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Obituary

# Our comrade and friend Henri Benois (1926-2025)

- Features - In Memoriam - Obituaries and appreciations -

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**Henri Benoits** [1] was born in Paris in 1926 and had entered his hundredth year. He was a child of the 'fortifs', between Porte de la Plaine and Vanves, the area where the ring road was built fifty years later.

After obtaining his primary school leaving certificate at the age of 12 in 1938, and spending three years in a complementary industrial course, he was taken on in 1941 as an apprentice draughtsman at Ferodo, a brake and clutch manufacturer in Saint-Ouen, and at the same time trained to a CAP. There he also met a Spanish anarchist refugee who 'lent him books'... and a few ideas.

In 1943, at the age of seventeen, he met Daniel Renard, a worker with revolutionary ideas, and in 1944 he was accepted into the Internationalist Communist Party (PCI), the organisation that had just united most of the different Trotskyist currents active in France. He took part in the 'Liberation', from a barricade erected in his neighbourhood in the 15th arrondissement of Paris to the occupation of his Ferodo factory several kilometres away. Never isolated, always with others, sharing the same hopes: this was already Henri's trademark, which would accompany him throughout his decades of commitment.

It was during these years that the other thread running through Henri's activist life, his internationalism, was born. The demonstration on 1 May 1945 in Paris, the first after the end of the Occupation, was a seminal event for him, with the massive procession in the middle of Paris of Algerian emigrants from the PPA-MTLD, with their national flags unfurled. A week before the massacres of Sétif and Guelma on 8 May 1945. On his return from military service in Germany, he took part in the Spartacus brigades in support of Yugoslavia, organised by the PCI following Tito's break with Stalin.

After taking part in CGT youth work and union reconstruction at the Ferodo factory in Saint-Ouen and then at Alstom, he was taken on at Renault in 1950 as a draughtsman. He spent more than ten years there, both professionally and as an activist. The PCI initially decided that he should join FO to promote trade union unity, but in 1952 he co-signed a call for a general strike at the plant with the CGT. Excluded from the FO for this reason, he joined the CGT. It was during these tumultuous days that he met Clara, a Renault employee and CGT activist, who was to become his wife until her death in December 2023.

A draughtsman, Henri belonged to the second college [category of technicians and supervisors] and was active as a delegate for his work colleagues. Renault employees in today's research centres would be astonished to know that the salary surveys that are still being distributed today date back to his initiatives to take action against arbitrary management 'at the customer's head'.

Henri, always consistent with his views, forged political and personal friendships with the union's immigrant activists, particularly Algerians. It was to them, Clara and Henri, that the creation of an FLN body at the plant was announced as a priority. It was this militant practice that led the Fourth International to associate Henri with the political and material aid given to the FLN. This was the beginning of his friendship with Mohamed Harbi, who wrote the preface to Henri and Clara's book *L'Algérie au cœur*. After Henri's interrogation by the DST, they concentrated on solidarity with the UGTA, which was at the heart of the organisation of Algerian proletarians for independence.

And it was in line with this commitment that the French federation chose Henri and Clara, along with four other Renault Billancourt employees, as on-site observers of the demonstration planned for 17 October 1961. Henri and Clara were positioned along the route of the demonstration between Opéra and the Le Rex cinema at the

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Bonne-Nouvelle metro station. Some thirty years later, their testimony would be heard at the trial that Papon, the organiser of the bloody crackdown on Algerians on 17 October, brought against Jean-Luc Einaudi, the historian who, after an unprecedented investigation, revealed the extent of the massacre.

In their capacity as militants, Henri and Clara took part in the general strike and the occupation of the Billancourt factory in May 68, pushing for the self-organisation of the striking workers and employees, within the limits permitted by their conscience at the time. However, they were accused, against all probability, by the leadership of the CGT union of being behind the uproar that greeted Georges Séguy's reading of the content of the Grenelle agreements. This denunciation was soon forgotten, as they were respected by their comrades and colleagues.

A militant at Renault and a convinced internationalist, Henri constantly maintained his links with the Fourth International, whose history is punctuated by numerous splits and regroupings. Henri's actions were always guided by what he believed to be the most decisive in terms of internationalist solidarity. This was the case in 1953, when, alongside the Vietnamese in the Renault cells, he chose to be in the minority with Pierre Frank in the French section. This was the case in 1965, when he accompanied Michel Pablo in his departure from the organised framework of the Fourth International and then became a militant within the Marxist-Revolutionary Alliance, the AMR, identifying with "self-management". The currents to which he belonged led him to become a member of the PSU on two occasions, and then to militate within the Marxist-Revolutionary Alliance, the AMR, which advocated self-management. The currents to which he belonged led him to become a member of the PSU twice, first in 1960, when he was a member of the national leadership as part of the socialist-revolutionary tendency and co-secretary of the Renault company section, and then in 1975 with the AMR. Then, in the early 1990s, he again joined the organised framework of the Fourth International, and in France the LCR and then the NPA.

Henri retired from Renault in 1984, but never gave up. An active member of the CGT Renault pensioners' section, his most consistent and persistent activities were in the service of immigrant workers. In particular, at the age of 90, he set up a weekly office close to the former Renault factory site in Boulogne-Billancourt, to defend the rights of the neighbouring immigrant population, starting with Renault pensioners and their families.

In recent years, especially since Clara's death, he had become less independent. Nonetheless, he read the daily newspapers *Le Monde* and *L'Humanité* every day and continued to subscribe to the press of the NPA and the Fourth International, *L'Anticapitaliste* and *Inprecor*. His last act of activism was carried out by his daughter Sophie a month ago: to speak about 17 October 1961 at a meeting held on the anniversary in tribute to Jean-Luc Einaudi.

Henri expressed the wish that, when the time came, the flag of the Fourth International would cover his coffin. A militant life worth living! Greetings and fraternity!

*His comrades on the NPA-Auto-critique blog, 28 November 2025*

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[1] In French, in the Maitron dictionary of militants of the workers' movement, [Henri BENOITS](#).