

## Marsha Pripstein Posusney 1953-2008

MARSHA PRIPSTEIN POSUSNEY shared her courageous fight with cancer with many of us but it was still shocking and tragic to lose her on August 22<sup>nd</sup> at age 55. Whether as an undergrad at SUNY Stony Brook, a Ph.D. student at University of Pennsylvania's Political Science Department, an Arabic student at CASA or at Middlebury, Marsha always combined her academic interests in Egyptian politics, labor, and political economy with her political commitment to labor rights, feminism (in and outside the academy), human rights, and social justice.

Marsha's first book, the co-winner of MESA's Albert Hourani Book Award, *Labor and the State in Egypt Workers, Unions, and Economic Restructuring* (Columbia University Press, 1997) argued that Egyptian trade unions continued to defend workers' rights in the political space they tenaciously protected within Egypt's moral economy. Marsha's cogent understanding of Egyptian politics and the vitality of labor activism has been borne out recently as demonstrations have proliferated in Egypt despite "enduring authoritarianism." Last spring, trade unionists were at the forefront of large demonstrations protesting declining workers' incomes and rights in the face of deepening privatization and the food crisis.

Marsha was the quintessential scholar/activist, and this was reflected in her work as a member of the American Political Science Association Council, where she pressed for the representation of small colleges in the discipline's various programs. For years Marsha was an editor and board member of MERIP, and supported their collective efforts to publish sophisticated yet popularly-accessible progressive analysis of Middle East politics in *Middle East Report*. The editorial skills that she honed at MERIP were put to use time and time again in conferences that Marsha organized at Bryant University and the Watson Institute at Brown University and elsewhere, often on politically sensitive topics. For years, she was a very active adjunct professor and research affiliate at the Watson Institute and a key member of CAFMENA, the Committee for Academic Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa at MESA, writing countless letters and investigating cases of professors being fired or jailed for their views.

Marsha was a great citizen at Bryant University where she began teaching in 1992 and was active in departmental politics, curriculum development and, of course, university governance and the faculty union. Marsha was also a very generous and outgoing scholar who mentored junior faculty and

reached out to many people she found interesting, finding ways to incorporate them into various conferences, professional committees, and her publications. She was a prolific scholar and edited *Women and Globalization in the Middle East* (with Eleanor Doumato; Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003) arguing that globalization had hit Middle Eastern women particularly hard. *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, co-edited with Michelle Angrist (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005) explored the puzzle of the endurance of repressive regimes and its particular institutional and coercive dynamics. Marsha published widely in journals and edited books, served on the editorial boards of *Studies in Comparative International Development* and *Mediterranean Politics* and also co-edited *Privatization and Labor: Responses and Consequences in Global Perspective* with Linda Cook (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2002).

In short, Marsha's original scholarship, her professional dedication, collegiality, her generosity, friendship, lack of pretense, and her activism were much admired in the Middle East academic community and by her students. We were awed by her courage and equanimity. Marsha also cared deeply and tried to sustain and contribute to the sisterhood of female academics who struggle to balance demands of research, teaching, field work, family, career, and health. She helped inspire the rest of us to keep asking difficult questions and to fight for the values she cherished, however difficult the quest. We offer our deepest condolences to her husband Tommy, and her son, Eric. Contributions in her honor can be sent to the Miriam Hospital Foundation, Box H, Providence, Rhode Island, 02901.

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