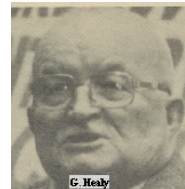


**Contents:**

- *Basic biographical data*
- *Biographical sketch*
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***Basic biographical data***

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Gerry Healy</b>
<b>Other names (byname, pseud. etc.):</b>	<b>Burns ; Thomas Gerard Healy ; Jerry ; Mason ; Paddy O'Regan ; G. Preston</b>
<b>Date and place of birth:</b>	<b>December 3, 1913, Cork (Ireland)</b>
<b>Date and place of death:</b>	<b>December 14, 1989, London (Britain)</b>
<b>Nationality:</b>	<b>Irish ; British</b>
<b>Occupations, careers, etc.:</b>	<b>Radio operator, editor, writer, party leader and organizer, political activist</b>
<b>Time of activity in Trotskyist movement:</b>	<b>1937 - 1989</b>

***Biographical sketch***

Gerry Healy was a highly controversial leader of British Trotskyism and gave name to a special brand of Trotskyism, '*Healyism*'.

Gerry (Thomas Gerard) Healy was born in Ballybane, Western Ireland, on December 3, 1913 as son of Michael Healy, a catholic small farmer, and his wife, Margeret Mary (b. Rabbitte). After school education he left Ireland for Britain and earned his living as radio operator on ships. "Unemployed for much of the 1930s, he spent the war in munitions factories, briefly training as a drughtsman". \*

Around 1931, he became a member of the *Young Communist League (YCL)*, the youth branch of the *Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB)*, and some years later he joined the ranks of the party itself (Westminster Branch), making some reputation as union and party organizer, speaker and agitator. At the

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\* McLroy, John: Healy, Thomas Gerard (Gerry) (1913-1989), Trotskyist leader, in: *Oxford dictionary of national biography from the earliest times to the year 2000 / ed. by H.C.G. Matthews [et al.]*, vol. 26, Oxford [etc.], 2004, p. 140. McLroy also wrote an exhaustive and very substantial biographical essay about Healy which we are considering the best contribution which until now has been published on the subject: McLroy, John: Healy, Thomas Gerard (Gerry) (1913-89), Trotskyist leader, in: *Dictionary of labour biography / ed. by Keith Gildart and David Howell*, vol. 12, Basingstoke, 2005, pp. 136-146

end of the 1930s, Healy approached Trotskyist positions and soon was expelled from the *CPGB*. He joined the ranks of the *Militant Group*, one of the tiny groups of followers of Leon Trotsky in Britain. In 1939, Healy became one of the co-founders of the *Workers International League (WIL)* which was led by Jock Haston and Ralph Lee. Expelled from the *WIL* in 1943, Healy at the end of the Second World War belonged to the founders of the *Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP)*, product of a fusion of some hitherto rival Trotskyist organizations in Britain. During the years after the War, Healy became one of the leaders of the *RCP* and closely cooperated with Sam Gordon, then staying in Europe as a liaison man between the American Trotskyist party, the *Socialist Workers Party*, and the *International Secretariat of the Fourth International (ISFI)* whose Secretary and most influential figure at that time was Michel Pablo (Raptis) \* . In the late 1940s, Healy became a strong advocate of entryism and a spokesman of a tendency within the *RCP* favouring entry into the British *Labour Party (LP)*, a position which was endorsed by the leaders of the *ISFI*. Thus, the *RCP* eventually dissolved and Healy became the leader of those which practised entryism in the *LP*. The Healy-led group was known in the 1950s as *The Club* which could win over a considerable number of communist militants and intellectuals getting disillusioned with Stalinism and leaving the *CPGB* in the wake of the Hungarian and Polish events of 1956 and of Khrushchev's "secret" speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> party congress of the *CP* of the Soviet Union. When in 1953 the Trotskyist *Fourth International* split, Healy sided with the American *SWP* under its leader James P. Cannon and with the majority of the French Trotskyist party under the leadership of Pierre Lambert and Marcel Bleibtreu. The *SWP*, the groups of Healy and Lambert together with some supporters in other countries formed the *International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)* challenging the *ISFI* of M. Pablo, E. Mandel and P. Frank. Healy became Secretary of the *ICFI* and when some years later the American *SWP* on the one side and the majority of the *ISFI* on the other side moved towards a re-unification of the international Trotskyist movement, the Healyists and Lambertists strongly opposed it and consequently remained outside the re-unified *Fourth International* (called *United Secretariat of the Fourth International, USFI*, formed in 1963). In the name of Trotskyist 'orthodoxy', they continued to attack *USFI* under the banner of the fight against 'Pabloite revisionism'.

In Britain, Healy's *The Club* was successful in winning some militants from the left fringe of the *LP* and in temporarily gaining leadership in its youth branch. Healy launched a new weekly paper in 1958, *The Newsletter*, and relaunched his group as the *Socialist Labour League (SLL)* in 1959, giving up entryism after his followers had been expelled from the *Labour Party*. In 1973, the *SLL* was renamed *Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP)* which, for many years, was able to publish a daily tabloid, *News Line*, and which for several years was one of the strongest forces on the far left of British politics. Healy, the *General Secretary* of the *SLL* and *WRP*, respectively, established himself as a sort of bizarre cult-leader. However, Healy's inner-party regime became more and more notorious and scandalous as did his political line; to mention only a few points: considerable financial subsidies came from dictatorial regimes as such of Libya and Iraq, female party members were sexually abused, hooligans were instrumentalised for physically attacking political opponents and dissidents. The politics of the *SLL/WRP* was characterized by a rigid ultrasectarianism and by vitriolic and monstrous slander campaigns targeting at political rivals on the far left such as for example the '*Security and the Fourth International*' campaign aiming particularly at Joseph Hansen and George Novack as allegedly having been *GPU/KGB* and *CIA/FBI* agents and even having been involved in the assassination of Leon Trotsky. A number of major splits occurred in the 1970s when a considerable number of long-time militants left the party or were expelled by Healy, e.g. a group led by Alan Thornett forming the *Workers Socialist League, WSL*, in 1974.

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\* See also our bio-bibliographical miscellany about Michel Pablo (Raptis) within the framework of our *Lubitz TrotskyanaNet*.

In 1985, Healy found confronted himself by his hitherto lieutenant Cliff Slaughter and other leading *WRP* cadres with the accusation of having accepted money from Middle Eastern dictatorial and terrorist regimes, of having abused female party members over many years and so on. The *WRP* split into a pro-Healy and an anti-Healy *WRP* and during the following years, the *WRP* (or, which had come out from the split) 'exploded' (or, imploded, collapsed) falling apart into several rival tiny groups, some of them repudiating Healyism, some of them factually continuing Healy's politics without Healy. At the same time, Healy was expelled from the *International Committee (ICFI)*, which he had relaunched under the same name after the old *ICFI* (Healyists and Lambertists) had split in the early 1970s. Eventually, Healy split from one of the *WRP* remnants to form the *Marxist Party* in 1987. During the last years of his life, he got convinced of Mikhail Gorbachev being the leader of a political revolution in the USSR. Only a handful of followers remained faithful, particularly Corin and Vanessa Redgrave\*, two of the most prominent and wealthy long-time members of the Healyist party. Together with Vanessa Redgrave, Healy visited the USSR in 1987 and 1989. According to Vanessa Redgrave's autobiography, he shared her house in Clapham, London, during the last four years of his life.

Aged 76, Healy died of heart attack at St. Thomas hospital in London on December 14, 1989. His grave is in Highgate Cemetary, London. He was survived by his wife, Betty (b. Russell) whom he had married in December 1941 and from whom he got a daughter, Mary, and a son, Alan. He was long-time associated with the Swiss-British Trotskyist veteran Betty Hamilton and had a long-time affair with Aileen Jennings who in 1985 revealed his sexual abuse of female party members.

For some decades, Healy was one of the most renowned but at the same time undoubtedly also one of the most controversial political figures within the British and international 'galaxy' of Trotskyism as can already been noticed when looking at the numerous obituaries and appreciations ranging from Vanessa Redgrave's "*Disciple of Trotsky*" and Sheila Torrance's "*G. Healy: a giant of Trotskyism*" to Alan Thornett's "*Gerry Healy: the Ceausescu of the British Trotskyist movement*" and Jim Higgins' "*The fall of the Mekon*".\*\*

By the way, in Tariq Ali's satirical novel "*Redemption*" (published in 1990), Healy is "Frank Hood", the leader of the British "Hoodlums", and in Trevor Griffith's play "*The party*" he was portrayed as "John Tagg".

We would like to conclude this short biographical sketch by some quotations concerning the role and meaning of Healy:

"For some 50 years, Healy had graced, or rather disgraced, the British Trotskyist movement. In that time, by a combination of low cunning, skulduggery and verbal and physical abuse, he has created almost as many ex-Trotskyists as Joe Stalin. It would have surprised me at any time in the last 30 years if he has

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\* Vanessa Redgrave, born 1937, is an outstanding British actress ("Blow-up", "A man for all seasons", "Isadora", "Camelot", "Queen Mary of Scots", "Murder on the Orient Express", "Wetherby", etc.) and together with her brother Corin, her parents Michael and Rachel Redgrave her sister Lynn and her children Natasha, Joely and Carlo is forming what has been called the Redgrave acting dynasty. Recently, Vanessa Redgrave founded the *Peace and Progress Party*.

\*\* These and other obituaries, appreciations and memories of Healy are to be found in our listing under the paragraph *Selective bibliography: Books and articles about Healy*. There are also to be found some exhaustive biographies, critical studies and documentary collections about the life, thought and action of Healy.

been expelled for grievous bodily harm, but that it should be for grievous bodily charm is extraordinary." \*

"A brutal thug capable of beating men and sexually exploiting women. A brilliant speaker with an engaging sense of humour. A man to whom the actress Vanessa Redgrave owes 'all my subsequent development as a political woman and artist'. Can these really all be descriptions of the same individual? There is no doubt that Gerry Healy could be alternately brutish and charming and that, despite his short stature, his bald head and what Brian Behan has described as 'the sore eyes of a newborn pig', he exercised considerable charisma, even in his old age. He will certainly not be forgotten by the many political activists who were recruited into the various British Trotskyite groups he led over the years. What is less obvious is whether his work has in any way advanced the interests of the international working class - whose cause he claimed to champion. It is more likely that Healy's contribution to the British left is regarded by most Trotskyists as highly embarrassing. [...] Healy will not be missed by many people on the British left. His methods gave Trotskyism a bad name. Most unforgivable for any self-respecting political leader, he was guilty of quite deliberately squandering the talent and idealism of most of the people drawn to his party."\*\*

"By the 1980s he had done more to discredit the Trotskyist movement, and the left in general than anyone else claiming to be part of it - despite other strong contenders for that distinction. [...] Unlike Stalin or Ceausescu, Healy never held state power. He learned about tyranny from the Stalinist movement and exercised it inside the small groups of the Trotskyist movement. The result has done serious damage to the development of the revolutionary Marxist tradition in Britain. The best conclusion from his death is to ensure that there is never room left for his ilk to do such damage again". \*\*\*

"Certainly Healy did turn many genuine socialist militants not just into ex-Trotskyists but into bitter and cynical individuals."\*\*\*\*

"Gerry Healy could indeed claim to have made a unique addition to an identifiable left tradition, though not the global revolutionary one to which he aspired, but rather that of sectarian big fish in little British ponds."\*\*\*\*\*

"The net result was that Healy's Club took the overwhelming majority of ex-CPers who moved to Trotskyism - people of the calibre of Brian Behan, Peter Fryer, John Daniels, Ken Coates, Cliff Slaughter and Tom Kemp, to name but a few, and a small but not unimpressive sprinkling of experienced industrial militants. I yield to no one in my distaste for that truly dreadful man Gerry Healy, but for a brief year or so in the late 1950s he was the most serious exponent of revolutionary politics in Britain. In a few months in The Club I learned more about Marxism than I had done in all the years in the CP. For that I am grateful. But then having built it he proceeded to destroy it. Like a child who takes his ball home when he cannot have his own way, Healy felt the need always to be in control politically, personally and, it transpired, sexually - he was a small plump obnoxious embodiment of a power mania, of a similar character to domestic tyranny, but written just a little larger. As Brian Behan said, if the organisation gets so big that he cannot get into his Rififi-type Citroen [...] and drive frantically round the country quelling

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\* Higgins, Jim: The fall of the Mekon, in: *The Spectator*, 1985 (Nov. 9), p. 22.

\*\* [Anon.]: Gerry Healy, Irish political activist, in: *The Annual Obituary*, 1989 (1990), pp. 789-790.

\*\*\* Thornett, Alan: Gerry Healy : the Ceausescu of the British Trotskyist movement, in: *Socialist Outlook*, 1990 (21), pp. 32-33.

\*\*\*\* Flett, Keith: Life as it is in the British Trotskyist tradition, in: *The Guardian*, 1989 (Dec. 30).

\*\*\*\*\* Martin, Brendan: Gerry Healy, in: *The Independent*, 1989 (Dec. 21).

any dissent, then he has to have a smash up. And in 1959 the smash up came and Healy's organisation went from being the least sectarian of the 57 varieties to become the most exclusive and sectarian of the lot, a finely tuned machine for burning out the cadre." \*

"En fait, Gerry Healy ne fut pas toute sa vie le dirigeant paranoïaque et brutal que certains ont connu. Il avait été un militant dévoué et convaincu. Mais il fut victime de la crise de la IVe Internationale et, comme d'autres, resté dans son bocal, se prit pour un génie dans son village et contribua ainsi à étouffer bien des espoirs et des élans dans le cadre de ce qu'on peut appeler un "national-trotskyisme". Se prenait-il vraiment pour "la IVe Internationale" et "la continuité de Trotsky", c'est-à-dire son successeur? Il semble que oui." \*\*

"He was a powerful orator, a successful organiser, an accomplished showman and, for some, a compelling socialist propagandist. He remained a primitive Marxist, schooled only in dogma, which in times of trouble, and suitably cloaked in dubious philosophical formulations, he was pragmatically prepared to discard. Although he was capable of composed, meticulous political work, as in 1956-57, sooner or later he always surrendered to his impulsive, impatient temperament, his political short-termism and his drive for organisational control. To claim that he sustained an important political tradition in difficult times is to beg the essential political question of exactly what tradition he sustained. In the long journey from Stalinism to Trotskyism to cultism he abused his limited gifts and betrayed those who placed their trust in him. He did more than anybody else in Britain to discredit Trotskyism as an alternative to Stalinism." \*\*\*

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\* Higgins, Jim: Locusts, cankerworms, caterpillars and palmerworms will get you if you don't watch out, in: *What Next*, 1999 (14), p. 23.

\*\* [Broué, Pierre?]: Gerry Healy (1914[sic]-1989), in: *Cahiers Léon Trotsky*, 1990 (41), pp. 126.

\*\*\* McIlroy, John: Healy, Thomas Gerard (Gerry) (1913-89), Trotskyist leader, in: *Dictionary of labour biography*/ed. by Keith Gildart and David Howell, vol. 12, Basingstoke, 2005, p. 145

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- Ceylon, the great betrayal : two reports from Ceylon. - [London : Socialist Labour League, 1964]. - [23] pp. [Repr. from *The Newsletter*]
- The future of the Labour Party. - London : Socialist Labour League, 1960. - 8 pp. (A Newsletter pamphlet)
- Leninism 58 years on. - London : Workers Revolutionary Party, 1982. - 16 pp. [Repr. from *News Line*, 1982, Jan. 23]
- No laws against trade unions! - London : Socialist Labour League, [ca. 1967]. - [Without pag.] (Socialist Labour League pamphlet)
- Our answer to the witch-hunt and our policy for Labour. - London: The Newsletter, 1959. - 11 pp. (A Newsletter pamphlet)
- Plan to beat the Tories. - London : Socialist Labour League, 1962. - [Without pag.] (Newsletter pamphlet)
- Problems of the Fourth International. - London : New Park Publications, 1966. - 36 pp. - (Newsletter pamphlets [& later ed.]
- Revolution and counter-revolution in Hungary : Stalinism unmasked. - London : Socialist Labour League, 1967. - 20 pp. - (Socialist Labour League publications)
- Stalinism unmasked : revolution and counter-revolution in Hungary. - [London : Newsletter, 1967]. - 20 pp. - (A Newsletter pamphlet)
- Stop this war : hands off the Arab people. - London : New Park Publications, 1955. - 4 pp.
- Studies in dialectical materialism. - London : Workers Revolutionary Party, 1982. - 83 pp. - (A Workers Revolutionary Party pamphlet)

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- The Marxist : bimonthly theoretical journal of the International Committee of the Fourth International (Athens) <TSB 0979>
- The Marxist Monthly (London) <TSB 0992> [ISSN 1361-7354]
- Marxist Review / Workers Revolutionary Party (London) <TSB 0999>
- News Line / Workers Revolutionary Party (London) <TSB 1100>
- The Newsletter / Central Committee of the Socialist Labour League (London) <TSB 1102>
- Socialist Outlook (London) <TSB 1514>
- Workers Press (London) <TSB 1857>

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\* TSB item numbers (e.g. <TSB 0716>) refer to Lubitz' *Trotskyist Serials Bibliography*, München [etc.] : Saur, 1993, which is out of print but available as PDF file within the framework of *TrotskyanaNet*. In *TSB* you can find detailed descriptions concerning the respective Trotskyist journals, newsletters, bulletins and the like.

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**Note:** More informations about Healy are likely to be found in some of the books, pamphlets, university works and articles listed in the relevant chapter(s) of our *Trotsky Bibliography*, 3. ed., München [etc.], 1999, particularly in chapters 7.5.09, 7.2.01 and 7.2.04.

For archival sources on Healy see the listing in John McIlroy's excellent biographical essay. \*

W. Lubitz, rev. July 2007

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\* McIlroy, John: Healy, Thomas Gerard (Gerry) (1913-89), Trotskyist leader, in: *Dictionary of labour biography / ed. by Keith Gildart and David Howell*, vol. 12, Basingstoke, 2005, p. 146