

## Remembering Mike

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that the left didn't rise as he (or anyone) hoped; what inspired us was that a guy like Mike was devoting his life to it. Mike's vision was, and remained, the most humane and practical version of the American dream I knew of. If others had worked as hard and passionately, it might have come true.

While Mike stuck to his democratic ideals, the theories with which he backed them changed over the years—a better way, I came to learn, than those who do it the other way round. That day, as he talked to us, he returned again and again to the gut-level facts of poverty and injustice—never with malice or hate, but with joy for what might be and for the fellowship of doing it. Eventually, he was able to move—if not change—the country by making poverty visible. Even in 1955, his blue eyes

were watery and pale—in odd contrast to the intensity of his speech—and I thought he looked tired, that he was mobilizing his energy against a continual drain.

I remember in the campaign of 1968, when I was writing speeches for Gene McCarthy, I sometimes called Mike to find out what should be known and said. Since Mike was supporting Bobby Kennedy, I imagine the Kennedy speechwriters made the same connection more frequently. Socialism, then and now, was a word that could not be mentioned in American politics—yet how many politicians must have turned to America's leading socialist, simply because he knew what the problems were, he ceaselessly thought about what might be done, and one could trust him absolutely.

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## Maxine Phillips

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Everyone remembers the first time he or she heard Michael Harrington speak. Mine was sometime in the early seventies in a drab room at the Catholic Worker house on the Lower East Side. I didn't know Mike's history with the Worker and was surprised that someone so famous would spend a Friday evening speaking to a small group made up primarily of derelicts and elderly leftists. The lapsed Catholic friend who had invited me started hearing the Voice of God in the middle of the speech. The whole scene was very uncomfortable, except that as Mike spoke I was caught up in the common sense of his message and his uncommon description of socialism. Like many others, I would join the democratic socialist movement in large part because he was so convincing, so credible, so charismatic.

Later, as a staff member of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee and Democratic Socialists of America, I regularly saw people respond to him with that same excitement. This was a man whose work had changed people's lives: not

only poor people's, but *our* lives. By then, for me, the edge was off the excitement. Years of arranging agenda items for endless meetings, of juggling creditors, of internal wrangling gave me respect for Mike's considerable organizational skills but dulled my ability to see land at the edge of the swamp. Then he would step up to the podium and the fire would flare. No matter how tired he was, no matter how dismal the external or internal political situation, he could call forth the best in us, holding out a vision of the new world. He always cautioned that socialism was not a religion, which is true. But he preached it with such fervor and made so many "altar calls" that one could get confused. As "chair of the Catholic Atheist Caucus" he might wince at the following description, but his life illustrated the biblical passage that those who "wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint." The strength finally gave out. The work and the legacy remain.

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## Jo-Ann Mort

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The last time I saw Mike, we had lunch at a coffee shop in Greenwich Village. He had a chocolate milkshake, which had been his staple food since the cancer recurred. We discussed nineteenth-century literature and E. M. Forster, the possibilities for lasting romantic love in the world, and Mike's

ideas for a new book he planned to write. He told me he had a long version and a short version in mind, depending on how much time he had left. He was dead two and a half months later.

"Thinking changing and changing living," Auden wrote. I wanted to talk to him about practical details,

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