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Fourth International - France

Tribute to Marc Bourhis, shot as a hostage at Châteaubriant on 22 October 1941, militant of the Fourth International

- Features - In Memoriam - Obituaries and appreciations -
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On 16 October 2021, at the initiative of the Committee of Remembrance of those shot at Châteaubriant, Nantes and the Resistance in Loire-Inférieure, we pay a special tribute to the three hostages shot by the Nazis whose remains were buried anonymously, again on the order of the Nazis, in the cemetery of Petit-Auverné. Here were gathered the bodies of Guy Mocquet, militant of the Communist Youth, Jules Auffret of Trignac, a trade unionist and elected representative for the Communist Party in Bondy, and Marc Bourhis, a Trotskyist militant.

Born in 1907 in Lézardrieux, in what is now Côtes d'Armor, Marc Bourhis was 34 years old. He and his wife Alice were both teachers in Trégunc, a commune of Finistère located about ten kilometres south of Concarneau. As soon as he graduated from the Ecole Normale de Quimper in 1926, Marc Bourhis became involved in the Unitary Federation of Education. It was in this union that he met another teacher who was shot at Châteaubriant, Pierre Guéguin.

An active militant of the Communist Party and a neighbour in Concarneau of Marc Bourhis' parents, Pierre Guéguin soon became close to the young teacher whom he convinced to join the Communist Party in 1930. Disagreeing with the political evolution of the Soviet Union and with the course followed by the PCF, Marc Bourhis left this party in 1933, the year Hitler became Chancellor of the Reich and opened the first concentration camps. Marc Bourhis then subscribed to the Trotskyist newspaper *La Vérité* and, at the trade union level, became the spokesperson of "l'Ecole Emancipée", the organ of the Unitary Federation of Education.

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

Marc Bourhis

From 1935, his links with Trotskyist militants became closer, especially on the return to Finistère of Alain Le Dem, with whom, in 1936, he joined the Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste (POI - Internationalist Workers' Party). On 29 December 1937, he chaired an important meeting of the POI in Concarneau, which was reported on by *Lutte Ouvrière*, the party's weekly, on 6 January 1938. Interesting to read that Pierre Guéguin, elected mayor of Concarneau in 1935, attended on behalf of the PCF to challenge Yvan Craipeau, who was the main speaker for the POI at this meeting.

After the expulsion of the Revolutionary Left current within the SFIO, its leader Marceau Pivert formed a new party, the Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan (PSOP - Socialist Workers' and Peasants' Party). Along with most of the French Trotskyist militants, Marc Bourhis joined it and actively campaigned for it.

Mobilized as soon as war was declared in September 1939, Marc Bourhis was sent to the barracks called "Le Bagne" in Brest, before being transferred in May 1940 as a suspicious element to the 137th Infantry Regiment of Quimper. A few weeks later, in June, this unit was blocked in its barracks by the German army. Quickly released to resume his class in Trégunc, Marc Bourhis reconnected with Pierre Guéguin who had publicly broken with the Communist Party at the signing, in August 1939, of the non-aggression pact between Stalin and Ribbentrop.

Throughout Finistère, Marc Bourhis and Pierre Guéguin – who had been stripped of all his mandates like all elected Communists – acted in hiding against the Nazi occupation. In June 1941, Hitler invaded the USSR. On 23 June 1941, Pierre and Marc improvised a meeting in a café on Trévignon point and publicly expressed their opinions and satisfaction at seeing the USSR in the camp of the Allies.

tribute to Marc Bourhis, shot as a hostage at Châteaubriant on 22 October 1941, militant of the Fourth International

On 2 July 1941, following a denunciation, Marc Bourhis - whom the Commissioner of General Intelligence presented as "the soul of the revolutionary party in his commune" - and Pierre Guéguin were arrested as agitators by the gendarmerie on an arrest warrant from the Prefect of Finistère and interned in the Choisel camp in Châteaubriant.

In this camp, where important cadres of the Communist Party were also detained, the Trotskyist Bourhis and the "renegade" Guéguin were slandered and quarantined by Stalin's French supporters, to the point that the Trotskyist historian Rodolphe Prager wrote about Pierre Guéguin: "the hatred of his former comrades condemned him to a difficult existence 'even more painful than his own', according to Bourhis, who was also not spared."

Designated as hostages, Marc Bourhis, Pierre Guéguin and their 25 comrades fell under Nazi bullets on the afternoon of 22 October at the Sablière quarry in Châteaubriant.

To the 27 of Châteaubriant, to the 48 hostages designated by the French authorities and shot in retaliation by the Nazis, we owe the same tribute. But this tribute requires that each of them be recognized in their political identity.

Marc Bourhis was a militant of the Fourth International, a Trotskyist militant. In 1945, his family had "Militant of the Internationalist Communist Party" engraved on his grave. On 19 October 1945, more than a thousand people attended a meeting of the PCI in Concarneau at the rostrum where Marc Bourhis' father and Pierre Gueguin's widow took their place, which did not prevent Communist militants from attacking the platform. In October 1946, Alice Bourhis, Marc's widow, had the following point published in the PCI newspaper *La Vérité*:

Dear comrades, on the eve of this 22 October, when the PCF is preparing with a lot of propaganda, to commemorate the anniversary of the massacre of the twenty-seven hostages of Châteaubriant, I believe that "La Vérité" must make the following clarification.

At the "Sablière" where the twenty-seven hostages were executed, a monument was erected. Various commemorative plaques are placed there. In August 1945, the PCI had a plaque affixed to Marc's memory. A fortnight later, while we went to the exhumation of the bodies of Marc and Pierre Guéguen, we notice the disappearance of the PCI plaque. Of course, no other is missing. That of the PCI alone has disappeared.

Who committed the sacrilege? Who was annoyed by this plaque to the point of desecrating this monument? Obviously, it contradicted the plaque that says: "In memory of the twenty-seven members of the PCF." We must not know that Marc Bourhis, who fell under the Nazi bullets, was a Trotskyist. Scruples do not bother them much! Has not the Stalinist Carriou just declared publicly in a meeting in Brest that, if Marc was taken hostage, it was because there was a "mistake".

Today no serious historian disputes Marc Bourhis's the membership of the Fourth international. But too often we still "forget" to mention that he was a Trotskyist and that his friend and comrade Pierre Guéguin had come closer to the Trotskyists. This dark page in the history of the workers' movement where Trotskyist militants were hunted down as "Hitlero-Trotskyists" cannot be forgotten even if it must be turned forever.

By unveiling this plaque recalling that the remains of Jules Auffret, Guy Mocquet and Marc Bourhis were buried in this cemetery of Petit-Auverné, it is indeed the militant of the Communist Party, the militant of the Communist Youth and the militant of the Fourth International, to whom we pay tribute. And on their behalf to the 48 hostages of Châteaubriant, Nantes and Mont-Valérien.

Jean-Noël Badaud, David Blanchard, Jean Brunacci, Sandra Cormier, Robert Hirsch, Henri Le Dem, François Preneau, Eric Thouzeau, Catherine Touchefeu

Historians, political activists and trade unionists, the signatories of this tribute have shared, for decades, the same interest in this tragic and heroic period of our history, convinced that the memory of the 48 hostages will forever accompany our common struggle for a society finally free from all evil, oppression and violence.

Nantes 12 October 2021

*The bulletin (in French)

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