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Obituary

Jakob Moneta 1914-2012

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He was not a big man, but he was impressive. His ability to speak, to explain difficult subjects in a way that everybody could understand, and his social capabilities attracted me, when I first met him middle of the seventies. And when I afterwards got to know his history, I was even more impressed. Jakob had lived a life, which included a big part of what Jews, Communists, Jewish Communists and especially left Jewish Communists had to endure and survive during the last century. But he had a dream, and he cited Lenin's sentence about dreaming in his memoirs in 1978.

Jakob was born in Blazowa, at the time still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and situated in the region of Eastern Galicia. When the Polish state was founded in 1918, a whole series of pogroms took place. His father, originally from Germany, publicly denounced the leaders of the pogrom and was forced to leave the country. So the family went to Cologne, Germany. Jakob, as a member of the Jewish community, also had to face anti-Semitic assaults there as well. So it was logical that he began his political work in a Zionist-socialist youth organisation. But in 1931 he joined, together with other members of his group, the SJV (Socialist Youth Association), the youth organisation of a left split from the SPD (Social Democratic Party), of which, by the way, also the later chancellor of Germany, Willy Brandt, was a member. During this time Jakob turned to Trotskyism – against the will of his father, who kicked him out of home.

But the victory of the Fascists in 1933 forced the family to emigrate again. While his parents went to Cuba and later on to USA, Jakob decided to live his dream and went to work in a Kibbutz in Palestine. There he worked in producing orange crates. But he was not a Zionist like David Razill, predecessor of Menachem Begin as leader of "Irgun": He fought for a two-nations socialist Palestine.

And so Jakob and some others did not leave the Kibbutz willingly: They were expelled by the Zionist majority in 1938, after beginning a fight for the 8-hour-day. He went to Haifa, where he founded an Arab-Jewish trade union. Shortly afterwards Jakob was imprisoned by the British administration and sentenced to "minimum one year" – at the end it turned out to be more than two years. He writes in his memoirs, that one day a man called Moshe Dayan was entering the prison – he was released soon...

And in prison his life as a journalist began. He was organizing with others a kind of prison-university, learned languages (in the end he spoke ten) and organized a hunger strike. After his release he cooperated with the Arab Left. But after the end of the war he became more and more disillusioned about the politics of the Zionists. He writes in his memoirs: "Here Jews became pogromists."

So in 1948 he went back to Europe, and lived, without a valid passport, a life as a precarious migrant, in France and Belgium.

By the end of 1948 he returned to Germany. That year, he entered the IKD (International Communists of Germany), the German section of the Fourth International, in which he stayed until his death. He, as an autodidact, worked as a journalist at a social democratic newspaper. Finally he was fired, because he repeatedly published articles by a man called Ernest Mandel in the newspaper...

When the FI opted for so-called entrism tactics, he joined the SPD. In 1953, he got a job at the German Embassy in Paris, as an attaché for social affairs, and stayed until 1962. In this time he worked clandestine in the support of the FI for the liberation war in Algeria.

In 1962 his old friends from the former SAP, who in the meantime became members of the SPD, and had leading positions in the Trade Unions, called him to work as chief editor of "Metall", the newspaper of the members of the Metal Workers Union, and at the same time of the magazine for the trade union officials, "Der Gewerkschafter". In his time Gunter Wallraff, the undercover journalist, published his first articles (there) about the working conditions in German factories, and in the seventies, Moneta organized the famous concert with the East German songwriter Wolf Biermann, which caused the expatriation of the latter. Until his retirement in 1978 he ran the newspaper, which grew in this time from 1,8 to 2,2 million copies.

At the same time, still a member of the SPD, he was doing clandestine work for the German section of the Fourth International, first inside the SPD, then, after the exit of the section and the foundation of GIM (Group International Marxists) in 1968 for their newspaper "Was tun". Until his retirement he was writing continuously for it under the pseudonym "Anna Armand", later under his name, and continued to do so after the merger of GIM with a post-Maoist group to the VSP (United Socialist Party) in the newspaper SOZ, in which he had a monthly column until he was more than ninety years old.

And during all these years he was not only engaged in the work in the Trade Unions, but at the same time in political movements, such as against the Vietnam War, Nuclear Power – and Stalinism. As early as 1952, he published a book about the history of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of USSR. After the Biermann concert the East German government issued a denial of entry until the year 2000 against Jakob...

After the fall of the wall he was kicked out of the SPD after 40 years of membership and, like other comrades of German section, in 1991 joined the PDS (Democratic Socialist Party, the former East German Communist Party), Until the age of 80 he a was member of its Executive Committee.

Jakob was dedicated to the workers' movement and to the Fourth International until the end of his life. And his very personal reasons, which are deeply rooted in the experiences of a Jewish Communist, he described in a biographical essay from 1978 as follows:

"Who was not murdered in the Concentration Camps, not killed in the gas chambers, who did not fall in imperialist wars, has no right to give up the struggle for Socialism."