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Obituary

Remembrance of Kevin Keating

- Features - In Memoriam - Obituaries and appreciations -

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Kevin Keating was born in Baile Ánna Cliath (Dublin) Ireland on 29 January 1949 and died there on 8 May 2020. He joined People's Democracy (Irish section of the Fourth International) in 1980, and remained a Fourth Internationalist until his death as a member of Socialist Democracy.

I was asked to write a tribute about Kevin, my dear partner who died in May from a deadly Glioblastoma brain tumour. I found writing it difficult with the sadness of him being gone and I missed his editing skills.

Kevin was interested and informed about anything one could care to mention; the world, science, politics, music, books, films the natural world, films, comedy, sport. He was a traditional Irish music enthusiast and was either playing tunes on his tin whistle or listening to music. He dabbled in a bit of painting and was an avid reader. I miss not having to tidy away the stuff he left lying around – books, kindle, music notes, etc. Prior to his illness he had a busy life, playing music a few nights weekly at traditional music sessions and swimming a mile as regularly as 3 times each week and involvement in political activity. Attending music schools and festival in Ireland every summer was part of his calendar of activities and after his retirement he travelled in Asia and trekked in Nepal in 2017.

Kevin faced his diagnosis in March 2019 bravely, his life of campaigning and struggle gave him an inner strength to cope and live as normal a life as possible. The day following his discharge from hospital we went to the national football stadium Croke Park to see his team Dublin playing. Not breaking with tradition, we also went to the St Patrick's Day parade.

He joked about his chemotherapy referring to it as chemo torture, saying therapy implied relaxation, massage and candles. My sister recounts her reading an expiry date on an item and him saying wryly "I also have an expiry date". Whilst his treatment in the public health care service was generally good he also experienced first-hand its stark inadequacies, waiting on one occasion 2 hours for an ambulance to respond to an emergency 999 call – a result of decades of cuts, austerity and outsourcing. Very often it was not safe to go to Accident and Emergency due to overcrowding and infection risk but Kevin was philosophical about this, he was glad to be able to stay at home when in reality he needed to be assessed for the increased incidence of seizures he was experiencing.

Reading the many tributes since his passing show the high esteem he was held in – it was lovely to read how well regarded and liked he was, a man with a quiet unassuming manner, thoughtful towards other people, kind and considerate with a good sense of humour. [1] He was a devoted father to his two daughters who cared for him with myself and other family members at our home during the last month of his life.

He was not a career person or interested in status. He devoted his time outside work to doing what he enjoyed - his paid work as a fitter/plumber in a local authority was a means to live. A message on the condolences page of his death notice says, "Great memories of Kevin working in the boiler house in Ballymun, and his main job highlighting the plight of others on marches down O'Connell St and handing out leaflets."

Kevin started work as an apprentice at a young age and soon became interested in left wing politics. At this time, as he states in his interview [here](#) tens of millions of workers across Europe were engaged in strikes, while Ireland topped the table for the number of strike days lost to unofficial strikes. This political climate radicalized him. He was a great admirer of James Connolly and fittingly Kevin's coffin was draped with the Starry Plough, the flag of the Irish Citizen Army representing Connolly's Workers Republic.

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In the 1980s myself and Kevin met through our involvement in the H Block campaign, republican political prisoners were on hunger strike for political status. We were both members of People's Democracy and were involved in an election campaign to elect Bernadette McAliskey who was standing during the hunger strike campaign as a candidate in the constituency of the then Fianna Fail leader. The election headquarters was a caravan which required guarding at night, one evening myself and Kevin were assigned as minders and from then on, we became more than comrades in struggle. Bernadette received a respectable vote but during the election campaign she was targeted by the pro-life movement. During this tense period of heightened struggle Kevin visited workplaces and campaigned to get support from workers and trade unions for the prisoners demands.

The repeal of the 8th Amendment in 2018 was a great victory, Kevin was involved in the campaign and was hugely impressed by the energy of the youth who were central in winning the landslide vote. [2] This gave him optimism, he believed this energy could be harnessed to win other victories. Later that year, with support and inspiration from Kevin, I helped, with others, set up the Campaign Against Church Ownership of Women's Healthcare with the objective of making the proposed new publicly funded National Maternity Hospital public and free of control and ownership by the nuns. He was enraged by the duplicitous role being played by government as they colluded with the church on the handover despite the repeal victory and the exposure of horrendous clerical abuse of children and adults in their care over decades. Kevin's speaking at the campaign launch focussed on the inspiring role of the youth and how they could defeat the manoeuvres of the state and catholic church regarding ownership of the new maternity hospital.

Kevin was active in the struggles against deregulation of utility services - refuse collection, property and water charges, he saw from the outset the introduction of charges would lead to these services being privatized. He was proved correct on this. He had many a sharp argument at campaign meetings on the role of the union leaderships in easing the way for the state to implement the neoliberal changes dictated by the TROIKA policies which continue under the fiscal treaty agreed by unions leaders. Kevin campaigned against social partnership deals between government, employers, and trade unions, seeing clearly that all the deals sold out workers and eroded public services. He saw through the deception and corruption of language used by the social partners whereby the buzz word reform was but another word for austerity instead of improvement in services. He got wired up and angry at how workers were made to pay for the crisis.

He was a thoughtful reflective person and a fervent advocate of the necessity for democracy in politics and campaigns, seeing its absence as a block on the ability of the working class to be centrally involved and have ownership of their struggle. Democracy was an important concept in Kevin's lexicon. He was bemused that left candidates' platforms in the recent local government elections failed to address the undemocratic nature of the councils whereby unelected city managers had control. He cited the democracy in Athens centuries ago as more advanced than today.

He cared about what was going on not just in Ireland but internationally. We were both involved in setting up the Ireland Bosnia Solidarity campaign in the early 1990s which supported a multi-ethnic united Bosnia Herzegovina and opposed the UN imposed arms embargo which left the Bosnians defenceless against armed Serb nationalists, the campaign supported the Workers Aid convoys to Bosnia. Our daughters could be forgiven for thinking they lived in Sarajevo as we campaigned relentlessly. In 2005 Kevin went to Colombia as an international observer with a delegation of students and trade unionists from Ireland. Students unions in Ireland were boycotting coca cola products. In Colombia he met with the coca cola workers who were then campaigning for an international boycott of Coca Cola products due to the repression and murder of trade union activists in their plants in Colombia. I could see on his return that the brutality of the state and the death squads that he learned about affected him deeply.

In more recent years, he met with and befriended people seeking refugee status in Ireland from whom he gained loving support during his illness. Kevin cared deeply about the downtrodden and marginalized and victims of abuse of power and worked tirelessly to get rid of the capitalist system whose injustices and inequality he so despised. He

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never lost hope or belief despite setbacks and defeats. His strong belief that there was a socialist alternative made him optimistic about the future.

It was fitting that his own rendition of Phil Ochs' song, When I'm Gone was played at his funeral service "I can't say who to praise and who to blame when I'm gone, so I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here."

He leaves behind an impressive legacy of kindness and political activism. For me as his partner and comrade his inspiration and determination will hopefully help myself and our daughters through his loss and that we will have the strength to continue to fight for what he believed in.

The photo below shows Kevin canvassing during repeal in 2018 with his partner Anne and daughter Kate. The [video clip](#) is of his funeral.

https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/kevin_canvassing_during_repeal.jpg

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[1] See "[Kevin Keating: A Tribute](#)" by Gearóid Á' Loingsigh and "[Kevin Keating - Trotskyist revolutionary](#)" by Chris Patton.

[2] See Anne Conway "[Landslide Victory for Abortion Rights in Ireland](#)".