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Obituary

A last farewell to Mick Woods

- Features - In Memoriam - Obituaries and appreciations -

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Mick Woods, a comrade from Britain who had lived in Denmark for more than twenty years, died at the too young age of 64 in July. But its not only in Britain and Denmark that Mick is mourned - the proudest achievement of his political life was his involvement in International Workers' Aid, a campaign of practical solidarity with multi-ethnic Bosnia. The tribute below, from Ulf B Andersson from Swedish Workers' Aid, was read at his funeral by former Danish MEP Søren Søndergaard who first met Mick through the campaign. The second piece was written for his memorial meeting in London, also addressed by Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, by Danish comrade Lone Degn. Establishing a proper archive for IWA would be the best tribute we could pay to Mick - Eds

For some of us a grey November day in 1993 was one of our happiest days. The message coming from Tuzla in Bosnia about the arrival of the first convoy from International Workers Aid was great news. It was due to effort of some extremely brave men and women in defiance of the impossible conditions in Bosnia at that time.

Mick Woods was one of the heroes on this convoy organized to support the Mine Workers Union in Tuzla, one of the few places where some kind of multi ethnic co-existence still prevailed in 1993 when the vicious war in Bosnia was creating death and destruction.

When Mick and the four other persons on the convoy on their way to Tuzla reached the office of UNHCR in Zenica in Central Bosnia UNHCR sent a fax to the head office in Zagreb: "I was surprised, to say the least, to see this somewhat motley crew turn up at a time when all UNHCR convoys are suspended and tensions are so high (...) I am quite suspicious. Can you please confirm the identity of these five persons".

After reaching Tuzla on November 8th 1993 IWA in cooperation with the Trade Unions in Tuzla and other organisations established cooperation between ordinary people around Europe and people in Tuzla. It was a truly grassroots-organisation with people having different ideas joining hands to fight, at least for a decent Europe. This was a period when we saw the ugly face of modern fascism in the form of this extreme nationalist idea of dividing people and forcing hundreds of thousands of people to leave their homes.

Mick was one of the important persons turning the ideas to concrete action. Altogether Mick drove around 20 IWA-convoys.

He could be stubborn but he had a big heart and close to a good laugh. His sense of humor became well-known within IWA and when we at IWA-HQ in Stockholm received a typical Mick-report with the headline "This ain't no technological breakdown, this is the road to hell" we feared the rest of the content in the report. "Shit happens" Mick admitted describing how the two trucks of IWA were lost by bad luck on the Igman Road in a convoy from Tuzla to Sarajevo on 25th of November 1994.

Mick continued to be a important part of IWA for the coming years and also worked for STS, StÅt Tuzlas skoler, organized by Vagn Rasmussen, another IWA-veteran who passed away in 2016.

The bravery of Mick and the other comrades in November 1993 changed or at least affected a lot of peoples lives. Our mutual experiences in IWA created a very strong bond of friendship, still existing today. It was also the source of love, marriages (and divorces) and was the root of birth of a few children.

A last farewell to Mick Woods

Mick Woods was not only a dedicated socialist, a brave truckdriver but also a talented writer. In the printed IWA-bulletin no 7 (November 1998), a special issue to celebrate IWA first 5 years, Mick collected his memories in the long article "Daddy – what did you do during the Bosnian war?". He made the conclusion: "To briefly draw a political balance sheet of IWA and our operation in ex-Yugoslavia – despite all our errors I believe we have in the last 5 years written a small chapter in working class history. We have made the notion of proletarian internationalism and solidarity come to mean something."

Mick continued: "On a personal note I would say that my activities in IWA were the most satisfying and meaningful in over 20 years of intense political activity. I'm glad I was there. I believe that those of us who were involved in the war have been changed for ever".

When we in Copenhagen in June 2013 celebrated IWA 20 years, Mick was there and some of us discussed the idea of celebrating IWA 25 years in Tuzla. It was with sadness we in May 2018 had to celebrate in Tuzla without Mick, too sick to travel to Bosnia.

Now Mick has passed away. In the hearts of people in what was IWA-Sweden and other countries he will be remembered for all his commitment.

If there is a place in heaven for brave truckdrivers Mick will be sitting there saying "It seemed like a good idea at the time! Sretno".

Preserving the archive

At the memorial in Denmark me, Ulrik and Søren, who were all active in the IWA campaign finally arranged meeting to organize all the paperwork from the campaign. We had talked about it before. We think there is an important story to tell. A story about how the left wing operated at the time, a story about how to do concrete national and international solidarity work and a story about mobilizing lots of groups all over Europe. But also a story that contains a lot of facts, that are withheld or denied in the official narrative about the Balkan war.

One of the problems is, that the IWA work, took place in a time between writing on paper by hand or type writer and the www. revolution; in the few years where we thought that the fax machine was a fantastic invention. Now we know, that things written on fax paper do not last.

I stored a lot of IWA papers, and can see that we have to act now or the story will be gone. Ulrik and I met in Copenhagen to have a look at the material - and it is still possible to read about 90 % of the pages. The material is from Croatia, Bosnia, Denmark and Sweden (between whom the international office circulated) and papers from some of the international meetings. This makes it possible to tell the story.

So the first step is finding funds to read through, sort and store papers and deciding how the story is to be kept and told. We will continue to work on this.

Lone Degn

If you want to donate we are using the ESSF account - but *please* mark any donation IWA appeal.

A last farewell to Mick Woods

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