



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

NOVEMBER 5, 2012

Errol Black: A truly remarkable life

If we're very lucky, every once in a while someone special will come into our lives. Errol Black was special.

He would be the first to claim otherwise, and to insist that we are all special, he no more than others. That was Errol's way. He was down-to-earth, friendly with everyone, always had time for others, and he was loyal to family, friends, and the progressive, people-based ideas that he fought for during his entire life.

Errol died late in the evening of November 3, 2012. He had been suffering from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), more commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

Errol grew up in the east end of Brandon in an Irish-Canadian working class family, and he spent most of his life there. As a child and teenager he hung out at the East End Community Centre; he and his wife Margaret worked in the Community Centre canteen when their kids were growing up; he published an article on the East End Community Centre and its importance in a working class neighbourhood; and he and Margaret celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary not in a fancy hotel, but in the East End Community Centre, with a wonderful meal prepared in the Centre's kitchen by friends who live in the neighbourhood.

Errol was a fixture in the East End: he worked consistently for, and sometimes was a candidate for, and frequently was a forceful and principled but supportive critic of provincial NDP governments; he served for 12 years as a combative, informed and effective Brandon City Councillor for his East

End ward; and he and Margaret had a wide circle of friends—many from Errol's school days—in the East End and throughout Brandon.

For 30 years Errol worked as a Professor of Economics at Brandon University. He was a first-class teacher and a very fine economist. His reputation as an economist has long since spread across Manitoba, and indeed across Canada. His specialty was labour economics, and he published widely and frequently about all aspects of the labour movement, including a book on trade unions in Canada that is widely used by unions and in university courses across the country. He also published several books on the history of the labour movement in Manitoba and in Brandon.

But Errol wasn't the kind of scholar who confined his contributions to arcane and often obscure academic journals. He rolled up his sleeves and got involved in all kinds of things. For 30 years he was an active member of the Brandon Labour Council. The current President of the Brandon Labour Council, Jan Chaboyer, considers Errol to be her inspiration and her mentor. For the same 30 years Errol was an active member of BUFA—the Brandon University Faculty Association. He co-authored BUFA's first collective agreement, and Mel Myers—long-time labour lawyer—considers Errol to have been one of Manitoba's most outstanding trade unionists. Mel told me just last week that Errol was the best in the province—bar none.

In 1996 and 1997 Errol was one of a

there is an alternative.

CCPA-MB
309-323 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 2C1

phone

(204) 927-3200

email

ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

website

www.policyalternatives.ca/
manitoba

blog

www.policyfix.ca

twitter

@ccpamb

continued...

group of three of us—Wayne Antony was the other—who created the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba (CCPA-Mb), and he stayed actively involved with CCPA-Mb to within a week of his death.

Errol published voluminously with CCPA-Mb: on various aspects of the labour movement; on the threat to Canadian trade unionists from recent developments in the U.S.A.; on the railroading of the leaders of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike; on the importance of and the need to increase the minimum wage; on the successful campaign for free busfare in non-peak hours for recipients of social assistance in Brandon; on the growing inequality between rich and poor and its many adverse impacts, and on and on.

Errol was always eager to collaborate with CCPA staff and research associates, and they with him. His generous and selfless approach made him a joy to work with. His knowledge and tireless commitment will continue to inspire us all.

Errol's has been a truly remarkable life. He was a wonderful man. He recently was awarded the Joe Zuken Citizen Activist Award for 2012, the Province of Manitoba Order of the Buffalo Hunt, and the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal.

For me personally, Errol's death is a terrible loss. We have known each other for 30 years; we have co-authored books and articles for almost 25 years. He was a wonderful friend. Most striking to me about Errol is that he was able to combine his warm, loving personal qualities—as husband, father, grandfather, friend to so many—with his determined and always principled and energetic and deeply intelligent opposition to social injustice, and his never-ending fight to build a better world.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba, in recognition of his enormous contributions to the labour

movement and to the struggle for social justice more generally, is establishing the Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues. We are well on our way to creating a permanent position at the CCPA-Mb for a first-class labour researcher, whose job will be to continue into the future the legacy left by Errol Black, by doing research and writing about the central role of organized labour in building a better world.

Jim Silver is a member of the CCPA-MB Board.

CCPA-MB
309-323 Portage Ave.
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 2C1

phone
(204) 927-3200

email
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

website
www.policyalternatives.ca/
manitoba

blog
www.policyfix.ca

twitter
@ccpamb

Fast Facts are produced and distributed free via email. They can be reproduced as an OpEd or opinion piece without obtaining further permission, provided they are not edited, and full credit is given to both the author and the source, CCPA-MB. Please contact CCPA-MB today to begin your free subscription.