

In Memoriam: Susan P. Johnson

by Leif Johnson

To write an obituary for one's wife of 27 years, whom I greatly loved, and desperately so in her 11-month battle with a malignant brain tumor, is very difficult. Yet it is also easy, for I knew her best.

The magazine you hold in your hands, the world's premier political weekly, is in large part the work of Susan Johnson. From July 1980 through the spring of 1984, Susan shaped what was then an amateurish, "insider weekly" with a few hundred subscribers, into a journal of the highest literary and political standard, which today exercises worldwide influence.

Susan was, in the words of one of her staff members, "a bulldog." But she was the most humble, and overly modest, bulldog. Her weapons in shaping the *EIR* to her standards were humor (occasionally puckish), discerning the true humor in others, extraordinary patience, a passion to teach her contributors how to write, and an unbelievable capacity for work; she never left an issue until every last detail was "wrapped up."

She detested hypocrisy, banality, and cant. As editor she compiled an ever-augmented list of clichés, trite phrases, empty words, meaningless formulations, and jargon, that she strongly cautioned her writers to eschew.

A "mere woman" in the high-powered atmosphere of some former officials of the intelligence staff, she faced wounded male egos with tact, wit, and a powerful memory. To their continual displeasure, she could resolve arguments by reminding them what they had written last week—or last year. She held them to her standards by her towering literary ability, but most importantly, by her political acumen.

She was all her life, intensely "political." It was the meeting of Lyndon LaRouche in the spring of 1968, during the Columbia University student strike, that proved to her the coherence of the political and philosophical domains. Then a graduate student in philosophy at Columbia University in New York, and recipient of the most prestigious scholarship in the nation, she immediately recognized LaRouche as the most powerful mind of the century. It was her attachment to the quality of LaRouche's mind that gave her the confidence to exercise the intellectual rigor, and fight for truth, she had harbored since childhood.

Her father, Louis Parmacek, was a prominent pathologist in Chicago, born of Jewish parentage near Kiev, Ukraine. He



was head of the Salt Lake City Army Medical Laboratory during World War II, where he met Susan's mother, Shirley Smith. Susan was born April 17, 1944, and was followed by a brother, David, the next year. She attended public schools and graduated from Sarah Lawrence College. Susan's artistic and literary abilities were early noticed.

Her extraordinary literary ability was manifest one summer, when she succeeded in learning German, while working a summer job. She made numerous translations, and one German author, on reading Susan's English translation, thanked Susan profusely for making her article so much better in English than in the original.

Susan translated letters and manuscripts of the great German physicists of the 19th century, Wilhelm Weber and Carl Friedrich Gauss, for use by Laurence Hecht, our longtime comrade who was framed up in Virginia to a 33-year jail term, as part of the "get LaRouche" cases. But she was most proud of her translation of a major philosophical work by the German poet Friedrich Schiller, "On the Aesthetical Estimation of Magnitude." The translation is sublimely beautiful, and Susan rued, as I do, that she had not translated more Schiller poetry.

For the last seven years, Susan and I had been assigned to political organizing in St. Louis, Missouri. Among her many achievements there, the one she most cherished was the development of a chorus. Fittingly, the chorus sang magnificently at her funeral in St. Louis, and at the burial next to her parents, in Elgin, Illinois.

Whenever we travelled by car, we read to each other. We read Cusa, Shakespeare, Kepler, and Leibniz; two months after the brain tumor was diagnosed, Susan read, for the fifth time, the Clarke-Leibniz correspondence. The work unfolded to us as never before; we were exhilarated. We cried for the happiness of having learned Leibniz, LaRouche's teacher. We cried because this was the fruition of our aspirations: We were back at the beginning, the first meetings with LaRouche. We cried, lastly, because Susan was doomed by the cancer; she could do no more, and I wondered whether I had the courage to carry this work on, alone.

In her last months of life, particularly two spent in Germany for treatment, she clung to her greatest love: Shakespeare. She re-read all the works of Shakespeare; then, commencing once again, death caught her midway into her task.