

Justin Ryniker

Justin Ryniker, a long-time supporter of the International Bolshevik Tendency, died during liver transplant surgery in Sydney early on the morning of Sunday, 1 June 1997. He was 31 years old.

As Wellington's *City Voice* said in a page three obituary (12 June 1997):

"He was lead singer for brattishly literate 1980s Wellington band The Wart, banner painter and babysitter for the Permanent Revolution Group and painter of the huge canvases that hung in the Hole in the Wall bar for its first year of business."

Over 400 attended Justin's funeral. His mother, Margaret, spoke movingly of his wisdom and friendship. Others talked of his generosity, artistic flair and unusual turn of mind. One friend, comrade and former workmate recalled:

"My first impression of Justin, meeting him a decade ago, was of a likeable young man, with a sometimes acerbic sense of humour and an air of cynicism about him. As I spent a bit more time with him over the years, particularly working together, I enjoyed getting to know him better and came to see him as the opposite of cynical, a very kind man, generous in his opinions of others."

Justin was no sentimentalist and had a sharp sense of irony, but he was thoroughly sensitive, deeply considerate and capable of great patience. He was very bright, intrigued by political ideas, and enjoyed an argument.

As a teenager, Justin displayed keen interest in various forms of artistic expression—music, painting, writing, film. He was never afraid to stand apart from the crowd. Among the enthusiasms which shaped his taste were Erich von Stroheim and Kenneth Anger films, and Metal Machine music. His aesthetic is perhaps summarized by this passage, chosen from his journal by his partner, Michelle:

"We must free ourselves from cultural conservatism, as well as from political conservatism. We must see our

rituals for what they are—completely arbitrary things, tied to our bourgeois way of life; it is good—and it is the real theatre—to transcend them in the manner of play, by means of games and song....[O]ne must put 'in play,' show up, transform, and reverse the systems which quietly order us about."

Justin became a supporter of the Permanent Revolution Group (PRG) at first in work against unemployment about ten years ago, well before its fusion with the Bolshevik Tendency in 1990. His band, The Wart, which had a substantial following in Wellington in the late 1980s, did gigs for united fronts the PRG was involved in.

During Christmas 1990, Justin's liver suddenly started to fail, and he had his first transplant early in 1991. His health was never satisfactory again, but he continued to work a full-time job, to do serious study in the field of art history and his own painting, to build a satisfying personal life, and to make significant political contributions.

For years, he looked after Sophie and Karl one evening a week, so their parents could attend IBT meetings. Their step-father recounted how:

"when Sophie (she was probably about six at the time) would get up at about 8pm, get dressed, and insist that she was going off to night school, Justin would deal with it all with his usual patient good humour."

Justin was a good trade unionist, and played an important role for a time with another comrade in the National Film Library resisting job cuts. And he also made banners and placards to order for the IBT—professionally, reliably and fast.

At the funeral, a PRG comrade said:

"Justin's friends will miss his wry little smile, his brutal brand of humour and sense of the absurd, and his occasional outbreak of maniacal laughter, with the accompanying stamping of the foot."

The IBT has lost a valuable supporter.