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Tribute to Alain Krivine

“To hold on as he held on, optimism of the will had to prevail”

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I wanted to begin this tribute to Alain with a prelude by Bach played by Rostropovich, because he loved classical music and especially stringed instruments. Having a brother who played the violin very well and coming from a music-loving family explain why classical music was a daily part of his life.

I met Alain for the first time in the summer of 1955. I was going on 13, he had just turned 14. Some Communist friends of my parents, with whom we were going to spend the weekend, had asked them to take their little neighbour by car. When I saw the little neighbour, I was very affected because he was then a very pretty boy.

But the only thing he was interested in was discussing politics with my father. The only concrete memory I have is that it was about the Indochina war and the trafficking of piastres. I don't know if many people here remember what the traffic of piastres was; But Alain, knowing that my father had denounced it in *France Observateur*, wanted to know all the details. A young militant in the Vaillants [a leftist scout movement] and then in the Communist Youth, he was already totally addicted to politics. On the other hand, he showed no interest in me. Which was my first disillusionment.

In 1961, I joined the Anti-Fascist University Front, created to oppose the OAS, and of which Alain was one of the leaders, earning him an attempted attack with plastic explosives. The little Stalinist of 1955 had become a convinced Trotskyist but was still active in the PCF and the UEC. We married the following year, in 1962, me with parental permission. So, it's been 60 years. A long companionship that has ended.

The 1960s were obviously very exhilarating. We were history students at the Sorbonne, totally carefree about our professional future like all those of our generation. We were at the age where the most lasting friendships are forged. We were militants in the Union of Communist Students convinced that by fighting against its then very Stalinist leadership we were going to shake the edifice, We did not shake much because we were expelled at a congress where Roland Leroy gave a speech of great violence against our deviations.

Because beyond the refusal to vote for Mitterrand in 1965, which at the time it should be remembered evoked his inglorious positions on the Algerian war, it was all the criticism of the Soviet Union that the Communist Party could not tolerate. In a deathly silence one of our comrades told him: “Roland, your speech was as beautiful as a Soviet tank in front of Budapest”. I evoke for you the atmosphere of the time. The Communists present here, whom I salute, will not mind me recalling this episode. Time has passed and validated our criticisms and analyses of Stalinism.

Then came the protests against the Vietnam War and of course May '68. I'm not going to dwell on May '68. Everyone knows that Alain was totally involved. I will simply quote a sentence from him which was the compass of his entire militant life: “May '68 taught us that we can break the shackles and allowed us to glimpse the organizational potential of society by those who do the work but have no decision-making power.” He paid for his commitment with one month in the La Santé prison in conditions which, it must be admitted, were rather comfortable. Then after released, it was directly to military service in Verdun and then directly to the presidential election of 1969. His meagre score made me understand that a breakthrough was not imminent. But he was not affected because remember it was the time of “élections piège à cons” [“elections are a trap for fools”]. In the 1974 election, Arlette grilled him politely. When he watched the television performances of his campaigns he said humorously: “Oh there, I really had to scare them”.

Sharing Alain's life for 60 years means that he had some virtues. First, he was incredibly optimistic. I seem to remember that it was Gramsci who said: “we must combine optimism of the will with pessimism of the intellect”. As

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for optimism of the will, Alain did not lack it. He was in all the fights whether successful or lost. If there is one sport he practiced it was walking. He trod the pavement for a thousand national or international causes. I remember one: he liked to recall that he was the only politician present at the first gay pride in the early 1980s. And he made us laugh by telling us, half in jest, what he heard people there say: “it really is him! We wouldn't have believed it!” On the other hand, pessimism of the intellect was not really natural to him. He had a somewhat euphoric vision of the struggles in progress, an ability to quickly forget failures. But given the evolution of the world today, which he considered much harsher than in 1968, I think that to hold on as he held on, optimism of the will had to prevail.

Living with an optimist when you are not always optimistic yourself is a real privilege. He taught me to put into perspective what didn't matter and to approach difficult times with courage. And until the end he kept this optimism despite the succession of illnesses that did not spare him in recent years. He kept telling us, “don't worry, it's going to be okay”.

Another pleasant quality of Alain he was a feminist both in his convictions and in his behaviour. It is also a trademark among all the Krivines, his brothers as well as the males of the second and third generation. Beyond convictions, to what is this attributable? To the beautiful person that was their mother, Esther, most certainly. To the personality of their companions. And for Alain to a feminine environment that suited him very well: two daughters and two granddaughters, girls with strong characters.

Finally in his personal life Alain was a tolerant, benevolent and very kind man. Tolerant first of myself, who, in short, became more Jaurès than Lenin. He never had a problem with that. Agreements and disagreements have had the advantage of enlivening our daily lives. Benevolent towards his elders and many comrades who, out of weariness or divergence, left his organizations. Those who were his friends remained his friends. Was he as cool in his activist life? I hope so. But given the bitterness of the debates of which his organizations had the secret, it must not always have been so easy.

So, any regrets to have? Activism is so time-consuming that it leaves little room for what makes life enjoyable and light. Between meetings you can always fit music and movie ins. But literature, theatre and exhibitions are often the great sacrifices! Did he miss it? Sometimes yes but actually not very often. He led the life he had wanted. That of an activist to the end of his possibilities. Fortunately, there are holidays. On vacation Alain knew how to completely switch off.

In closing, I would like to thank all those who were so much present with us when his health was declining. All those who are here today to pay tribute to him. All those who have flooded me with warm messages since his death with the same words that come up again and again: humanity, empathy, benevolence, simplicity, humour, selflessness.

I will stop there because it would border on the cult of personality which he would not have appreciated. I hope that all those who loved him will remember a man of great integrity.

21 March 2022

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