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Obituary

# Hendrik “Pips” Patroons, comrade and friend

- Features - In Memoriam - Obituaries and appreciations -

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**Our comrade Hendrik Patroons, alias “Pips”, passed away in Ghent on April 17, 2025. He was active from an early age in SAP-Antikapitalisten (our organization in Flanders, then called Revolutionaire Arbeiders Liga) and the Fourth International. A convinced revolutionary right up to his last days, he and his companion Marijke Colle left a lasting mark on the organization. He took part in our last national congress in December 2024, and had volunteered to be part of the technical support team for the 18th World Congress of the Fourth International in February 2025, but was unable to do so due to illness. We publish below the tribute paid to him by Alain Tondeur at the funeral ceremony in Wondelgem, near Ghent, on April 25.**

Pips was a comrade and a friend. I learned a lot from the comrade, and laughed a lot with the friend. Pips had a very broad cultural background. In history, linguistics, philosophy, literature, music, even thermodynamics. He was curious about everything, read a lot and had a remarkable memory for what he had read, as well as for the names of authors whose books he had read - or not.

Pips was what we call a revolutionary Marxist. His organizational commitment had its ups and downs, due to the vagaries of life, but he always remained faithful to the fundamental ideas of our political current, the one stigmatized as “Trotskyist”.

Pips never let himself be pigeonholed. He had a historical, materialist and critical approach to Marx's work - and even more so to “Marxism” as it developed after Marx.

Pips' thinking was resolutely anti-dogmatic. He scorned Stalinism and tirelessly hunted down all forms of scholasticism, all traces of teleological thinking. Including - and perhaps especially - in our political current.

Pips was profoundly and radically materialistic, but he sincerely respected sincere faith. It was he, a long, long time ago, who opened my eyes to the dialectical depth of Marx's famous quote: religion is both “the opium of the people” and “the sigh of martyred peoples”.

Pips had the same dialectical approach to the national question, particularly the Flemish question. In addition to his presentation of Ernest Mandel's writings on this subject, he was planning to devote a small book to it: “L'idéologie flamande” (“The Flemish Ideology”). Death prevented him from doing so.

Pips had great admiration not only for Marx's materialism, but also for Spinoza's rationalism. He had no love for Romanticism or, more generally, for the expression of sentiment. Paradoxically, in aesthetic terms, he appreciated Romantic music, particularly that of Schubert and Wagner. This contradiction may be a product of his personal history, but I never had the courage to discuss it with him.

It wasn't easy to argue with Pips. Not only because he knew a lot, but also because he was quite explosive and easily indignant. The younger Pips was like a pressure cooker. Age softened him, but it always took a lot of energy to change his mind, or even to reach a compromise.

Pips was a militant thinker, not a dreamer. He didn't shy away from concrete tasks, and could be very practical. He was not a political leader. This quality was embodied by Marijke. Pips confided in me his admiration for Marijke's political acumen and her talents as an agitator. He himself saw himself more as a propagator (critical, of course!) of

the political line than as a designer of it. As a trainer rather than an agitator.

I worked practically with Pips for several years. We worked full time editing our organization's newspapers – *La Gauche* and *Rood*. I shared political editorial responsibility with Marijke (who worked as a teacher), and editorial secretarial responsibility with Pips. This was before computer-aided page layout. The work was enormous and tedious. Every Sunday, Marijke, Pips and I were joined by a small team to assemble the layouts. Everything had to be ready for Monday morning at 8am. Even the slightest delay in the production line meant working late into the night. Pips sometimes exploded, but he never flinched.

It was in this context that I learned how funny Pips could be. The need to decompress translated into laugh-out-loud sessions. Pips would imitate Charlie Chaplin, I'd imitate Ernest Mandel and we'd laugh ourselves to tears with nonsense I wouldn't dare repeat here. We'd both had colonial childhoods, which created a certain complicity. Above all, we shared the same admiration - critical, of course! - for the adventures of Tintin.

We knew them by heart. I called Pips “captain”, and he called me “sailor”. It wasn't hierarchical. A thousand portholes, let the devil bite me if I am lying!

Ciao Pips, thanks for everything, and for the rest - I won't say any more, you know what it's all about. Best regards to Marijke.

26 April 2025

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [Gauche Anticapitaliste](#).

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