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Appreciation

“Over 60 years of activism for socialism”

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I was among the 2,000 people who marched on March 21, from the Place de la Nation to his funeral at the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, behind a banner “Merci Alain.” Tributes from a wide variety of figures, many of whom had parted ways with him but wanted to salute his memory, were collected at a memorial meeting organized by the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) on April 30.

Among them, British socialist Tariq Ali explained how he identified Krivine and the “Ligue”: “It was for us, those of us in smaller organizations of the Fourth International, the best organization of the Fourth International.” The International Socialist Tendency (IST) wrote: “above all we are in debt to Alain and his comrades in the JCR — the starting point of the LCR and now the NPA — for leading the way in reviving revolutionary socialism as a living force in Europe. They blazed a trail that we must continue to follow.”

Alex Calinicos (British SWP) stated: “For me he always represented the indomitable spirit of the great revolt by French workers and students in May 1968.”

Early Years

Krivine and his twin brother Hubert were born in Paris on July 10, 1941. Three of their four grandparents had immigrated from Ukraine and Romania to escape antisemitic pogroms at the end of the 19th century. The twins had three older brothers and a sister.

By the end of the year his father, a dentist, arranged for his wife and youngest children to move to a small town in the north of France; with the liberation of Paris the family was reunited.

Interested in politics from childhood — and growing up in a household that valued education — he, by 1960, was enrolled at Sorbonne University, studying history. Two years later he married his wife Michèle, who became a professor of history, geography and social sciences. They had two daughters, Nathalie (b. 1968) and Florence (b. 1974).

Alain Krivine joined the Communist Youth of France in 1957. His activity in support of Algerian independence led him to oppose the line of the French Communist Party (PCF), then the dominant force in the French left and labor movement (about twice the size and influence of the Socialist Party). This put him in contact with members of the French section of the Fourth International, the PCI (Parti communiste internationaliste), which he joined but without announcing it publicly to avoid expulsion.

He became a leader of the Union of Communist Students, his current known as “Guevarist” for their solidarity with the Cuban revolution. Finally, in 1965, entire local groups of the Union were expelled wholesale, including Krivine. He then turned to solidarity with Vietnam against the U.S. imperialist aggression, helping to found the National Vietnam Committee.

May 1968 and Beyond

Krivine's celebrity comes mainly from his role in the May '68 events.

A rising but relatively contained tide of workers' struggles had been developing since 1963. In 1968 a massive student protest against police repression forced the unions and left parties to call a national demonstration and one-day general strike. But in one factory after the other, workers voted to continue the strike indefinitely, leading to the most massive labor strike in French history.

Because of its role in triggering the event, the student movement played a far more important role than its size would suggest (300,000 compared to 10 million workers on strike). And within this student movement Krivine's JCR (Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire), played a key role because of its previous work on Vietnam and its attempts to bring about a worker-student alliance, despite PCF attempts to separate the two movements.

French society and De Gaulle's conservative government were shaken. For about 15 years thereafter, strikes multiplied, membership in unions and left parties grew, citizens voted increasingly to the left, and new social movements emerged.

The JCR became the LC (Ligue communiste), renamed LCR (Ligue communiste révolutionnaire) after being banned: It grew from 300 to over 3000, acquiring influence in the trade unions (CGT, CFDT, FEN) and new social movements as well as in public debate where it was seen as the alternative to social democracy and Stalinism.

After François Mitterand, a social democrat, became president of France in 1981, the Ligue grew more slowly, while deepening its roots in the labor movement. Krivine remained among its leadership, attentive to any opening that might announce a new revolutionary upsurge, or a possible regroupment of revolutionary, or anticapitalist or simply class-struggle or neo-Keynesian forces.

But a capitalist counter offensive had begun under the guise of neoliberalism. Retrospectively we know that no social revolutions were successful even temporarily after Nicaragua (1979). In these tougher times for revolutionaries, Krivine became widely known for remaining true to the ideals of his youth.

Of course, many of his generation did likewise and quietly spawned the new social movements of the 1990s and beyond, but he was in the limelight and counterposed by the media to obvious turncoats like Daniel Cohn Bendit and Bernard-Henri Lévy. He described himself as a popularizer not a theoretician (“je suis un vulgarisateur”).

In the tributes many describe him also as a party builder, attentive to organizational detail, close to the rank-and-file, present at demonstrations, factory gate events, small local meetings and welcoming visitors at the national headquarters in Montreuil.

New Struggles

The 1995 strike wave, the emergence of the global social justice movement (“altermondialisme”) and the “No” vote on the 2005 referendum amending the European Union constitution, seemed to herald a new cycle of rising struggles. LCR presidential candidate Olivier Besancenot received 4% of the vote in 2007, beating the PCF and Lutte Ouvrière (another Trotskyist group — ed.) candidates.

Krivine then supported the launching of a broad NPA (Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste) rather than pursuing unity with the anti-neo-liberal left (Collectifs unitaires anti-libéraux). The latter was later augmented by left-wing splits from the SP, became the Front de Gauche (PCF/far left/Parti de Gauche) and has reemerged today as the Nouvelle Union Populaire Ecologiste et Sociale (NUPES).

For a while, the NPA was broader than the LCR, incorporating anarchist and social justice collectives. But these currents soon were attracted by the broader Front de Gauche and its successors, or left the NPA for other reasons. Krivine followed politics until the very end, but did not live to see the foundation of the NUPES, in April 2022.

Builder and Organizer

These are the broad outlines of Krivine’s role on the French left. But his role on the world scene, as spreader of socialist ideas, organizer of solidarity networks and builder of revolutionary groups in many countries beyond France must also be addressed.

Krivine’s trajectory is profoundly embedded in international events. His first militant activity, at age 16, was as a French Communist Youth delegate to the World Festival of Democratic Youth held in Moscow in 1957 to promote Peace and Friendship.

This is where he met Algerian delegates who convinced him that the French PCF was not doing as much as it should to support their struggle for independence. The encounter was fundamental: Krivine saw himself as part of the historical Communist movement, articulating the interests of the world proletariat, and committed to act against his own imperialist homeland, France.*

His refusal to see France, despite its Gaullist dissidence from U.S.-led Western imperialism, as non-aligned or attached to the universal republican values of the French revolution on the world scene, remained with him throughout his life.

This was of course the basis for his support to Algerian self-determination in general, his specific solidarity with the movement actually leading the struggle, the FLN (Front de Libération nationale), whatever differences he might have with its leadership, and his creation of the Front Universitaire Antifasciste to combat the far-right forces defending the French colonial empire (the OAS, Organisation de l’Armée Secrète).

Solidarity with Cuba and Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s could also be seen as support for self-determination of nations struggling to free themselves from the domination of an imperialist master, although in these cases their enemy was not French but U.S. imperialism.

Unlike in Algeria, the movements actually leading these struggles seemed to promise clearly anticapitalist measures, in defiance of Moscow’s desire to preserve the status quo and avoid uncontrolled challenges to capitalism. The reputation of Krivine’s French movement as “Guevarist” was based on this perception of Vietnam and Cuba as relatively independent of the Soviet peaceful coexistence line.

Krivine’s activism on Vietnam brought him to street demonstrations in Berlin, Brussels and London and encouraged contacts in the United States and many other countries.

In the United States, the Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialist Alliance were playing an important role in organizing the antiwar movement. This registered with the U.S. (SWP) and French organizations of the Fourth International, who saw the possibility of escalating formal fraternal relations established by the FI’s reunification of 1963 into a more active collaboration on common initiatives around Vietnam and student and youth work.

Personal Recollections

Just then, I happened to have joined the JCR in France and was preparing to go to college in the United States in fall 1965. Krivine and others quickly told me that I was not simply a revolutionary Marxist and a critical Communist but a Trotskyist (a discovery recounted by others), and sent me to see Pierre Frank, the leader of the PCI at the time, who gave me a letter to carry to New York and introduce myself to Mary-Alice Waters and Jack Barnes of the YSA and SWP.

May '68 had a big impact on the U.S. antiwar and student movement. The events demonstrated the potential of the working class of advanced capitalist countries to awaken and mobilize. Mary Alice Waters and Joseph Hansen, an older leader of the SWP, were in Paris, meeting occasionally with Krivine and covering events.

Out of these encounters came the widely distributed Revolt in France May-June 1968. A Contemporary Record Compiled from Intercontinental Press and the Militant. The YSA issued a badge of solidarity with the JCR and, one of its leaders, Peter Camejo engaged in “the battle of Telegraph Avenue” in Berkeley (June-July 1968).

As Tariq Ali’s tribute above emphasized, Krivine’s Ligue became the model for groups and individuals around the world drawn to revolutionary socialism. Krivine and other leaders of the French section spent time in other countries to develop closer links (Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Britain, Sweden, Canada, Switzerland, Germany, Holland).

In some countries with a weak, purely intellectual or non-existent Trotskyist tradition, imitation or adaptation of the Ligue model became the norm. In countries like the United States with a stronger Trotskyist tradition, the lessons of the French experience raised discussions.

Alain Krivine, then using the pen name Delfin, was intricately involved in these debates around political issues such as the nature of the new youth radicalization, the role of universities in revolutionary upsurges, the need for a gradual turn of student-based organizations towards the labor movement and working class. But they also involved organizational differences about party democracy and tendency representation.

Here my path again crossed Alain Krivine’s. I was involved in two debates in the U.S. SWP, the first in 1971 around a document calling “For a Proletarian Orientation,” the second in 1973 around critical support for a European Perspectives resolution that included a turn to the working class.

In my opinion, the 1973 debate over a guerilla warfare strategy, allegedly adopted by the FI in 1969, was a diversion from the main issues and practical options which centered on advanced capitalist countries. In both cases, the minority point of view was not represented as such on the National Committee of the SWP.

In 1974, the minority supporters (Internationalist Tendency) were expelled without a trial. Krivine as a leader of the largest organization of the FI which took pride in its democratic internal regime and respect for minority rights, supported the official FI disapproval of the expulsion. I was elected to the International Executive Committee of the FI and saw Krivine regularly at meetings.

From 1981 to 1989, I worked part-time at the international center of the FI as a translator and editor, and continued to witness Krivine’s involvement in attempts to build the FI. There were visits or exchanges with Brazil and Mexico, two countries where the FI had large sections.

He was an international observer of the 1984 and 1990 elections in Nicaragua. In 1999, Krivine was elected to the European Parliament (EP), which enabled him to play an international role with more authority, such as during his trip to Caracas, Venezuela in 2003 to celebrate the defeat of the attempted coup against Hugo Chavez. And when the

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United States lifted its longtime refusal to deliver a visa in March 2003, for a visit to Kofi Annan, of the UN, along with a delegation of the EP protesting the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

He continued to help the FI build revolutionary organizations to the very end: in Moscow in 2006, to discuss with activists of the new socialist group Vperiod; in Madrid in 2010 to honor Daniel Bensaïd, in Athens to help organize resistance to the diktats of the troika (European institutions that imposed crippling austerity on Greece — ed.), and in Kiev in 2015 at the invitation of the Sotsyalni Rukh movement.

Alain Krivine's legacy: Over 60 years of activism for socialism on a global scale.

*Krivine's [testimony](#), translated from Jacques Charby's *Les Porteurs d'Espoir* (La Découverte, Paris, 2004) explains this moment.

+Alain Krivine's memoir, **Ça te passera avec l'âge** (“You’ll Grow Out of It”) was published in 2006 by Flammarion. See an [English biographical sketch](#) of his life and work.

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