

# Comrade Nedy

Comrade Juanita “Nedy” Hillman, administrative counselor for San Francisco Bay Area Local 1100, Department Store Employees Union, and a Trotskyist since her youth, died on 1 February of complications from pneumonia. She was 45 years old.

Comrade Hillman joined the then-revolutionary Spartacist League in the early 1970s, and was a member of the central apparatus of that organization until 1982, when she quit in disgust at its increasingly cult-like internal life and the dishonesty of some of its top leaders.

Shortly after leaving the Spartacist League she became a supporter of the Bolshevik Tendency (BT), and remained so until her death. Only recently, on 15 November 1991, she chaired a public debate between the BT and the Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (at that time associated with the British Workers Power group).

Never in robust health, Comrade Hillman caught the flu over the year-end holidays and was hospitalized until her death more than a month later.

Nedy (as she was known to her friends and comrades) graduated from San Francisco’s Hastings Law School in 1988 and clerked for the late Charles Garry, an attorney noted for his defense efforts in political trials of radicals in the 1960s and 70s.

While attending law school, she ran a student law clinic, the Unemployment Project, which specialized in unemployment compensation cases. She later wrote a legal handbook entitled “How to Fight for Unemployment Benefits in California,” which has since gone through several printings.

Under the sponsorship of the Bay Area Income Rights Project, Nedy gave seminars to other unions and the Bar Association on unemployment compensation. After a year at the San Francisco Legal Aid Society, Nedy worked at the San Francisco Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation, appealing denied unemployment compensation claims and winning all but one of her cases. She also volunteered her services to the Homeless Advocacy Project. In her three years as a practicing attorney, she generously gave her time and skills to the working class and the homeless. In February 1991 she became legal counselor for Local 1100, and prosecuted the local’s arbitration cases, unemployment hearings, workmen’s compensation cases and mediations.

A public memorial service was held Saturday, 8 February, in San Francisco, attended by more than fifty of her friends, colleagues and comrades. Reprinted below is the eulogy delivered at the memorial service by Comrade Fred Riker of the Bolshevik Tendency.

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James P. Cannon once said that his youth followed him all his life, looking over his shoulder and whispering in his ear: “Be true to me for I am your youth—don’t betray me.” Nedy never betrayed her youth. She died an atheist and a communist. And we are proud to have known her.

Nedy *hated* oppression—the oppression of women and children, racial oppression and the universal oppression we suffer as workers in this most capitalist of societies. Beginning as a young woman, she fought all her life against Nazis and Klansmen, landlords and bosses. She fought against imperialist wars, homelessness, unemployment and against the arrogance, privilege and alienation that this system breeds by its very nature. When she found that her political organization had degenerated into a pathetic cult, she quit and fought to expose the betrayals committed by the leadership of that organization.

The pressure of having to live in this society, while simultaneously holding a vision of a better world, caused Nedy much pain and suffering. There were times when it made her sick and disoriented. There were times she behaved more like a character out of a Hunter S. Thompson novel than an “officer of the court.”

What saved her, though, was her wonderful sense of humor and the fact that she managed to maintain her world view and her faith that the workers, the poor and the oppressed have the power to change this world.

For all her faults, Nedy was selfless in this belief. When she became a lawyer, she worked on homeless and unemployed projects, and later took a job with a labor union....When he was interviewed for her obituary, the president of the union for whom she worked said that she had to be strong-armed into taking pay raises. “She wasn’t,” he said, “in it for the money.”

This is the Nedy we claim as ours. This is the Nedy we want to remember.