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USA

Bill Banta, 1941-2008 - Revolutionary socialist all his adult life

Friday 17 October 2008, by [QUINN Patrick M.](#) (Date first published: 15 September 2008).

BILL BANTA, A member of the Chicago branch and founding member of Solidarity, died of pancreatic cancer in a Chicago hospice on August 20th. He was 67. Bill was a revolutionary socialist his entire adult life. Born on February 6, 1941 in Portland, Indiana, he joined the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) as an undergraduate at Indiana University.

Upon graduation in 1963 he moved to Chicago, where, as a social worker, he became involved in the civil rights movement and was an active trade unionist. He soon became an organizer in the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), where, among other accomplishments, he organized the blue collar employees of the city of Evanston, winning them a contract which, after 40 years, remains one of the best contracts negotiated by municipal workers anywhere in the United States. Bill also served as an organizer for the Furniture Workers and the United Electrical Workers in Louisville, Kentucky, and worked in Chicago as a taxi cab driver.

In 1968 Bill joined the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in Chicago. He had become very involved in the movement against the war in Vietnam. He then secured a job as a switchman on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad in Chicago and quickly became a militant mainstay of the large group of members of the United Transportation Union (UTU) organized by the SWP. He remained a militant in the UTU until 1982 when he lost his lower right leg in an accident on the railroad.

In the SWP he was a member of two opposition tendencies, the Proletarian Orientation Tendency (PO) in 1971 and the Internationalist Tendency (IT) in 1973-74. With 160 other oppositionists in the SWP who supported the political positions of the majority of the Fourth International led by Ernest Mandel, Bill was expelled from the SWP on July 4, 1974. About one third of those who had been expelled, including Bill, were readmitted to the SWP in 1976. In 1982, however, he and more than a hundred members were expelled from the SWP by the undemocratic and dictatorial regime that ran the SWP. Bill became a founding member of Socialist Action and then, in 1986, a founding member of Solidarity.

From 1984 to 1989, Bill was a key activist in the Evanston Committee on Central America, which had been organized to oppose U.S. intervention in Nicaragua and El Salvador. During the 1990s and into the beginning of the new century, Bill devoted many hours as a volunteer at the New World Resource Center, an independent progressive bookstore and gathering place for the Left in Chicago.

Bill came from a working-class background in Portland, Indiana. His father, a U.S. Marine, had been severely wounded on Iwo Jima during World War II. A member of the Church of Christ, a Boy Scout who enjoyed camping, and a high school football player, Bill had also early in his life developed a keen sense of social justice, and when in college he encountered socialism for the first time, it was a natural fit.

Bill had a great many friends and comrades in Chicago and he will be sorely missed. He was an

exemplar of those of his generation who had embraced the vision of a socialist world and devoted their lives to transforming that vision into a world without war, injustice, racism, oppression, and capitalist exploitation — a world in which economic, political and social equality will prevail.

**** There will be a memorial meeting for Bill at 1:30 PM Saturday October 25th at the 2nd Unitarian Church, 656 West Barry Street in Chicago.***

P.S.

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* Patrick M. Quinn is a member of Solidarity in Chicago and a longtime friend and comrade of Bill Banta.