We are saddened to report that comrade Steve Wallis, a former member of the Democratic Socialist Alliance died suddenly on 13 September 2014.

Here, DSA member, John Pearson pays tribute to our lost comrade.

I am intensely sad to have learned of the sudden death of my comrade and friend, Steve Wallis.

I last spoke to Steve in person on Wednesday 10 September when we had a couple of drinks after the Stockport Left Unity meeting. Although he was a member, and latterly Vice-Chair, of the Manchester Left Unity branch, Steve was a great friend of Stockport branch and I know that all Stockport comrades will share my great sadness at losing him. He had been a prime mover in the initiative of Manchester branch, in January this year, in helping us get set up in Stockport. Afterwards, he supported the new branch enthusiastically. He came to nearly all of our monthly political discussion meetings. He travelled to Wigan with us during the election campaign in May, to help with the mass leafleting. He joined us on nearly all of our demonstrations and petitioning sessions in a 3 months long campaign over sanctions, workfare and work capability assessment, at the Stockport jobcentre.

We last had email contact on Friday 12 September, when Steve contacted me asking if I intended going to the AGM on 4 October, of the Independent Socialist Network, the successor to the Socialist Platform of Left Unity. He had intended to go to the Diggers Festival in Wigan on Saturday 13 September, to help on the Left Unity stall and I was surprised when he didn’t turn up. When, by Wednesday this week, Steve had been ‘offline’ for 5 days – a very unusual event – I discussed with Ali Treacher, another comrade and friend of Steve’s, our concerns at his absence. We concluded that he had probably gone to Scotland for the closing days of the referendum campaign. He had talked about the possibility of doing this several times and it would have been typical of Steve’s ‘get up and go’ activism that he would have done precisely that. Sadly, as we learned yesterday, this was not the reason for Steve’s absence.

Steve has been very active in socialist politics in Manchester for many years. He is someone whom everybody on the left in the city and its environs knew. Steve was absolutely dedicated to the cause of socialism. He termed himself, ‘Revolutionary socialist Steve’ and constantly argued that revolution was the only way to win the fight for a socialist society. He was active on **every** front of the struggle – anti-racism and anti-fascism, support for migrants, opposition to militarism and war, support for oppressed peoples and nations and in particular the Palestinians, opposition to austerity and cuts and solidarity with all of its victims, support for strikes and all other struggles of organised workers, working to create a political party for socialism. Rarely did an important demonstration take place – in Manchester or nationally – where Steve was not present. Not only was he present but he was always actively present, handing out leaflets explaining his views on the best way to take the struggle forward to victory. Steve’s dedication, energy and activism was inspirational.

Steve suffered for many years from serious mental illness. But he would not let this handicap limit his activity. He came hard up against the state mental health regime. Steve was sectioned under the Mental Health Acts many times. He absconded many times. The sight of the police turning up to picket lines, demonstrations or socialist movement conferences in order to arrest Steve and take him back to psychiatric wards became a not infrequent experience. He always resisted the authoritarianism of this most authoritarian of the health services. He fought Mental Health Tribunals, often losing them but sometimes winning them, as indeed he did a few months ago. After his most recent victory at Tribunal, he accepted a community supervision plan and he commented positively on his progress to me several times. At last he was being genuinely consulted about his medication and treatment, he said.

Societal understanding of mental illness is undoubtedly one of the remaining barriers we face in overcoming fear and prejudice at some of the aspects of our own humanity. I don’t know what Steve’s condition was. I was too polite to ever ask him. He was affected himself by these societal problems. For many years, Steve denied that he was mentally ill, insisting that he was a political prisoner. Since I became much closer to Steve, after I joined Left Unity (an action in which his example had been persuasive), I realised that he had stopped making such assertions. His own mental attitude to mental health was developing. Steve experienced a degree of lack of sympathy and understanding to his struggles against illness from some quarters of the left. This caused him hurt and concern. A few months ago, he told me how disappointed he was when the leader of one of the left sects whose trajectories he intersected with, published a podcast in which this individual cautioned that account should be taken of Steve’s illness in assessing his political views.

Steve had the ability to joke about his thoughts. One of his characteristics was that he thought that his presence, even only as a spectator of some events, nevertheless had the capacity to influence their outcome. A keen football fan, he had become a supporter of FC United, at the outset of the wave of revulsion that shook Manchester United supporters confronted by the naked capitalist expropriation of the club under the proprietorship of the Glazer brothers. On the last occasion that we spoke, Steve reported on the progress of the team and reiterated the importance of his constant attendance at matches, home and away. He smiled however as he expressed the wish that they should start to thrive through the agency of their own footballing abilities rather than through his presence.

Steve was ready to tackle anything. He was keen on music and he aspired to be a songwriter and singer, undaunted by the fact that he had an awful singing voice! He always tried. With a hint of sadness, he told me recently that his band had folded. There were other sadnesses in Steve’s life. He was profoundly and constantly sad that he had been unable to secure a lasting intimate partnership.

But, above everything, Steve remained positive and outwardly cheerful. Paramountly, he deeply cared about his fellow human beings. He was a very intelligent, very creative and very capable man and he didn’t hesitate to take action to really influence events. A recent example was on the occasion that news broke that a couple of MPs were calling for the suspension of the Greater Manchester Chief Constable, Peter Fahy, over serious misconduct within the police force. Steve immediately saw the opportunity to advance the campaign for Justice for Anthony Grainger, an unarmed white man who had been extra-judicially executed by Greater Manchester Police. Steve contacted Anthony’s cousin and organised an e-petition and a very effective demonstration at GMP Headquarters, which attracted serious media coverage.

Losing Steve, as a socialist comrade, a friend and a compassionate and caring human being, is a severe blow.

RIP Steve – our most appropriate tribute to you will be to redouble our efforts for victory in the causes that you dedicated your life to.