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Ernest Mandel

Ernest Mandel: partybuilder and pedagogue

- Features - In Memoriam - Obituaries and appreciations -

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Ernest Mandel (1923-1995) was one of the leading members of the Fourth International in rebuilding the movement after the Second World War.

He is above all known as a leading Marxist economist and political analyst, whose reputation went beyond the militant circles. The list of his published works notably on economy is extensive such as *Late Capitalism* (1975). One of his major works, *Long Waves of Capitalist Development*, was first published by the prestigious Cambridge University Press in 1980. He also wrote many works of political analysis such as *The meaning of the Second World War*. [Alex De Jong, 2023 "Ernest Mandel was one of the 20th Century's greatest Marxist thinkers", <https://fourth.international/en/564>].

However, Ernest was also a practical revolutionary convinced of the need to build revolutionary organizations, both the section in Belgium and the Fourth International worldwide.

He was thus very committed to developing educational programmes within the International and a number of his published works are based on series of educationalists that he himself gave. One such was *Class Society to Communism* (1977) later republished as *Introduction to Marxism* (1982), each chapter covering different questions such as: What are the economic roots of social inequality? What are the differences between this society and previous class societies? Where does profit originate? How did the modern labour movement develop? Why is social revolution necessary to liberate the working class? How does bureaucracy develop in the labour movement? What is the role of a revolutionary party? How did the world become divided into rich and poor nations? What is the nature of states like the USSR, China, and those in Eastern Europe? How would a society managed by the workers run itself? The expanded edition covered topics not dealt with in the earlier such as women's oppression, indicating Mandel's readiness to learn from really existing movements.

Many of Mandel's educational texts shaped the thinking of generations of Fourth International activists. One of these, translated into several languages, [*The Leninist Theory of Organization*](#), in reality a work on how class consciousness develops and how this intersects with the capacity to take political, revolutionary action and thus the role of the party. This is not a treatise on party-building in general. However one passage became fundamental to the work of our women comrades in explaining how sexism (as well as other oppressions continues to exist even in organizations committed to a programme for building a society free from all oppression: "it would be giving the capitalist mode of production too much credit to assume it to be a perfect school for preparing the proletariat for independent activity, or that it automatically creates the ability of the working masses to spontaneously recognise and achieve all the objectives and organisational forms of their own liberation," in [*The Leninist Theory of Organisation, Chapter V. Organisation, bureaucracy and revolutionary action*](#). While Mandel was discussing the dangers of bureaucratization this seemed just as relevant to the question of sexism (or lgbtphobie, racism, etc).

Inspired by May 1968, Ernest Mandel - who spoke for example at thirty-three universities in Canada and the USA in the autumn of 1968 - reflected on the role of the university in bourgeois society, of students in the class struggles fully elaborated in his work *Les étudiants, les intellectuels et la lutte des classes* (1979) one of the fundamental texts for our student activists in France. [\[1\]](#)

In person, Ernest Mandel was an inspiring and pedagogical speaker - in several languages including Flemish, French, German, English, Spanish. When the Fourth International youth camp in July 1995 learnt of his death just a few days prior to the camp the opening meeting included an inspiring tribute to him from Vincent Scheltiens of Belgium followed by a standing ovation from the 800 participants many of whom had heard him speak especially of

course the 35 Belgians present.

Another of Ernest Mandel's priority tasks was the question of finances - money was the sinews of the war for him. Not the question of how it was spent, for Ernest that was secondary, the real question was how to find money. He devoted time and energy to finding those who would donate money to the Fourth International through political support for it.

It was thanks to his efforts that the Fourth International was able to create its International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam in 1982, buying and converting premises that would enable comrades from all over the world to come together for residential schools where they would learn both from those specialized on certain topics who came to speak and from each other. The school - which moved to a new building in 2006 - first offered two three-month residential courses per year but as fewer national organizations were in a position to supply candidates the offer became more varied. First in the 1990s with thematic schools, a shorter school especially for young cadre and a later a general three week session as well as seminar meetings for comrades leading different areas of work. The building also hosts the regular residential meeting of the FI leadership bodies.

Today, thirty years after his death, we are still seeking to keep alive Ernest's contribution to the construction of our International, notably by publishing his writings, mostly in new translations through the [IIRE](#).

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PS:

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[1] The full pamphlet was never translated in to English, the first part is [The Revolutionary Student Movement: Theory and Practice](#).