

# Marta Russell, 61, Writer about Disability Issues

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Marta Russell died a few days ago in Los Angeles days short of her sixty-second birthday. A journalist and commentator about issues affecting disabled people as well as a film industry worker for many years, Russell was best known for her landmark and pioneering book, *Beyond Ramps: Disability at the end of the Social Contract* (Common Courage Press). Here she set out a compelling critique of how capitalism marginalizes and oppresses disabled workers. Reading it as a young disability rights advocate, I found Marta's book a breath of fresh air, combining passionate advocacy with an understanding of political economy and an account of how disabled people are systematically oppressed by capitalism.

Marta was particularly unique in focusing on an anti-capitalist critique of disablement policy in the United States where postmodern analysis of the disabled body has predominated. With Jean Stewart, she wrote a remarkably biting piece about prisons and disablement for *Monthly Review*. She was also not shy about criticizing misguided strategies by disability rights movements that she felt were too moderate or co-opted. Disabled since birth, Marta leaves behind a daughter, Georgia Scheele, her partner, Steve Weiss, and countless disabled people she radicalized around the world. Advocates of socialism from below would do well to revisit her work on this too often ignored topic.

*Ravi Malhotra is a member of the Human Rights Committee of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities and co-authored an article with Marta Russell in Socialist Register in 2001.*