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In Memoriam: James Cockcroft, 1935-2019 - “Above all he was a political activist from the days of the war in Vietnam”

Thursday 5 September 2019, by [QUINN Patrick M.](#) (Date first published: 1 September 2019).

JAMES COCKCROFT WAS an historian, sociologist, political analyst, poet, and bilingual award-winning author of 40 books and countless articles on Latin America, and particularly on Mexico. His study, *Intellectual Precursors of the Mexican Revolution*, first published in 1968, became an instant classic.

Above all he was a political activist from the days of the war in Vietnam. And I knew him best as an activist.

Jim had already become a figure of note on the Left before I first met him. He had been a Humanities Fellow at Antioch College for 1967-68. While there, he had become an informal mentor of the Antioch chapter of the Young Socialist Alliance, many of whom lasted long on the Left, including my longtime friend, Alan Wald, who today is an editor of ATC.

My next encounter with Jim came in 1970 when he was a member of the faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. At the time, I was the head of the Young Socialist Alliance chapter at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. We sent 10 members from Madison to Milwaukee to develop a YSA chapter there when previous members left to join the Workers World Party. Jim immediately became the faculty advisor of the new YSA chapter.

Our young members respected his political acumen and appreciated his steadfast support. Jim had a special talent in relating to young people, helping them develop a fuller understanding for socialism. Jim grew up in Albany, NY and attended Cornell University. Graduating in 1957, he married Eva Sperling, who — as Eva Cockcroft (1937-1999) — became an internationally-recognized muralist. They had three sons, Ben, Eric and Peter.

Jim received his M.A. and Ph.D. at Stanford University. His interests were wide-ranging: sociology, history and political science, with a focus on Latin America and Latinos in the United States. His extensive publishing record also reflects that range.

My next encounter with Jim came during the later 1970s when, after he and Eva divorced, he met and married my friend Hedda Garza. By this time, several of his books on Mexico and Latin America had become “required reading” for U.S. socialists.

Jim and Hedda became a team as leading members of the Left in New York City. Unfortunately, Hedda died of cancer in 1995, as Jim was to die after his battle with bladder cancer this year.

Years later I was delighted to learn that Jim became partners with my old friend, Susan Caldwell. Jim and Susan were a political team among the Left in Montreal. And when she worked at the

International Institute for Research and Education School in Amsterdam, he lectured there as well.

My wife Mary and I would drive to Montreal almost every summer where we would get together. My last encounter was in their backyard late last summer, where we met up with two of Jim's sons.

Over the years Cockcroft taught at a number of U.S. colleges as well as abroad. A writer for the Mexico City daily La Jornada, he was most recently active in the International Committee to Free the Cuban Five, which eventually succeeded in securing their release from U.S. prisons.

Jim Cockcroft was one of the most extraordinary persons that I have had the good fortune to know. He was a delightful public speaker and a natural raconteur. His support of the Cuban revolution, in particular, was exemplary. Not only was he a superb academic historian, writer and an outstanding mentor of young people, he was the epitome of a committed socialist whose passionate advocacy of humanity was unexcelled.

Patrick M. Quinn

P.S.

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<https://solidarity-us.org/atc/202/james-cockcroft/>