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Fourth International

“We worked hard, but joyfully”

- Features -

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In its June issue our French-language sister publication *Inprecor* celebrated fifty years of regular publication. At the launch in 1974 *Inprecor* was published in the three languages of the International (and in German as *Inprekorr*). However in English and in Spanish for different reasons the publication has not been continuous and today alongside French (*Inprecor*) there are two online magazines [International Viewpoint](#) and [Punto de Vista Internacional](#).

Antoine Larrache and Paul Martial from the *Inprecor* editorial team interviewed Anna Libera [1] who was in the original *Inprecor* team in 1974.

Can you describe your work at *Inprecor*?

I participated in the creation of *Inprecor* in the spring of 1974 in Brussels, where the centre of the Fourth International was located. Previously, I had worked at the weekly *Rouge*. There was a centre, because the Fourth International had become much stronger thanks to May 68. Before May 68, the Fourth International was a fairly small group. Its sections were quite weak, except in France among young people and in the United States. Following May 68, the JCR, which became the LCR, developed greatly and inspired many young people, groups especially among the younger generations in Europe. We had sections in practically all of Europe and a lot of contacts in Latin America.

The need for a permanent centre emerged. It should normally have been in Paris, given the importance taken by the LCR. But Mandel [2], Udry [3], Maitan [4] and others were all banned from staying in France after May 68. (The bans were lifted in 1981 by Mitterrand, and that's when *Inprecor* returned to Paris.) So this centre was established in Brussels, where there was also the centre of the International, which discussed many aspects of strategy and tactics. This leadership based in Brussels had a somewhat extraterrestrial aspect – apart from Mandel, all its members came from other countries, and therefore had few personal and activist connections in Brussels – and *Inprecor* helped to change that and give a concrete basis to its activity, because we worked with the Belgian section, in particular to produce it. *Inprecor* was really the organ of the Unified Secretariat [5] of the Fourth International. At *Rouge*, the LCR newspaper, we had an editorial committee, we discussed, we distributed the articles, etc. We were doing more reporting than we could do at *Inprecor*.

Concretely, how did it work?

We had this big office, which was a big apartment in the centre of Brussels. In one part, there was the secretariat of the International which functioned with as permanent members Udry, Michaloux [6], and Gisela Mandel, Mandel's wife. And then on the other side, there was the workshop where we produced *Inprecor* in French and English. So I was there for the French part. And then there were American comrades, like Joanna Misnik [7] who was a pillar, and her boyfriend at the time, Jon Rothschild. They were working on the English version.

There wasn't really a formalized editorial committee, we were more of a working editorial secretariat, with a few people. We were making the journal. But there were informal meetings, where we looked at what articles we had: it was really the organ of the Fourth International. The F.I. had become a lot stronger, but there were lots of people we didn't really know. The people who arrived were a whole new generation and they didn't have a lot of training. In each country, there were a few people who had belonged to the International in the difficult years, but overall they were all new organizations, with new generations, and new issues too.

What were the you most concerned with? The Eastern Bloc must have been a major concern, right?

Before 68, the centres of interest were essentially the Algerian War and Latin America, where the Ninth Congress of the International supported guerrilla warfare. The centres of interest focused a lot on the Third World, as it was called at the time, and then the focus shifted to Europe and the new generations.

Eastern Europe was an important concern, but we didn't have much contact. For example, Maitan, in his history of the Fourth International, speaks of a section in Czechoslovakia but I, who dealt with this country for years, can assure you that there was never a section, even though we had a very good friend, Petr Uhl, who was very influential among the dissidents [8]. There was a lot of concern about dissident movements in eastern Europe at the end of the 1970s, but at that time, even though it was among our concerns, it was less compared to Western Europe.

We had a regular work routine. Once a week we had a meeting. There was no really journalistic concept, such as the search for a balance between the sections, which we had at *Rouge*.

The end of the Vietnam War was a big, big centre of interest, and the Portuguese revolution, which started a few weeks before we launched *Inprecor*. Two members of the secretariat, Udry and Michaloux, were sent there, with a Portuguese friend who had been in exile in Brussels, and they regularly sent us material.

Our objective was therefore to coordinate all these new forces in the different countries, and to develop analyses which would allow us to understand this new phase of struggles which had been opened by 68. It was really the organ of the Fourth International and not an activist newspaper that reports on everything that happens around it.

What was the connection with the review *Quatrième Internationale*?

Inprecor followed more political news and *Quatrième Internationale* was more theoretical. *Inprecor* aimed to coordinate the struggles, what was happening in the world at the time, even if it was obviously linked to the analyses of the Fourth International. There was also a desire to direct all these new forces. The analyses were the result of discussions with them. For example, there were many meetings of leaders of the F.I. with our Portuguese friends, meetings with many other forces to develop an analysis of the new movements. There was no editor-in-chief, nor even a formal editorial committee, it was really the secretariat of the International which determined which articles we published, and which sections we would ask to send us an article.

We published material produced by the local sections. Then there was the translation work: Jon translated into English and I into French. Then, the factory. On Sunday afternoons, with Joanna, we alternately set up the layouts in English and French and on Monday morning, we took them to the printing works of the Belgian section, where its own weekly *La Gauche* was printed [9]. Afterwards, we sent it to subscribers and to the different sections. That was the practical side of making the journal.

How did the International have the means to bring out these publications?

We had lots of new sections contributing, so there was a lot more money to do this kind of thing. In addition the team was completely underpaid, Joanna, Jon and I worked seven days a week, and we benefited from the *La Gauche* printing press, which gave us bargain prices. That's how we managed to do it.

We sent *Inprecor* to many countries, wherever we had sections. The English version was distributed in more countries than the French version, obviously.

For example in Africa, you sent the French version I imagine?

I'm not sure, I don't remember that we really had contacts in Africa. At that time, contacts with Algeria were mainly through Pablo because it was he who had organized solidarity at the time of the war of liberation. Later, in the 1980s, *Inprecor* became more interested in Africa because we had several comrades who had links in French-speaking Africa and South Africa.

We sent *Inprecor* to Italy, France and Switzerland. We sent the English versions to mainly English-speaking countries. It was also sent to Latin America. The Germans were making their own *Inprekorr*. They translated into German from the French or English versions. The Spanish comrades, who were still underground at the time, did the same thing for Spain and Latin America. We roughly covered the reality of the Fourth International at the time, which was a real transcontinental network with a lot of travel: as the centre of the International was in Brussels, many activists from distant countries came from time to time, so we could interview them. We really operated in total symbiosis with the network of the Fourth International.

When you say that it was the organ of the Fourth International, how did the discussions take place? Take the example of the Portuguese revolution, how did you conduct the discussion on what *Inprecor* would be used for in that context?

These were mainly political discussions at the level of the secretariat of the Fourth International, and it decided what was published. As Udry and Michaloux were in Lisbon, on Portugal we had a very regular flow, even if what dominated was not information, but rather the treatment of events through the analytical prism of the Fourth International.

In 1975, I will always remember the issue we did on the fall of Saigon, because we were in our offices located in the centre of Brussels and while we were designing the front page, there passed under our windows a great demonstration of joy by people who had supported Vietnam. So we went down to join the demonstration, we felt part of a certain political reality despite the context of this Unified Secretariat separated from the main sections of the Fourth International.

Later on when I worked as a journalist, I headed the international section of the daily *Rouge*. Every morning we had a meeting – first in the international section – where we discussed what we were going to cover, how we were going to organize ourselves, and then afterwards we made proposals to the meeting of the editorial secretariat. We really went looking for news, we could decide to send a journalist to Western Sahara for example (and we did!). At *Inprecor* there were no such discussions. We covered events like the Portuguese revolution, the end of the Vietnam War, those were essential, then someone in this or that section told us "this is what's happening, we can send you an article" and then from time to time in time, the secretariat produced a document of orientation to be published.

The interview with Mariana, who worked much later, gives the impression of an obviously activist press organ where there were discussions on what to publish. But we were given the line and then articles that embodied the line. I think it played a very important role at the time. Besides, when you think about the history of the first *Inprecor* that of the Third International, it also had pretty much the same function. The Third International was obviously on a completely different scale from us, but it also found itself with a whole series of new forces after the Bolshevik revolution, new parties that were emerging. For the Fourth International it was the same. These new organizations said "we want to do like you, we agree with you", but we didn't know them and they didn't always know the Fourth International, except that it was an organization that had survived, that it was anti-Stalinist, that it carried the banner of the Third World, let's say – because there was a lot of support for Ho Chi Minh, then for Cuba and the guerrillas in Latin America, so that attracted a lot of people. But there was often a superficial knowledge of our programme.

Maitan describes this reality very well in his book on the history of the Fourth International [10] – in which he does not talk about *Inprecor* at all. [11] And sometimes there were surprises, when we discovered more about one another, which explains the number of splits and difficulties.

There was also an idea to coordinate these new sections. It was not simply informing and training these new generations who had joined the Fourth International. But there was this vision of coordinating movements. We were a bit "megalomaniac", with a small secretariat in Brussels, to try to coordinate social movements which were developing all around the planet, but ultimately that was the very meaning of the International at the time.

Would you say that all this was the product of a conscious objective in the congress, in the International Committee?

It was decided at the Congress after 1968, the Tenth. This idea of strengthening the permanent centre of the Fourth International and publishing an organ in a certain sense of centralization was totally conscious. Helping, coordinating the movements that emerged after 1968, training these new generations in a revolutionary vision, was a decision of the Fourth International.

And the idea of publishing articles that do not come from the Fourth International as we do today?

At the time this was not at all the conception. The idea was really to have an organ which would make it possible to bring together from an intellectual and political point of view all these new forces which had joined the Fourth International.

Do you remember feedback from different countries?

It was very well received, I think it was useful. I was very internationalist, very Fourth International, even though I found that there was a bit of a megalomaniacal side to wanting to control everything from a very small centre. Fortunately, as we had sections which were very much anchored in the reality of the struggle, that compensated, it wasn't felt too much. I think it was very useful: when you reread the articles that were written then, there were analyses of revolutionary movements that were developing that were produced in the heat of the moment – everything that was written about Vietnam and Europe.

Based on the writings of Jon Rothschild who also worked with us, who spoke Arabic and was very interested in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there were quite a few articles on this issue. It was just after the Yom Kippur War in 1973. There was the Palestinian movement and 50 years later we are no further ahead, we have even gone backwards dramatically. There was a lot about the Middle East.

We wanted to produce solid analyses in the heat of the moment. That was not always easy and I think there is nothing to be ashamed of in what was done. I think it was useful because I, who travelled a lot in Europe, met people who were around the Fourth International, knew *Inprecor*, read *Inprecor* and found it useful. It was a journal which provided a lot of intellectual and political nourishment with regard to current events in the world. There were also many papers in the sections which could republish or adapt articles, that was also the function of *Inprecor*.

And your personal assessment?

We all worked together, we were a very good team with our revolutionary over-optimism and, as we didn't have many friends in Brussels, we socialized together. It was a very good time and we had the impression that we were doing something useful, concrete. You had something in your hands at the end of your week, instead of having spent it in

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grand political discussions drawing up plans on the revolutionary comet. Your journal went to lots of European countries and people read it. The articles were republished, we were even quoted by the press. It was a very rich and enriching period, especially because struggles were winning. It's not like now, where we participate in lots of struggles... but they lose.

There was a different atmosphere, a basis for a certain revolutionary optimism. We worked hard, seven days a week, and then if at midnight we hadn't finished, we stayed until 2 a.m. because at eight o'clock on Monday morning we had to take the newspaper to the printshop, so you couldn't tell them “we're going to bed, we'll finish this tomorrow”.

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[1] Pseudonym of Isabelle Richet, professor emeritus of history at Paris Cité University.

[2] Ernest Mandel (1923-1995), Belgian economist, was a leader of the Fourth International from 1946 until his death in 1995.

[3] Charles-André Udry, economist, was a leader of the Fourth International. He is currently responsible for Page Deux editions and the online political magazine *À l'encontre*. He is a member of the Movement for Socialism (MPS, Switzerland).

[4] Livio Maitan (1923-2004), a leader of the Fourth International from 1951 to his death in 2004.

[5] The “Unified Secretariat” resulting from the merger in 1963 of two Trotskyist currents from the Fourth International, was the governing structure of the International from 1963 to 2003.

[6] Charles Michaloux was one of the leaders of the French section and the Fourth International.

[7] Contacted by us, Joanna, who returned to the United States and became a trade union activist, was unable to answer our questions due to her state of health.

[8] Petr Uhl (1941-2021) Czech journalist and essayist, founder of Charter 77 which brought together dissidents opposed to the normalization of the country.

[9] *La Gauche*, newspaper of the Belgian section of the Fourth International.

[10] “*Memoirs of a critical communist, Towards a History of the Fourth International*”, London, Merlin, 2019.

[11] There are many references to the content of *Inprecor* but none at all to the team which produced it. - IVP