# Remembering Doug Ireland, Steve Kindred, and James D. Young

written by Thomas Harrison, Dan La Botz | July 2, 2014

Doug Ireland, radical journalist, blogger, passionate human rights and queer activist, and relentless scourge of the LGBT establishment, died in his East Village home on Oct. 26. Doug had lived with chronic pain for many years, suffering from diabetes, kidney disease, sciatica, and the debilitating effects of childhood polio. In recent years he was so ill that he was virtually confined to his apartment. Towards the end, even writing, his calling, had become extremely difficult.

Doug wrote for the *Nation*, the *Village Voice*, *New York* magazine as well as his blog *Direland*, and in France *Libération* and the news website *Bakchich*. His scathing polemical style and the vast breadth of his knowledge were exceptional. Doug was a tireless champion of the oppressed of all kinds, but especially of those who are punished for loving members of their own sex, wherever they might be. For his uncompromising internationalism, his refusal to allow cultural differences to stand as an excuse for denying LGBT people their human rights, I can think of no one on the left, apart from Peter Tatchell, who was quite like him.

Doug was always a man of the left, a libertarian socialist, who nevertheless had long-standing ties to progressives in the Democratic Party—going back to Allard Lowenstein, George McGovern, and Bella Abzug, for whom he worked as a campaign manager. But he was never an apologist for mainstream Democrats, including Obama, never pulled his punches in his attacks on their cynical amoralism.

Doug had a special loathing for Clinton. One of his last published pieces was "Should We Forgive Bill Clinton?" in *Gay City News* (March 26, 2013), after the former president wrote an op-ed for the *Washington Post* against the Defense of Marriage Act, which he had signed into law in 1996. Noting that the *Post* piece was timed to prepare for the kickoff of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign a week later, Doug wrote:

The truth is that an old and predatory libertine like Bill couldn't have cared less if a guy or a gal wanted to marry a Volkswagen. He wasn't a bigot himself—he just surfed on the bigotry of others like the opportunist he's always been. And it is that opportunism that led him to write his op-ed piece against DOMA on behalf of his wife's candidacy.

Doug reminded his readers that "there is a long list of vicious actions by President Clinton and his administration for which he owes LGBT people an unadulterated apology." One of the items on this list was the Clinton administration's use of aid and trade blackmail targeting Third World countries to stop them from buying or manufacturing cheaper, generic versions of the AIDS-fighting drugs needed to prolong life. . . . How many thousands died because Clinton, in his subservience to the greed of Big Pharma, engaged in this shameful arm-breaking? We'll never know for sure—but their blood, too, is on Bill's hands.

Doug was a friend of *New Politics* and of the Campaign for Peace and Democracy. In 1988, at a time when the Campaign was heavily involved in defending democratic dissidents in the Soviet bloc, Doug reported for its newsletter on the persecution of gays in Eastern Europe. He wrote:

Of all the taboos in Eastern Europe, none has been more cruel or dehumanizing than the official attitude toward homosexuality. If one of the very first acts of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution was to abolish the laws making homosexuality a crime, . . . Stalinism recriminalized homosexuality, and the theory that 'fags are a product of capitalist decadence' has reigned malignantly in the Eastern bloc ever since, with anti-gay persecutions a favorite weapon of the political police throughout the bloc.

Doug's understanding of Stalinism's crimes, and beyond that of the whole history of the left's troubled relationship to alternative sexualities, was brilliantly expounded in a piece he wrote for *New Politics*, "Socialism and Gay Liberation" (Winter, 2009). In it, he paid tribute to the courageous gay socialist pioneers, John Addington Symonds, Edward Carpenter, Oscar Wilde (yes, he was a socialist), and Magnus Hirschfeld. But he also described the vicious bigotry that was made official in the Stalin-era Communist movement and persisted long after Stalin's death.

The great turning point, of course, was the birth of the post-Stonewall radical gay liberation movement in the United States, a movement, in Doug's words, that was "against the State, which made us criminals; against the medical and psychiatric professions, which declared us sick; and against the cultural heterotyranny which made us the target of disdain, ridicule, opprobrium, hate and violence." Like Doug, Gay Liberation saw itself as an integral, but never a subordinate, part of *all* liberation struggles—feminist, antiwar, civil rights.

What a contrast with the mostly narrowly parochial LGBT organizations of today, which support and shower gay dollars on any politician, of either party, who is "good on gay issues," no matter how reactionary he/she is on anything else. Since the late 90s, the gay movement has become tamed and institutionalized, symbolized preeminently by the corporate-oriented Human Rights Campaign. Doug never ceased railing against the established LGBT leadership for its political conservatism and for turning the movement into just another interest group—but he was especially critical of its near indifference to the persecution of LGBT people in other countries. Doug called for the aggressive defense of gays under attack in Uganda, Russia, Iraq, and Iran. In this, he was working in the great universalist tradition of the historic left, based on a single norm of human freedom and flourishing, a norm that justifies criticism of cultural traditions, wherever they might be, that support such practices as female subordination, racial and religious discrimination, and homophobia.

In his *New Politics* piece, Doug insisted on the need "to begin a serious and radical rethinking of homosexuality and gender identities so as to understand at a deeper level why the fear and loathing of same-sex love and gender variants are so deeply engrained in society and culture." Writing in 2009, he sensed "a hunger for a return to some of the earlier principles of sexual liberation for all with which our movement began, not just here but abroad." Doug is no longer with us, no longer able to make his own inestimable contribution to the revival of these principles. Let us hope, nevertheless, that they can be revived, for the sake of a truly liberated future.

Thomas Harrison

**STEVE KINDRED, 1944-2013**

The other night my wife and I went to have dinner with Ellen Goldensohn, the wife of my friend Steve Kindred. Steve died of cancer a few months ago. Ellen invited me to take a few of Steve's books from the shelves that held them. I found on the shelves three old copies of *New Politics*: one from the Summer of 1965, one from the Fall of 1970, and another from the Fall of 1971. I would not be at all surprised if the three copies of the journal had once been stuffed in his rucksack, together with his compass, flashlight, maps, address books, radical newspapers, cigarette papers and tobacco, peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches, and a quart of milk, the usual stuff he carried as Steve

traveled back and forth across America for decades as a radical student and later labor organizer.

Perhaps these were random copies that survived Steve's early peripatetic life as an activist in Students for a Democratic Society in Chicago, then as an editor of the student-worker-alliance paper *The Picketline* in Los Angeles, and later as a founder of Teamsters for a Democratic Union active in Detroit. Maybe, on the other hand, these were issues he had saved because they had a particular significance for him, articles in them having been written by his intellectual mentor Hal Draper and his friends Kim Moody and Mike Parker. Whichever may be the case, it was *New Politics*' commitment to supporting the radical left, to furthering reform in the labor movement, to fighting for equality for African Americans and other oppressed groups, and to democratic socialism that Steve had imbibed as a youth and that helped to maintain him through his years of activism. As a member of the International Socialists and Solidarity, Steve continued to have those politics as his north star.

Steve was that rare person, ingenious and fearless, who could walk into a difficult and sometimes dangerous situation—a confrontational student protest, a wildcat strike, or a rank-and-file group in its first local union election—and provide the kind of leadership that not only offered guidance but also inspired others to rise to the occasion. That character came from Steve's family and their fine values. But his politics came in good measure from *New Politics*. We will attempt to carry on that tradition in his memory and the memory of so many other activists, intellectuals, and social critics long associated with this journal who are no longer with us. The struggle continues.

Dan La Botz

**JAMES D. YOUNG, 1931-2012**

The editors of *New Politics* regret that we didn't earlier note the sad passing of James D. Young, a longtime friend and occasional contributor to *NP*. Young, known to his friends as "Jimmy," was a lifelong socialist and prominent labor historian. He came from a working class family in Scotland and left school at fourteen to work in a local sawmill. A few years later he became a railway worker, and as an adult received a trade union scholarship to study history at Newbattle Abbey College. He later attended Oxford University and received his Ph.D. from the University of Strathclyde, and for many years taught Scottish and labor history at Stirling University. For several years in the late 1950s and early 1960s he was a member of the Socialist Review Group, the forerunner to the International Socialists/Socialist Workers Party (UK). From the mid-1960s onwards he considered himself an independent socialist and a principled advocate of socialism from below. Young's first book, published in 1979 and reissued in 2011, was *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class*. His other works include *Women and Popular Struggles* (1985); *John Maclean: Educator of the Working Class* (1988), *Socialism and the English Working Class* (1989), and *The Very Bastards of Creation* (1996). His autobiography, *Making Trouble: Autobiographical Experiences and Socialism*, was published in 1987, and his biography of C.L.R. James, *The Worlds of C.L.R. James: The Unfragmented Vision*, was published in 1999. He was completing a biography of James Connelly when he died. James Young was a prolific author, a lively public speaker, and a friend and mentor to numerous labor historians and socialists, both in Scotland and elsewhere. He is missed.

## Footnotes