 10 seagulls on top of his van pleasantly shitting all over it, I asked what he was doing. He said he was with "the union" and he was waiting for the ship to come in as he was on the "line crew" that was the gang assigned to tie up the ship to the pier. He had a radio going in the background with scratchy voices. I asked about that and Howard said he keeps a radio scanner in his van to listen to the marine channel which gives updates when the ships are due to arrive. As I realized it was Howard, I mentioned I knew of him and his work in the Local so we started talking. We were members of two *different* revolutionary organizations but we didn't even get to that. Howard was reading a science fiction novel and as I was a sci fi buff as well, we talked for a good 20 minutes about our favorite sci fi authors. He was a true buff and we had both read many of the same writers. We never even got to politics! We exchanged phone numbers and arranged, occasionally, to meet at Muddy's coffee shop on 24th street to discuss the books we were both interested in. But we also discussed military history, military tactics and strategy during a revolution (Howard was as some of you know, something of an expert on the German Revolution). Sometimes these were quite "high end" discussions.

So why all these reminiscences? Partly to give insight into the man sitting here and what made Howard...Howard. But as a revolutionary digital archivist and librarian it is important for me to understand that the *human material* in



LABOR STUDIES AND RADICAL HISTORY

the mind of this class fighter represents a somewhat smaller segment of the labor and, revolutionary movement. That is, the working class intellectual of which, in my opinion, is an increasingly rare kind of human being. Howard represents the quintessential proletarian intellectual. I've known a few in my lifetime but not many, unfortunately. Intellectuals of Howard's type are "*polymaths*", to use an almost ancient term that has fallen out of vogue, is defined the following way: "A polymath is a person whose expertise spans a significant number of different subject areas, known to draw on complex bodies of knowledge to solve specific problems." I think this defines Howard exactly. His pedagogical approach to explaining the complexities of capitalist oppression and defining the class struggle approach to solving these problems is exactly what such a working class polymath does. His decades long experience in imperialist war, class struggle on the waterfront, building a revolutionary organization has developed Howard into this vibrant and fascinating working class intellectual that we should all, as members of the working class, be quite proud of.

Happy Birthday, Howard!

David Walters
Director
Holt Labor Library
Admin, Marxists Internet Archive