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Obituary

# François Vercammen, member of the Belgian section of the Fourth International

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**We have heard of the death of our Belgian comrade François Vercammen on Tuesday, June 16, 2015 after a long illness. Aged 69, François was a pillar of the LCR (Belgian section of the Fourth International) but also one of the main leaders of the Fourth International. For years, thanks to his knowledge of several languages, he had regularly monitored the activities of its different sections and in particular of the French LCR.**

A faithful companion of our comrade, Ernest Mandel, a Belgian economist recognized worldwide, François was himself the author of many books and publications and was for a long time involved with training at the Amsterdam School.

He attentively followed the debates in the LCR up to the creation of the NPA and many will remember his ability to listen, his kindness and his simplicity. Very open to all developments and debates, he nonetheless maintained the rigor necessary to revolutionary combat.

He was known for his laughter, his love of life and of activism until a stroke a few years ago which quickly cut him off from the world.

**Alain Krivine**

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## **The death of our comrade François Vercammen**

Our friend and comrade François Vercammen died on Tuesday, June 16, 2015. François had been ill for years and had been cared for in an institution for the last few months. He passed away peacefully, in the presence of his companion, Leen, surrounded by the affection of his loved ones.

François's conscious political life was entirely devoted to the struggle for the emancipation of the exploited and oppressed. Born into a family of Antwerp dockworkers, François was won at a very young age to revolutionary Marxism and to the Fourth International. Through his profound knowledge of the working class, his great historic culture and his strategic vision, he rapidly established himself as a leader of the first level, first in Belgium and then in Europe.

Within the Belgian section, François was noted particularly for his fine analysis of the strength and the weaknesses of the labour movement, particularly from what he called the "oppositional reformism" of the FGTB. Many trade unionists have benefited from his insights, simple without superficiality and pedagogic without paternalism.

Within the Fourth International, François participated, with Pierre Rousset, in the foundation of the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam, within which he perfected his knowledge of the Russian revolution and of the thought of Lenin, of whom he was a great admirer.

During his last active years, François threw all his strength and intelligence into the analysis of the "European despotic proto-state" and the construction of the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EACL). Constantly travelling from one end of the continent to the other, he was involved in actively building links between the Italian PRC, the Scottish SSP,

the Red-Green Alliance of Denmark, the Portuguese Left Bloc, and the French LCR, in particular.

In 2005, François took an important role in the organization of a symposium in tribute to his spiritual father, Ernest Mandel, ten years after the death of the latter. Those who knew him retain the memory of a man who was friendly, helpful, fully dedicated to the cause of the emancipation, contemptuous of honours and those who sought them.

François was a formidable and intransigent polemicist, but someone who, in debates, never left the terrain of the ideas and principles to which he devoted his life. A special tribute will be made on July 3, 2015 in Brussels, in the afternoon (the time is not yet fixed), in the salle La Tentation, rue de Laeken 28. We will return soon on the life of François, on this site.

In the name of the LCR, we express our very sincere condolences to Leen and to François's family. The struggle continues, and "Swa" remains in our hearts.

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**Daniel Tanuro and Thomas Weyts**

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## François Vercammen, a militant generation

François Vercammen was one of our leading cadre coming out of the 1960s youth radicalization. Playing an important role in the renewal of the organization in Belgium, he was actively involved in the Fourth International in the constitution a leadership team composed of activists from the same generation (from various countries and continents) - alongside "old" comrades such as Ernest Mandel, Livio Maitan and Pierre Frank. His main field of activity was Europe.

He drew heavily on the European experience when we together launched the International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE) in Amsterdam in 1982 (he remained a co-director until 1985). At the time, two three-month educational sessions were held each year in the institute. The purpose not just "transmitting" "knowledge," but more thinking collectively - with participants, as well as visiting speakers - abouts the lessons of the history of social and revolutionary struggles. In particular, it was an opportunity for our generation of activists in the FI to take stock after some two decades of non-stop activity. Thus, from one session to another, the lectures were enriched by the discussions with Europeans, North and Latin Americans, Asians or Africans, belonging to a range of quite different organizations, not necessarily members of our International. The "educators" were educating themselves through these plural exchanges [\[1\]](#).

Beyond the West European issues, François took up at the IIRE, his substantive work on the Russian Revolution, the Bolshevik Party and Lenin's thought. We came together in working on this crucial, founding experience; he had specifically in mind its teachings as seen from Europe - and I as seen in Asia.

François took history very seriously and did not think we could afford to make a clean sweep of the past - without memory organizations are disarmed. But the past must help us to think about the present, not to turn us away from it. François was as humanly as he was politically open.

**Pierre Rousset and Sally Rousset**

[1] The IIRE 1982-2007 [The first decade - Living internationalism: 1982-1992](#).