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Obituary

Maurice Rajsfus, the last of the righteous

- Features - In Memoriam - Obituaries and appreciations -

Publication date: Friday 19 June 2020

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Maurice Rajsfus was born in Aubervilliers (Seine St Denis) on 9 April 1928 and died in Antony (Hauts de Seine) on 13 June 2020. His parents were Polish Jews who had arrived in France in the 1920s. [1] He last saw his parents at the age of 14 when they were arrested in the notorious *rafle du Vélodrome d'Hiver*.

Maurice and his sister Jenny were arrested with their parents on the morning of 16 July 1942 by French gendarmes - the start of the Round-up of the Vel' d'Hiv. They only escaped deportation thanks to their parents' lucidity. Since there was a law stipulating that children of French nationality could go out, their parents asked Maurice and his sister to leave the place where they had been assembled, in Vincennes. Their parents were transferred to Auschwitz and disappeared there. Having returned to the small family apartment, the two children survived.

Maurice became a member of the Communist Youth at the Liberation, but was quickly expelled for "Hitlero-Trotskyism". He made the mistake of thinking that strikes were the best weapon for workers, whereas for the CP it was no longer a question of contestation but of the reconstruction of France. It was in the framework of the Youth Hostels that he met Trotskyists. Briefly an activist in the Internationalist Communist Party (PCI - French Section of the Fourth International), he discovered the reality of repression in the colonies. From July 14 to August 14, 1950, he participated in a brigade of volunteers sent by the PCI to Yugoslavia, in support of Tito who had been declared a heretic by the USSR and the Communist parties. Contacted at the start of the Algerian War by his former Trotskyist comrades, against the advice of the Communist Party, he organized a gathering of several thousand people on October 13, 1955 in the Latin Quarter,

Going from one odd job to another, the post-war years were difficult for him on the material level. His marriage in 1954 and the birth of his two children brought him stability. He became a journalist, a profession which he exercised with passion until 1986. He was part of the PSU experience from its creation, and was branch secretary in Vincennes for a while. A member of the National Union of Journalists (SNJ), he participated fully in the events of May 68, which enabled him to see closely the intensity of the repression, of police violence. With Jean-Michel Mension (Alexis Violet in the LCR), they created the Observatory of Public Liberties. He ensured for many years the publication of the bulletin *Que fait la Police?* He was also one of the initiators of the *Ras l'Front* network (set up to counter the National Front) of which he was president for a few years.

In addition to his works on the police (*La police hors la loi. Des milliers de bavures sans ordonnances depuis 1968*, Le Cherche Midi, 1996 and *Je n'aime pas la police de mon pays*, Libertalia, 2012), this anti-Zionist wrote books on Israel and Palestine. Finally, he took up, both as a witness and as a historian, the Vichy period and the Occupation (He wrote a short book, *La rafle du Vel' d'Hiv*, PUF, 2002). What he came across in the archives led him to take an interest in the file of the General Union of Israelites of France (UGIF). In his book *Des Juifs dans la collaboration, l'UGIF 1940-44* (EDI, 1980), he drew up a severe account of the action of these leading Jews confronted with the demands of the occupiers. An exciting and courageous work, according to Pierre Vidal-Naquet, who wrote the preface.

Maurice Rajsfus at 90 in his own words

It is said that revolutionaries never die; it is just that towards the end, they start to have knee pain.

My life as an activist started very early, since my parents had sent us, me and my sister, to a summer camp linked to the Secours rouge on the island of Ré in 1937 and 1938. We then had the feeling of being future great revolutionaries.

In fact, I have been an activist since the Liberation of Paris at the end of August 1944. At the time, I thought I was participating in the revolution by joining the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Communist Youth. But two years later I was violently expelled by them, on the charge of "police provocateur". I was 18 years old. In October 1946, I joined the Fourth International.

After a few years of wandering here and there, I regained a taste for the fight against the Algerian war. I participated in September 1955 in the constitution of the committee of youth movements of Paris against the departure of the contingent to Algeria. The movement was strongly repressed by the police. And on February 8, 1962 I found myself in the demonstration a few hundred yards from the Charonne metro station.

"The *Enragé* of Fontenay-les-Roses"

Having taken my distance for a time from activism, I changed my outlook on life and began to build an essential professional career for myself. I became a journalist. A little distant from the struggle, when May 1968 broke out, I had just turned 40 and, overnight, I became 20 years younger, and I learned not to run away from the police.

In the second half of May 1968, I participated in the creation of the Fontenay-aux-Roses (where I lived then) action committee. It wasn't all plain sailing, and alongside the Trotskyist and Guevarist comrades it was difficult to win against the Maoists of the École normale supérieure of Fontenay.

With this month of May 1968, a life of activism began that has never stopped since.

There was the creation in Fontenay of a small newspaper produced on a duplicator, *L'Enragé de Fontenay-aux-Roses*. There were around twenty issues, until October 1969, when the cohabitation with the Maoists became unbearable.

"What are the police doing ?"

In November 1969, I began to publish a new monthly bulletin, *Action banlieue sud*, which would appear regularly until December 1975. At the same time, the Socialist Studies Group was formed, which was devoted to the history of the workers' movement in the years 1970 and 1971

As the repression of May 1968 had left its mark, I quickly set out to compile documentation on police violence, based on the press. It was a lot of work, but it enabled me to compile more than 10,000 files concerning approximately 5,000 cases of police repression. This work was the origin of the creation of the Observatory of public freedoms in May 1994, after the murder of a young man called Makomé in Grandes-Carrières police station. This led to the publication of more than 200 issues of the newsletter *Que fait la police?* ("What are the police doing?") until 2014.

In May 1990, I participated in the creation of the *Ras l'front* network which, after a difficult start, experienced rapid

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growth, together with activists who had succeeded in disrupting the demonstration by the National Front on the Place de l'Opéra on the First of May 1995. A little later I became president of *Ras l'front* for several years.

Unable to be satisfied with this unbridled activity, at the dawn of my retirement, I began to publish a number of works heavy with meaning, from 1980 on. Out of the 60 or so books published to date, around twenty are devoted to the police, and more generally to repression in all its forms.

I don't think I disappointed those I fought alongside too much. But at the age of 90 my knees are starting to make me suffer and my left hip made of tin prevents me from running as fast as I should, not to save myself when it becomes necessary, but to hunt down the new fascists that threaten our fundamental freedoms.

Maurice Rajsfus

27 juillet 2018

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[1] See Wikipedia [Maurice Rajsfus](#).