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France

Remembering Daniel Bensaïd

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Thousands of people gathered at La Mutualité in Paris on Sunday, January 24, 2010 to render homage to Daniel Bensaïd. Hosted by Fred Borrás and Myriam Martin, both from the leadership of the NPA and from Toulouse, like Daniel, this was an emotional and militant act of remembrance to his memory.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Bensaid_meeting.jpg]

The audience brought together militants of the NPA of all ages, young newcomers and veterans of the 68 generation, representatives of other left forces, people from the world of culture, and also former LCR activists who had shared a militant adventure with Bensaïd and moved away, through tiredness or renunciation, at some point along the road. A road that as said Daniel “was much longer than we imagined in the youthful enthusiasm of the 1960s”, but from which he never deviated, until the end of his life, and with the same enthusiasm as at the beginning.

The tribute came just a day after the “Powers of communism” event at Université Paris VIII, which had been organized by Daniel and the Société Louise Michel, and involved renowned French intellectuals like Jacques Rancière and Étienne Balibar, as well as foreigners like Slavoj Žižek and many others.

A long list of speakers recalled various moments in Daniel's life, starting with Alain Krivine and finishing with Olivier Besancenot. In between there was Janette Habel, Flavia D'Angeli, Miguel Romero, Carmen Castillo, Philippe Pierre-Charles, François Sabado, Gregoire Chamayou, Daniel Mermet, Alain Badiou, Edwy Plenel, Samy Joshua, Michael Lowy and Annick Coupe. Their words accompanied the silent homage dedicated to Daniel by the thousands in the audience. The poet Serge Pey also recited three poems accompanied by a visual performance, and the well-known singer Emily Loizeau played three beautiful songs. The artist Charb, illustrator of Bensaïd's book “Marx mode d'emploi”, contributed to the event with several vignettes, projected during the speeches, that gave an emotional ceremony a touch of humour, especially during the showing of a short film with images and fragments from Daniel's life.

Many other well known names from around the world who shared Daniel's militant sympathies participated, such as Tariq Ali, Michael Warschawski and Francisco Louçã, as well as comrades from Izquierda Anticapitalista, like Jaime Pastor or Manolo Garí, and of the former leadership of the Spanish LCR like Justa Montero and Chato Galante, and other former militants of the Spanish LCR. Also present were representatives of various revolutionary organisations in other countries, such as Alex Callinicos from the British SWP or Ahmed Shawki from the ISO in the United States. The event was marked by a strong international profile. It was not for nothing that Daniel Bensaïd was a “believing and practicing internationalist” as Fred Borrás reminded us in his presentation.

“It's hard to pay homage to a person who never accepted it,” began Alain Krivine, who recalled the events of May 1968 and the role played by Bensaïd as a student organiser who “remained a revolutionary activist from then until now”.

Janette Habel, a former leader of the LCR and the Fourth International known for her work on Cuba and Che, spoke of Bensaïd's political thought with regard to his ideas on emancipation, recalling a debate on the issue the last time they met at the ATTAC Summer University. At a time of confusion on the left in the 1990s, “Daniel was devoted to the task of redefining without betraying” and now it was time “mourn him through fidelity to his message”.

Flavia D'Angeli, spokesperson for Sinistra Critica, who met Bensaïd, like so many, through one of the Fourth International's revolutionary youth camps, explained that for the construction of Sinistra Critica and before that

Bandiera Rossa during the 1990s, Daniel's thought "was an impressive instrument in dealing with political impressionism" and passing fads. "Daniel never gave up and we will always be grateful to him".

Miguel Romero spoke of the role played by Daniel in the construction of the Spanish LCR under Francoism, recalling the first meeting with him in 1972 in Barcelona. "At the end of this meeting, where we talked about everything, Daniel Bensaïd was already for us Bensa, el Bensa". Daniel, he explained, would also decades later again play an important role in the reconstruction of a revolutionary political project in the Spanish state, becoming also for a new generation of militants "el Bensa".

Film maker Carmen Castillo, exiled under the Chilean dictatorship and author of "Calle Santa Fe", stated that the solidarity of the Ligue and people like Daniel Bensaïd was fundamental. "Without them we would not be here, we would not have been able to leave". It was thanks to Daniel and his comrades, as Michael Löwy said, that we learned "that the dead are not dead" and that we "live in the company of the absent". Emotional words from the writer John Berger, dedicated to the death of Bensaïd, were read.

Philippe Pierre-Charles, leader of the Revolutionary Socialist Group (GRS) in Martinique, recalled that Daniel Bensaïd always had a particular relationship with the French West Indies. "In his speeches and educational schools that he gave for more than 40 years he always shocked us with his profound knowledge of the history, philosophy, and literature of our country" and he recalled Bensaïd's intervention in a massive conference on colonialism in Martinique in 2006.

François Sabado, long-time leader of the LCR and currently the Fourth International, explained the role played by Daniel in the construction of the Fourth International during the 1970s and 1980s, and particularly in countries such as Spain or Brazil, for whom the commitment to the Fourth international IV was a form of "tying the thread of history" and integrating past and present. "Daniel and internationalism were synonymous", he said. Expressing the feelings of all he concluded: "It will be hard to continue without him. He has left us a beautiful heritage. Transmitting it will depend on us."

Gregoire Chamayou from the review "Contre-temps", founded by Bensaïd in 2001, reviewed his political-philosophical thought, through quotes and phrases from Engels, Marx, Gramsci, Peguy, Benjamin, Lenin and Blanqui particularly appreciated by Bensaïd. "We never know from where will come the spark that can catch fire" he noted, citing Lenin.

Daniel Mermet, a well known radio broadcaster who interviewed Bensaïd on several occasions, and who dedicated a special programme to him in the 1990s, recalled his willingness to "resist the irresistible". Mermet introduced the next speaker, the renowned philosopher Alain Badiou who intervened by way of answers to the questions raised by Mermet. Badiou recalled his intellectual relationship with Bensaïd and the public discussions resulting from distinct visions of politics and emancipation, but always from the same side of the barricades. "With his absence" he said, "there is something that has changed in the intellectual, political, militant, revolutionary panorama". He pointed out that, beyond their differences, when he was attacked in the press as anti-Semitic "the first to leap to my defence was Daniel" and despite their different views on continuity and discontinuity in politics, one of Daniel's virtues was precisely "loyalty to his projects".

Edwy Plenel, a former militant of the Ligue and a prestigious journalist, former editor of "Le Monde" and currently involved with the Médiapart Project, gave an emotional recollection of Daniel and his links with the history of the labour movement and the Paris Commune, and his interest in "transmission", Daniel "was not of one generation, he is of eternity."

Elias Sanbar, a prestigious Palestinian essayist and writer, said that "Daniel was rather than anything, a resistant" and practiced "resistance as it should be done, combining action and reflection."

Samy Joshua, a leader of the NPA and President of the Société Louise Michel, explained the objectives of this society, set up by Daniel as a space of confluence and plural intellectual debate, in the vicinity of the NPA but independent of it, and for which "the consistent and open thinking" of Bensaïd is an example and a reference in the "immense task" ahead.

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

Michael Löwy, a respected intellectual and promoter of the eco-socialist international network, active in the LCR and now the NPA, reviewed the political and philosophical thought of Bensaïd, a "Communist heretic", according to the formula used by both in a joint article on Blanqui. Daniel was noted for his "stubborn fidelity to the oppressed and opposition to any dogmatic orthodoxy", his contempt for "homo resignatus", and high quality literary work, "coming from the pen of a real writer." The best way to pay tribute to Daniel was to remember the words of the American trade unionist, Joe Hill, just before being shot: "don't mourn, organize!."

Annick Coupé, a leader of the alternative trade union Solidaires, highlighted the fact that for trade union and associative activists like her, Daniel had a "valuable role in the political debate of the social movements" and cited his commitment to the mobilization intellectual in favour of the strikes of November-December 1995 strikes against the Juppé plan, marking the beginning of the social opposition to neo-liberalism in France.

Olivier Besancenot closed the meeting stating "that we have met here with the intention of perpetuating his adventure." "Daniel", he continued, "helped us to militate, was a transmitter between generations and in many areas" and "the best tribute that we can make is that this transmission continues."

The Internationale was sung by the thousands of participants, and was preceded by tumultuous applause in memory of Daniel, ending an emotional event in which we all began to take on the reality that Daniel is no longer with us.

Never has a militant meeting filled with so many sad people ended up as such a warm gathering.