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Obituary

Roland Lew

- News from around the world -

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Our friend Roland Lew passed away on March 30th, after a long illness. Born in Lausanne in 1944, he studied in Brussels, where he joined the Socialist Young Guard (JGS), then, under the influence of Ernest Mandel, the Belgian section of the Fourth International.

Roland was a “Trotskyist”, but also a “libertarian” or a “Luxemburgist”, in short a Marxist who was convinced that the emancipation of the working class can only be achieved by the working class itself. This “self-emancipation” was from the beginning of his political activity at the centre of his thinking.

Having withdrawn from organised political activity at the end of the 1970s, he shifted the focus of his attention towards research. A recognised specialist on China, he was one of those who followed step by step cultural evolutions and continuities, their links with social structures, the passages of elites from one regime to another, from a state or a regime to a new regime or state.

His book “L'Intellectuel, l'Etat et la révolution, Essais sur le communisme chinois et le socialisme réel” [1] will remain in this respect an example of the analysis of a process of social transformation and the deeply-rooted obstacles that it is confronted with because of the reproduction of elites and cultural traditions, even within a popular revolutionary process, phenomena of which the Stalinist degeneration of the Communist Parties only represents one particular caricature.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/AMao.jpg>]

Although he had not for a long time been a member of an organisation, Roland was the opposite of disillusioned or disappointed. Wherever he lived, he established many links with the small groups who shared, to a greater or lesser extent, his objectives.

So while he was a university lecturer in Algeria, he quite naturally spent long evenings discussing with the underground militants who would later, when the dictatorship began to tolerate opposition, establish the PST (Algerian section of the Fourth International). He followed passionately - though he sometimes found them disappointing - the debates of revolutionary organisations, he kept up and multiplied his relations with militants, he was always on the lookout for new thinking and new positions.

In short, never claiming to have finished his own thinking, he was open to the thinking of others, from whom he always hoped to learn something. Although he was an analyst of elites, he was the opposite of an elitist.

The publications of the Fourth International could always count on him as an attentive reader and a valued collaborator. [2] He was a critical reader, capable of discerning the weaknesses of an analysis, especially when he appreciated its general orientation.

“Strike where it hurts”, as he liked to repeat, so that critical analysis could develop and not be transformed once again into a dogma in the service of party machines - big or small - and become a reassuring ideology for bureaucrats who don't like to be challenged, stifling thought, all the while pretending that its “the workers” that we mustn't demoralise. He was one of those who considered that certainties - and especially the certainties of militants who laid claim to Marx's analysis - were only made to be overturned.

His kindly but critical telephone calls, the meetings with him to dissect what was not up to scratch in Inprecor will be

Roland Lew

missed by our journal. With his loss, we lose a critic and a writer, a comrade and a friend.

To Anne, his companion, we send our warm sympathy.

[1] Roland Lew, "L'Intellectuel, l'Etat et la révolution, Essais sur le communisme chinois et le socialisme réel", L'Harmattan editions, Paris 1997.

[2] Some of Lew's writings on China were published in IV; you can find "Rebellion in the rustbelt" in the Spetember 2002 issue and "Taking the capitalist road" in the March 2003 issue. Go to the online magazine section and find back issues