



## In Memoriam - Obituaries and appreciations

### An inflexible intervention for the liberation struggle of the Tamil people!

26 July, by **Socialist People's Forum**

The Socialist People's Forum expresses its condolences on the passing of Vickramabahu ('Bahu') Karunaratne, General Secretary of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP).

The Socialist People's Forum considers Bahu's role in the 1970s and 1980s as a historic chapter in the struggle against authoritarianism, and capitalism, and for the renewal of revolutionary socialism in Sri Lanka. His leadership in the struggle within the Lanka Sama Samaja Party against

coalitionism (popular front politics) is a memorable chapter of the 'new left' movement.

Challenged by the repression of the JR Jayawardena regime, let us recall the hope of working people's power in Wickramabahu who led the July 1980 strike.

Bahu will be remembered for his inflexible intervention in the liberation struggle of the Tamil nation. He was consistent in his conviction that the only solution to the national question

of Sri Lanka is to accept the self-determination of the Tamil people.

The Socialist People's Forum has strong disagreements with Bahu's politics in the last period of his political life while respecting his historical political intervention.

Vickramabahu Karunaratne, goodbye to you

Dharmasiri Lankapeli

Secretary

### Last of the Hollywood Blacklistees: Norma Barzman

30 March, by **Paul Buhle**

Her actual screen credits were few, in part because she left Hollywood for Paris with her better-known husband, Ben Barzman, as McCarthyism made further film work impossible. In part, she wrote later, few women had ever been taken seriously as screenwriters until much later. The writing that she did after the couple returned to

Hollywood in the late 1950s never got produced.

Yet Norma played a vital role in the little-understood community of creative screenwriters struggling to find a place for themselves, mostly in Europe during the worst of the Blacklist, but also earlier and later, in

Hollywood itself.

It is impossible to describe let alone analyze the Left role in Hollywood's so-called Golden Era briefly, in part because the deeply contradictory relation of cultural activists with the Communist Party. It connected them with unionization efforts and wartime

antifascist mobilization, but also bound them to an unwieldy and mostly unfriendly bureaucracy. CP leaders and its cultural commissars never appreciated film art, and allowed for considerable autonomy only because Hollywoodites made large financial contributions. Famously a visiting William Z. Foster, hoping to raise money or perhaps play upon guilt in a 1930s visit, wanted to meet Cowboy stars who were his idea of leading film actors.

A handful of leftwing writers were very successful, indeed among the highest paid writers in Hollywood. Sometimes enough of their work survived into genuinely brilliant films, or at least films with brilliant moments.

The majority scraped along, often writing for B pictures including detective dramas, children's films or even Westerns. Every writer could say that the best writing remained unproduced. Norma and Ben Barzman occupied the second tier, but both showed promise, until 1947 came around, with the end in sight. They fled abroad to France, finding there an artistic-minded, leftish community with famous artists and writers eager to engage "the Americans" socially.

Norma co-wrote a screenplay about a young woman urgently seeking an abortion. Ben, who had scripted a great film in 1949 based upon the Italian-American working-class novel *Christ in Concrete*, by Pietro Di Donato, had mixed success in his career afterward. Joseph Losey, Jules Dassin and a few others found great success, while most had to go behind "Fronts" for U.S. television work or await the reopening of opportunities at home.

My own small world, as belated scholar of the Blacklist, included aging survivors like Walter Bernstein, Abraham Polonsky (known familiarly

as the "last Marxist of Hollywood"), Paul Jarrico (who had produced *Salt of the Earth* before departing abroad), sitcom master Frank Tarloff and former Abbott and Costello writer Bobby Lees, among others.

It may be important to say, for the readers of *Against the Current*, that for most of them, faith in the Soviet Union faded early, and that their understanding of how Marxist ideas could be applied to screenwriting never got much beyond the instinctive.

They despised capitalism and the film colony capitalists, they dreamed of a film world guided by working people in every sector of the industry, technicians as much as writers. Some of them, including the Barzmans, grasped at film noir in their bitter disillusionment with the collapse of wartime, antifascist hopes, and with the rightward-moving Democratic Party.

Television series *You Are There* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, scripted under pseudonyms, reached many more millions than almost any of their films, a point worth pondering. The Mary Tyler Moore Show and some of Norman Lear's ventures like *Maude*, not to mention the humane kids' programs like *Lassie* and *Flipper*, owed a lot to their creative efforts.

The writers — rarely allowed to use their own names until near the end of their careers — perhaps touched the consciousness of 1960s-'80s political generations deepest with *Never On Sunday*, *MASH*, *Midnight Cowboy* or *Serpico*, to name a few that survived the studio system and its fragmented successors. Walter Bernstein got *The Front* made only because Woody Allen would star in it.

The "blacklist film," about the history of their persecution, invariably featured someone "innocent" but mistaken for a Red. Perhaps *The*

*Majestic*, starring Jim Carrey, really is the end of the line, appropriately in 2001, fifty years since the Blacklist came slamming down.

But this would be the wrong way of looking at a cultural story of great complexity and value. Some socially critical writers, directors and even (or most likely) stars today get important films made and will continue to do so. "The Left" as a community has never coalesced again in Hollywood or New York, and is unlikely to do, even when political positions are taken at award ceremonies or in acts of real or symbolic solidarity. And yet recent strike action by the "talent guilds" depended upon traditions of solidarity that owed their origins to hard work and sacrifice long ago.

Norma Barzman repeatedly emphasized, in writings and in her memoir, that the community of the Left, wherever she found herself within it, was itself the source of strength and understanding.

They could be wrong about the USSR (as nearly all of them would later admit) but right about capitalism and right about the struggle for creativity and commitment within the commercial cultural of capitalism ongoing. It was, so to speak, their credo.

Nothing less than a deep look at their work that actually achieved a worthy production can bring a sense of their accomplishment, and even that falls short of what, under different circumstances, they might have done. I am happy to have spent a little time with Norma Barzman, more with Abraham Polonsky, Bobby Lees, Walter Bernstein and most of all Ring Lardner, Jr., among others less well known. And to have been, with a handful of colleagues, the historians of their lives and work.

[Against the Current](#)

## Tribute: Ernesto Herrera (1949-2024)

## 28 January, by **Charles-André Udry**

Born on 22 May 1949, Antonio Maria Nuñez Guglielmi was part of the Spanish and Italian emigration that settled in Uruguay, a country that experienced exceptional growth from 1910 until the early 1950s. An activist, he chose as his pseudonym the name of a writer who, among other things, wrote about the civil war that shook the Eastern Republic of Uruguay in 1904-1905, a writer with an interest in social protest and the libertarian movement.

In the second half of the 1950s, Uruguay plunged into a socio-economic crisis. It was in this climate of social tension that Ernesto, as a metalworker, became a shop steward in a factory that made valves for gas cylinders, one of the branches left over from the early policy of import-substitution industrialisation.

Compared to the trade union movement, left-wing political forces were weak and had no significant expression at the political-institutional level, a field occupied by two parties, the Blancos - a national party linked to the large landowners - and the Colorados, a party representing Montevideo's urban bourgeoisie. Ernesto initially joined the ranks of the Communist Party, which since 1955, under the leadership of Rodney Arismendi, had refocused its activities on the trade union movement. The latter underwent a process of regroupment and coordination in the mid-1960s, with the establishment of the Convención Nacional de Trabajadores (CNT), which put forward a programme of immediate demands, nationalisation and land reform.

In 1973, Ernesto joined the Socialist Workers' Party (PST). In front of the factory where he worked, Benas SA, the monthly magazine of this organisation - which claimed to be Trotskyist, opposed to armed struggle and to Stalinism and its offshoots - was distributed by an activist who became one of his closest comrades in battle, Juan Luis Berterretche.

The broad outlines of the context are as follows: from 1967, and in particular from May 1968, militarisation and the state of siege became established; social struggles developed; a very specific urban guerrilla movement, the Tupamaros, had been increasing its activities since 1966; the two traditional parties were joined by the Frente Amplio (FA), a broad grouping of centre-left and left-wing forces. The PST participated, along with other forces from this spectrum, in the creation of the Frente Amplio in 1971. Faced with this challenge, the ruling class relied on the army to re-establish order and declared an "internal war" (from April 1972) against the guerrillas and the working classes, in order to destroy what remained of the historic social gains. This was followed by the coup d'état of June 1973.

The coup, the resistance and its limits have been analysed on several occasions by Ernesto Herrera. The "recovery of memory", 50 years on, reveals the combination of his militant experience and the political and historical culture that underpinned it.

The dictatorship lasted until 1985. From 1973 to 1975, Ernesto played a decisive role in maintaining clandestine organisational structures, before the repression became even more brutal, but failed to turn most of the population into informers. For the members of the PST, clandestine activity continued, albeit on a much reduced scale, with arrests, detentions in barracks and then prisons - one for the men called Libertad, the other for the women in Punta Rieles, where Marita, Ernesto's companion, was elected spokeswoman for the internal resistance - and support for the families of the detainees.

Forced political exile contributed to the internationalisation of socio-political commitment. In 1982, repression hit what remained of the PST's militant core very hard. Along with other members, Ernesto went into exile in Brazil, where he rubbed shoulders with the initial

developments of the Workers' Party (PT) and established close links with activists from Socialist Democracy, a current of the PT. They provided assistance to "undeclared" exiles from the Uruguayan PST. In 1983, Ernesto returned to Uruguay clandestinely to take part in the anti-dictatorial mobilisation and reorganisation of the PST, as well as in the political debates marking the new phase of consolidation of the Frente Amplio (FA). A complex process began: the FA's electoral fortunes began to grow in 1989, although coalition governments between the Parti Colorado and the Parti Blanco remained victorious until 2005; the Tupamaros (National Liberation Movement-MLN) became part of the FA in 1989; and left-wing forces joined forces within the FA under the name of MPP (Popular Participation Movement). The trajectory of the MPP in turn became the focus of policy debates in an international context marked by neo-liberal globalisation, the break-up of the USSR and its satellites, questions about the "Cuban model" and so on. Ernesto was a member of the federal leadership of the MPP - which brought together the PST, the MLN, the MRO-Movimiento Revolucionario Oriental, the PVP-Partido por la Victoria del Pueblo and independent activists. Far from being a sectarian, he was already anticipating the forces that were going to shake up society and, in the process, the forces claiming to be revolutionary socialists, while basing his convictions on a meticulous examination of the accentuation of the multiple forms of exploitation and oppression.

By the turn of the millennium, Ernesto was able to gauge the changes in the FA's development and objectives. In 2005, the FA won government "power". Within it, the MLN component came to the fore, which, for some informed observers, consecrated the formula "from arms to the ballot box".

Ernesto Herrera quoted Carlos Real

de Azúa in his book *Política, poder y partidos en el Uruguay de hoy* (1971) to illustrate what the initial FA represented. Carlos Real de Azúa described the birth of the FA in 1971 as the expression of "a real counter-society" nourished by grassroots assemblies, social mobilisation, political radicalisation and a collective practice of "breaking away" not only from the two-party system of the Blancos-Colorados but also from the socio-economic system in the hands of the landowning classes (financial, industrial and agrarian) and imperialist organisations. In the light of this description, Ernesto stressed that there was no simple transition from "armed struggle" to "the electoral route", but a break with the Frente's historic programme - which was an extension of that of the CNT - leading to "reformism without reform", during the governmental experiments.

In Ernesto Herrera's eyes, understanding these changes and ruptures made historical knowledge and meticulous monitoring of current events even more valuable, requirements understood as a prerequisite for working out a revolutionary socialist "what to do", while "managing" the uncertainty that distanced him from "vulgar optimism".

From 1985 to 2003, Ernesto Herrera took on the task of "coordination" in Latin America in order to provide

information to the authorities of the Fourth International (Unified Secretariat). He did this on the basis of his militant experience and his understanding of the changing political context in this "small" South American country. Added to this was his militant internationalism, linked among other things to political exile, which had sharpened his capacity for comparison, the better to identify what was specific and general in the various social formations.

The year 2003 saw the arrival of the Lula government in Brazil and the participation of members of Socialist Democracy in that government. In the light of what Ernesto had assimilated alongside Brazilian activists and of his experience in Uruguay, he could only express his extreme doubts, in fact his disagreement, with this subordination of DS leaders to the imperatives of Lula's government machine. The hopes raised by the dynamic opened up by the Lula government among members of the leading circle of the Fourth International made it inappropriate, in their view, for Ernesto Herrera to take on responsibility for "coordination". However, the latter was not a decision-making body, but essentially a means of maintaining links and making contacts.

With the support of those who had been able to share some of the accumulated experience and

knowledge that Ernesto Herrera had built up, he was able to continue his militant activity in Uruguay, maintain militant links in South America and exchange ideas with comrades in various European countries. This network created the conditions for the launch of the *Correspondencia de Prensa* newsletter, and later the [website](#) of the same name.

In the same way that, as a "long-standing militant", Ernesto was a resource over the years for the activity of revolutionary socialists in South America, the newsletter and website extended and broadened the availability of this support. There are some tributes that make departed activists into greater figures than they were in their own lifetime. Ernesto Herrera certainly would not have wanted that, which I dare to assume on the basis of my 40 years of militant friendship. I hope I have escaped this sort of pitfall.

The posthumous publication - in French and Spanish - of a work he devoted to the history of the Tupamaros and to the present socio-political life of Uruguay and its inhabitants will help to make a reflective past an instrument for the present.

26 January 2023

Translated by *International Viewpoint* from [A l'Encontre](#).

## Last respect to Comrade Neil Wijethilaka amid the Revolutionary Red Salute of his comrades.

16 December 2023, by **Dharmasiri Lankapeli**

Neil Wijetilakayan, who was seventy-eight years old at the time of his death, also worked as the secretary of the United General Workers Union.

Niel was a well-known trade union leader in Sri Lanka. Having worked on

a casual employee basis for many years, the employees of the Cultural Triangle and the Road Development Authority workers won the struggle for permanent service as semi-public service, with his leadership

In his left politics, he worked together with the Fourth International recent leaders such as Ernest Mandel, Pierre Rousset (ESSF), and Éric Toussaint. Comrade Niel had long-term experience as a political teacher of left-wing revolutionary politics in Sri



Lanka. As Secretary representing the Sri Lanka Section of the Fourth International, the Socialist People's Forum, he was engaged in global left-wing politics in his lifetime.

United Socialist Party Secretary Siritunga Jayasuriya, Srinath Perera, Frontline Socialist Party leaders Kumar Gunaratnam, Senadheera Gunathilaka, Pubudu Jayagoda,

Duminda Nagamuwa, Nuwan Bopage, Lahiru Weerasekera and Socialist People's Forum's Sumanasiri Liyanage, Chamil Jayanetti and other left activists and many trade union leaders paid their last respects to comrade Niel.

The political career of Comrade Neil Wijethilaka was celebrated by Udawela Nanda Thero, Teripaha Samitha Thero of Kalutara People's

Council, Siritunga Jayasuriya, Duminda Nagamuwa, Dharmasiri Lankapeli and Dhanasiri Rathuvadu who gave special eulogies and celebrated the last respect with the participation of large number of colleagues.

16 December 2023

Source: [JANA.LK](http://JANA.LK).

## Marc-Henri Reckinger, from painter-activist to committed painter

1 November 2023, by **Robert Mertzig**

The praise and comments, more or less "cultural" and appreciative, are now flowing. All the flora and fauna of Luxembourg's cultural scene have their say. What is especially remarkable is that virtually no one mentions his political commitment or his revolutionary past, and above all, only his non-political paintings are published!

And yet his main work is political in fact, as a supporter of the Fourth International, Mandel, Bensaïd and Krivine. Moreover, he was very moved when Bensaïd's book *La lente impatience* [1] was published. After Bensaïd's death, he painted a number of related works, including *Salle d'attente* (The Waiting Room), an emblematic work that illustrates the links and historical continuities between revolutionaries, Marxist theoreticians, those involved in revolutions, revolutionary processes and workers' self-organization.



*Illustration: La Salle d'attente, Marc-Henri Reckinger, 2014.*

Towards the end of the 1960s, Marc Reckinger was a member of a team of Luxembourg teachers who, although initially left-wing, became radicalised under the impact of the Vietnamese revolutionary uprising and then May 1968. Most of them chose the Marxist option and, together with young Luxembourg students from Brussels, eventually set up the Luxembourg section of the Fourth International (in 1971), whose membership grew rapidly. For three or four years Marc was a member of the section's leadership and an unbridled activist: under his impetus, the section distributed tens of thousands of leaflets in front of or in the metalworking companies (35,000 workers at the time), almost on a weekly basis. At the same time, he provided a graphic framework for LCR meetings, particularly during the elections and for conferences with Mandel and Krivine. He took part in the International's training schools, as well as a workers' conference in Antwerp. He was also, for a time, treasurer of the organisation. At the same time, he continued his painting.

After these ultra-activist years, he undoubtedly suffered a sort of burn-

out and chose to devote himself to painting, leaving the LCR. He had a Cubist period afterwards, but Marc soon returned to his initial options, namely what might be called "militant realism"! His paintings assert and illustrate solidarity with, for example, the Zapatistas, the Third World, anti-globalisation or ecological movements, criticism of venal sport, opposition to Putin or Trump, the Syrian uprising against Assad, and so on.

While there are few if any references to Surrealism in his paintings, there is a clear affinity with Diego Rivera. Marc was in symbiosis with the joint declaration by Trotsky, Breton and Rivera on the need for "the independence of revolutionary art". Similarly, he agreed with John Berger's analyses, particularly those concerning art under the Stalinist dictatorship.

In short, he never forgot or denied his past as a revolutionary militant or co-founder of the LCR (the Luxembourg section of the Fourth International). In a way, he illustrated and illuminated it throughout his life!

Hasta la victoria siempre, compañero!

Source: *Gauche Anticapitaliste*.

# He was one of ours: Tribute to Túlio Roberto, victim of the Pinochet coup

11 September 2023, by **Bea (Naná) Whitaker**

It was with this optimism that Túlio Roberto Quintiliano arrived in Chile in 1970 with a safe conduct from the Brazilian authorities as a political exile. He was 26 years old.

After 1968, the military government in Brazil hardened and established the most bloodthirsty and repressive regime of the dictatorship. In reaction to this, many left-wing political organizations were radicalizing their forms of action, defending the armed struggle by constituting armed branches within them and an orientation of politico-military struggle.

The Medici government modified the constitution to establish “order” at all levels of society. It created instruments of censorship and repression and founded intelligence organizations linked to the armed forces and the state. Union rights were suspended, military incursions into union headquarters were increasing, demonstrations were prohibited. Censorship of the media and of any cultural expression of protest was becoming widespread. Investigations and persecution of people opposed to the dictatorship were intensifying. Repression cracked down and state violence was at its height (rapes, torture, disappearances, murders).

In 1968, Túlio Roberto was a student at the Engineering School in Rio, he participated intensely in the youth protest movement at the university and became interested in politics, probably following the ideals of his father, Aylton Quintiliano, who had formerly been an activist of the Communist Party of Brazil. He was a journalist and writer, wisely recognized for his resolutely left-wing ideas [2].

Túlio Roberto chose to join the

Brazilian Revolutionary Communist Party (PCBR). He became close to Apolônio de Carvalho, who had fought in the Spanish Civil War, been a resistance fighter in France, formerly a member of the central committee of the PCB and later founder of the PCBR. Túlio participated in demonstrations and political activities at the university, as well as in clandestine party initiatives.

In 1969, the police entered his home in the middle of a family dinner and took him away handcuffed, under the uncomprehending gaze of his mother. His ordeal at the hands of the military began. He was first detained in a prison in the centre of Rio, where he was tortured by electrocution for several days. He was then taken to a prison in Belo Horizonte, where he was also tortured. For four months, he went through nine army, air, navy and federal police prisons. He retained the physical and psychological consequences. The torturers wanted to extract from him the names of militants from the university and his political movement. They did not get anything. The soldiers released him.

Back home, Túlio Roberto began to work professionally on the construction of a continental road between Belém and Brasília. He did not know that his case had not been abandoned by the authorities and that a trial was underway. He was tried in his absence, without any defence, and received a prison sentence. Not wanting to relive the ordeal of incarceration, he decided to request political asylum at the Chilean embassy in Rio de Janeiro.

There he met another exile, Mario Pedrosa, one of the most important modern art critics of the 1940s in Brazil, founder of the Communist League, a member organization of the

International Left Opposition (ILO), led by Trotsky in the 1930s. At the founding Congress of the Fourth International, Mario was elected to the International Executive Committee (IEC).

During the weeks of waiting before their departure for Chile, these two asylum seekers engaged in a series of political discussions, full of humour and directed at the very biased TV channels, which had been censored by the dictatorship. These moments deepened a friendship that would lead to the decision to live together when they arrived in Chile.

His experience in prison had solidified his resolve. Túlio Roberto would repeat incessantly to his wife, a few years later in Chile, that “it was the movement and the commitment of the masses which gave me confidence in my convictions, which enabled me not to denounce anyone, to reveal anything, never to betray our objectives!”. This confidence remained with him. His conception of the class struggle was based on the importance of the movement of the masses, in the struggle for his ideals.

## Resistance in Brazil

The Brazilian left of the 1970s was marked by the Algerian liberation struggle from French imperialism in the 1960s. It was impacted by the appearance of the 26th of July Movement, the guerrilla movement which overthrew the dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959, with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara at its head. The Cuban revolution greatly influenced the history of socialism in Brazil but also in the entire Latin American continent. Régis Debray's

text “Revolution within the revolution, armed struggle and political struggle in Latin America”, written in 1967, also influenced a whole generation of political activists, dreaming of revolution and the overthrow of the dictatorship in Brazil. This context stimulated debates and breaks from the stageist or legalist conceptions of the traditional left parties. One after the other, these parties suffered splits.

The Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), the Communist Party of Brazil (PcdoB – a Marxist-Leninist party), but also the Revolutionary Political Workers’ Organization (POLOP – a Trotskyist organization) experienced divisions which resulted in the formation of new movements and organizations. Most of their leaders abandoned the work of building organizations among the youth and among workers to devote themselves to their organizations and to implementing the armed struggle. They broke away from the struggles of the working class like that of Osasco in the state of Sao Paulo or that of Contagem in Minas Gerais [3]. During all these years, all parties and organizations had to conduct any form of action and activity in conditions of total clandestinity.

The new organizations – the Revolutionary Movement of October 8 (MR8), the National Libertarian Alliance (ALN) and the Popular Revolutionary Vanguard (VPR) organised four kidnappings of ambassadors – from the United States, between 1969 and 1970. [4]. Their declarations justified these actions, with the objective of freeing comrades in prison in exchange for the ambassadors, to force a stop to the tortures... Carlos Marighela, founder of the ALN, defined the guerrilla war as the only possible combat against the dictatorship and as a triggering factor of revolutionary consciousness in Brazil. He was inspired by the theoreticians of “foquismo” that “one should not always expect that all the conditions are met for revolution”, as Che Guevara said in his *Guerrilla Warfare*.

Since joining the PCBR, Túlio Roberto had been convinced by the importance of the mass movement, in which he participated intensely, and opposed with determination the vanguardist

politics of these new organizations. Founded in 1968, the PCBR theorized the articulation between the rural guerrilla and the mass work in the cities to succeed in constituting the Revolutionary People’s Government, whose anti-imperialist and democratic tasks should open the way towards the socialist revolution. Influenced by the road of the armed struggle, without defending the “foquist” theories, the PCBR structured its apparatus in the armed sector (kidnappings, bank robberies...) and the political sector (participation in mass movements in universities, in factories ...). But the difficulties of clandestine intervention in these sectors also led this party to a “vanguardist” drift of underestimating interventions in workplaces, universities and different activities.

The armed actions of militant cadres produced no effect in the evolution of the consciousness of the proletariat, much less the mass involvement of the working class in the actions of resistance to the Brazilian dictatorship. It was precisely this reality that convinced Túlio Roberto that these actions were a false road to the overthrow of the dictatorship in Brazil. This conviction would accompany him to his arrival in Chile.

## Chile, laboratory of the Latin American left

Arriving in Santiago in October 1970, Túlio Roberto was invited to work for the Allende government, with the Agrarian Reform organization. At the same time, he sought to make contact with the countless Brazilians who were also refugees from the Brazilian dictatorship, but especially his companions from the PCBR, who were critical of the militarist and vanguardist methods of Brazilian political organizations. He then suggested that they debate, in order to produce discussion texts intended for the exiled left. But it was above all the series of kidnappings of diplomats in Brazil by the new organizations which would trigger in Túlio and his comrades the desire to structure a group of activists from Brazil with the aim of influencing the debates within

the Brazilian community present in Santiago. The group would be called Ponto de Partida, the “Starting Point”.

Already very open to critical ideas concerning Stalinism thanks to discussions with Pedrosa, Túlio began to immerse himself in Trotskyist literature. A Brazilian refugee comrade, who would become his wife, and who was invited to take part in this group, suggested contacting an organization “not very well known, but very interesting”: the Chilean section of the Fourth International.

Following his arrest in 1969 in Brazil, the sociologist Fábio Munhoz, a critical activist of the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers’ Party (POR-T), a party linked to the Fourth International, arrived in Santiago. He wanted to meet the Brazilians of the Ponto de Partida group. Túlio and Fábio wrote a discussion text intended for the Brazilian left exiled in Chile. The document “About a kidnapping in Brazil” provoked a shock in the Brazilian community in Chile.

This text went against the grain of the ideas and practices of the community of the new generation of activists and had a significant impact. But being very ill, Fábio preferred to return to Brazil, where he died very shortly after his return.

The political reality in Chile emerged as the antithesis of the vanguardist ideas of the defenders of the armed struggle as the only way to overthrow capitalism. This process seemed to be following a dynamic similar to the Bolsheviks’ experience which could culminate in an insurrection, despite the proclamation of a “Chilean road to socialism” by Allende and Popular Unity going through respect for the existing institutions.

Mario Pedrosa used to speak of the process in Chile as “a true laboratory of class struggle in Latin America”. Debates proliferated within the Latin American left present in Chile, between the Brazilian refugees marked by Cuban theories of armed struggle, the Stalinists convinced that the process of change through elections was more than viable, and the centrists who wavered between



one or the other of these conceptions. Indeed, they all observed with profound attention the increasingly radicalized dynamics in the country in which they had become politically active.

The Brazilians met comrades of the Fourth International section, represented by the Peruvian Virginia Vargas, today a well-known feminist, and Jean, her companion.

The Fourth International had just held its Ninth World Congress in 1969. Debates within the sections were developing. The majority resulting from the world congress was under the influence of the vanguardist orientations of Débray and the majority of the so-called Guevarist organizations, including the PRT, Argentinean section of the Fourth international. The Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) of the United States was in the minority but maintained constant contact with organizations in Latin America, as well as with Europeans - particularly the French and Italian sections. The two tendencies competed for the sympathy of the militants of Ponto de Partida, due to the importance that it represented for the Fourth International to build a future section in Brazil.

A new process of discussion began and innumerable meetings were held with the various European leaders, and those from the United States and Latin America: with the Chilean Raul Santander, Marxist intellectual and historian, with the Bolivian Hugo Gonzales Moscoso, historic leader of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (POR), with Livio Maitan and Jean-Pierre Beauvais (both belonging to the majority of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International), with Peter Camejo leader of the SWP, passionate defender of the minority positions, etc.

Peter Camejo, very enthusiastic about the document by Ponto de Partida, critical of the new Brazilian vanguard, published it in *Intercontinental Press*, magazine of the Fourth International, and wrote a commentary article on this text, in *The Militant*, newspaper of his party, the SWP, and used it extensively to combat the vanguardist positions of the majority. [5]

Conversely, the (European) majority of the Fourth International never informed or published any article on the debates between the leaders of the Fourth International and the Brazilian group.

Alongside these debates, Túlio produced various discussion texts aimed at exiles arriving in Chile. He promoted meetings with comrades in deep disagreement with the methods of armed struggle to the detriment of the mass movement and began to take an interest in the process of the Chilean class struggle.

## A determined commitment

As early as 1971, the year the document was published, the Ponto de Partida group quickly found itself in the middle of two blocs emerging from the Ninth Congress of the Fourth International - the battle between the Europeans, influenced by the Cuban revolution and by Latin American guerrillas (the majority), and the Americans (the minority) defenders of the revolutionary struggle rather beginning from mass struggles.

In this intense period, Túlio Roberto read Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and discussed with many intellectuals residing in Chile. He had a long discussion with Francisco Weffort, Brazilian and former teacher of Fabio Munho, about the nature of the USSR. He adhered to the thesis regarding the USSR as a bureaucratized workers' state and not as a socialist state capitalism, as Weffort asserted.

The Punto de Partida (PdP) group was becoming an important centre of discussion, especially with the new wave of Brazilians who had arrived in Chile. It maintained relations with the representatives of the two tendencies of the Fourth International who passed through Santiago, on the situation in Chile, on the positions of Brazilian organizations, on international political events. Both the majority and the minority of the Fourth International wanted to build a section Brazil from the PdP group.

Chile became the centre of interest of the Latin American and international left. Political refugees from different continents were increasing in number and were integrating into the Chilean process of change. Organizations and political parties were divided between those who believed that the "peaceful road to socialism" would lead to a change of society, and those who did not manage to generalize sectoral struggles to the whole of society. Neither side presented a programmatic or transitional proposal for the transformation of the system.

During this period Túlio Roberto became increasingly interested in the workers' struggles of the new structures of dual power: the *cordones industriales*. He was enthusiastic about this experience!

In Chile, class polarization deepened, the process was radicalized with the employers' offensive by means of a paralysis of truck transport (known as the "truckers' strike"), or by the organization of a shortage ("boycott") of foodstuffs and basic necessities. Faced with this, an unprecedented and spectacular response emerged for these young Brazilians from the PdP who had heard of "dual power" only in meetings and in though various readings: the appearance of the *cordones industriales*. They were organized by workers located in factories in different sectors of Santiago, but also in more than a dozen important provinces of the country. Militants of the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left) broke from the orders and "party discipline" because workers' control of the factories became their priority. Requisition of abandoned industries, recovery of account books, organization of production were decided in general assemblies. The "orders" of the parties were irrelevant, the priority was collective decisions.

All power was concentrated in the hands of these workers, who immediately felt the need to structure themselves and expand their movement, not only in the factories, but also in the neighbourhoods and *poblaciones*. Authentic self-organization was built and reinforced



the prospect of new relations of production.

The bourgeoisie then abandoned its “strike” and “boycott” offensive to concentrate on the preparation of a coup d’état. In June 1973, the soldiers of the “Tacna” regiment rose up, but the “Tanquetazo” failed.

Popular Unity did not believe in the determination of the bourgeoisie not to give in to the interests of the workers and the government did not prepare the population and even less the movements for the slightest military attack. Concessions were made to the bourgeoisie on the initial programme relating to social measures, and declarations of confidence in the armed forces issued.

During 1972, the PdP group defended the Trotskyist theories of the need for an international tool – a political party to act for the transformation of society. Influenced by the discussions with Peter Camejo, ardent defender of the positions of the minority of the Fourth International, and by the eminently political interventions of Raul Santander, their militants decided to approach the Fourth International. They then initiated a process of discussions on the priority of the moment: to participate and amplify the revolutionary process in Chile or to prepare the return to Brazil of the refugees to build a new party.

The class struggle in Chile encouraged Túlio Roberto’s growing desire to engage in this process. A debate took place within the group, which ended in a split. One part decided to focus on building a Brazil-oriented organization. Túlio defended another perspective of building a new and miniscule party of the Fourth International, the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR), which decided to close the chapter of entryism within the PS and try to integrate into the mass struggles with the hope of influencing this process.

The PSR and its militants engaged in action within the *cordones industriales*, where they could contribute with the workers to consolidating their structures. The Latin American revolutionaries of the Fourth International living in Chile

then decided to join the PSR, and intervened with the aim of participating in the resistance of the masses.

As a member of the Fourth International, Túlio Roberto chose to give his all to the extremely rich Chilean process, alongside Hugo Blanco (a Peruvian leader of the Fourth International), with the hope of a workers’ response to the attacks and the second coup attempt. [6]

At that point the PSR had no illusions about the intentions of the bourgeoisie which wanted to overthrow Unidad Popular. On 1 September 1973, it published a declaration about the confrontation between the classes [7]. The declaration began with the observation that the national political situation was at a crucial turning point towards a definitive solution of the question of power. It noted the incapacity of UP to respond to the needs of the proletariat. Analysing the attacks of the bourgeoisie, on the state and the intentions of US imperialism and the right the statement concluded “It is these social and political factors that make the solution to the question of power, of spreading the revolutionary process, and of the triumph of that process possible only in the arena of armed struggle.”

On 11 September, Túlio Roberto was going to work as the sounds of car horns filled the streets where Santiago’s luxury shops were located. A bomb exploded on La Moneda, the presidential palace, very close to Túlio’s place of work. He understood what was happening and went back home to find his companion and think about what to do. It was impossible to escape the control of the neighbours, accomplices of the coup, who as soon as he arrived home, threatened him with death if he did not come to the lunch to celebrate the coup.

The next day, a military patrol rang the doorbell of his house. Realizing that they were a target of the military, Túlio took his partner in his arms and announced to her: “I don’t know what they are going to do, but this time, I will not deny my convictions, nor who I am”. The soldiers invaded the house and searched it completely, then took the couple to the Military School. His

companion was released and Túlio was taken to Tacna, where the putschists were, with two Uruguayan Tupamaros and members of the GAP – Group of Friends of the President, Allende’s close guard. Túlio never returned, his body was never found. [8]

Since then, his companion, his relatives, his friends, have not stopped looking for a clue, a trace of him. Reported missing, he was forgotten...

This year 2023, marked by the fiftieth anniversary of the end of Popular Unity, a group of Brazilians are paying tribute to Túlio and the others who disappeared and were murdered, victims of Pinochet’s military dictatorship. A commemorative plaque will be placed in Santiago. So as not to forget. [9]

An astonishing particularity of the trajectory of this revolutionary is that his organization, the PSR, was never cited in the countless analyses, descriptions and criticisms of the European sections of the Fourth International, and even less the information about the death of the one of its militants... Only the declaration of the PSR alerting on the urgency of the armed preparation of the resistance, was published by the former minority, the SWP, the former section of the Fourth International in the United States. [10]

Following the split of PdP, certain members of the group that chose to build a new party in Brazil ended up passing through Argentina, and met of Nahuel Moreno. Many years later these members founded the Unified Socialist Workers Party – the PSTU of Brazil. Some of its militants, fellow travellers of the PdP group, paid tribute to Túlio by interpreting his history as if he would have been one of the founders of the PSTU because he was a founder of PdP.

A bitter taste persists at the mention of this outstanding revolutionary!

The PSR, a political tool bringing together FI exiles in Chile, fully participating in the Chilean process, member of the Fourth International, is not remembered. Nor is the violent repression suffered by its militants...

# Livio Maitan Is a Forgotten Giant of Italian Marxism

10 August 2023, by **Enzo Traverso**

For fifty years, between the 1940s and the 1990s, Maitan was one of the leading figures of the Trotskyist Fourth International, alongside Pierre Frank and Ernest Mandel. As a tireless strategist and organizer, he was very influential in many of the Fourth International's crucial decisions — although he was less colorful and flamboyant than some of its other leaders, and only featured briefly as a character in Redemption (1990), Tariq Ali's satirical novel on the Fourth International.

In his native Italy, Maitan was a public figure of the radical left. A conference at the National Library in Rome recently discussed his legacy, with many prominent representatives of the Italian left taking part, from Fausto Bertinotti to Luciana Castellina.

One hundred years after Maitan's birth and almost twenty years after his death, his heritage deserves retrospective reflection. Seen within this broad horizon, he appears to me very distant from our own time. He belongs to a world that no longer exists, and perhaps for this very reason, he matters for our historical consciousness.

## Professional Revolutionaries

Livio Maitan embodied a noble figure, in many ways heroic and tragic, that deeply marked the history of the twentieth century: the professional revolutionary. It is worth dwelling on the definition of this term. Revolutionaries have not disappeared: there are still some with us today, and they are probably more numerous

than people might think. Yet while the twenty-first century has already experienced revolutions, the figure of the professional revolutionary belongs to the past.

With the exception of some national liberation movements in the Global South, professional revolutionaries now belong to a time when the division of labor, political parties, and the public sphere were all structured differently. Above all, they belong to a time when revolution was a horizon of expectation or, in the language of Ernst Bloch, a concrete, necessary, and possible utopia, one that had penetrated the mental universe of millions of human beings.

Professional revolutionaries were men and women for whom revolution was not just a project to adhere to or fight for, but a way of life — a choice that oriented and shaped their entire existence. This choice implied deep political, cultural, and ideological motivations, which could be questioned, reconsidered, or rectified, but which constituted the starting point for experiencing reality.

We might say that these revolutionaries overcame Max Weber's dichotomy between politics as a vocation and politics as a profession. But we should add that for professional revolutionaries, politics was anything but an opportunity to make a "career." It was a choice that implied rather the total renunciation of any well-paid, respectable, and prestigious career. It was a choice to be part of a kind of countersociety.

Being professional revolutionaries meant accepting that they would live very modestly, often in precarious

material conditions. When the finances of their movements did not make it possible to pay them a meager salary, these men and women could write for newspapers and magazines, translate and edit books, or sometimes teach seminars in universities, as Maitan also did. However, these were not professional choices — they were expedients allowing them to conduct their main activity, which was preparing for revolution.

This choice of life created characters somewhere between bohemians and monks, split between total freedom and the strictest self-discipline, between the rejection of all conventions and a certain asceticism. Max Weber described the Protestant work ethic as a form of "inner-worldly" asceticism. I believe that a similar ethic existed among professional revolutionaries. The rebels, Hannah Arendt wrote in *The Hidden Tradition* (1943), were conscious "pariahs," not because they were miserable (although they had no heritage to defend), but because they consciously assumed their marginality.

## A Way of Life

One of Maitan's great merits was to avoid the dangers of sectarianism and dogmatism to which such marginality inevitably exposed its practitioners. By culture and temperament, he was entirely unlike the charismatic leaders of small sects — a scourge that has dotted the history of revolutionary movements, particularly the Trotskyist one. If anything, his flaw was an excessive modesty that limited his personal ambitions.

This life choice obviously possessed a

solid moral foundation. It was a choice to struggle against oppression and injustice; a belief that the dominated could change the world; a bet on the capacity of human beings for self-emancipation. Because the revolution was a worldwide horizon, it oriented these men and women toward cosmopolitanism.

Maitan embodied this tradition. As a leader of the Fourth International, he devoted much of his life to traveling from one country to another, attending public congresses and clandestine meetings, discussing with leaders of parties, movements, trade unions, groups, and clusters from four continents. His books provide eloquent testimony to this activity.

The combination of these features — the rejection of a career and acceptance of permanent precarity with solid convictions, a strong moral impulse, and extreme mobility — indicate that the life of the professional revolutionary was also made up of sacrifices, which are the other side of nonconformism. Above all, the renunciation of a normal life.

The lives of professional revolutionaries did not, in many cases, escape the gender hierarchies of a patriarchal society. Many of them relied on their female partners who were raising children or had steady jobs.

Maitan never told me about his private life, about which he was very shy. His autobiography, *La strada percorsa* (The Road Taken, 2002), is exclusively political and contains almost no mention of his affections, his companions, or his children, who apparently reproached him for it. This, too, was one of the consequences of choosing revolution as a way of life.

## Peripheral Publications

This existential choice inevitably reverberated in his intellectual ambitions. Maitan left behind a vast body of work, very rich in the variety of topics covered and the originality and depth of his analyses. But such analyses were almost always relegated

to the newspapers and magazines of the Fourth International, or to the publishing houses that sprang up on its periphery.

In Italy, the public knew him essentially as a translator and popularizer of Leon Trotsky. He possessed a classical education and was widely cultured but wrote mostly to intervene in strategic debates and issue political polemics, seeking to orient an organization or to theoretically delve into problems that had political relevance. I do not think he ever tried to write an essay to satisfy a personal or an intimate intellectual desire.

A party man, he never set out to write ambitious theoretical works, such as those of his closest collaborators like Ernest Mandel or Daniel Bensaid. Personally, I regret this voluntary sacrifice on Maitan's part. It was the result of great modesty and humility but also, probably, of a certain political myopia.

The history of Trotskyism in Italy would have been different if it had found a more solid historical location, political definition, and theoretical elaboration. It never had the theoretical brilliance of operaismo ("workerism"), whose foundations were laid first with the journal *Quaderni rossi* (1961–66) and Mario Tronti's *Workers and Capital*, then with the later works of Toni Negri. Maitan was the only one who could have accomplished such a task, but he thought the priority was translating and disseminating Trotsky's works.

In the following decades, he decided to entrust his sharp interventions on the crisis of Marxism, Antonio Gramsci, or the history of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) to small publishers, and they never reached a wider audience. This, I fear, was the result of a choice rather than objective circumstances.

This choice was rooted in a way of life. Maitan was writing for an organization and his readers were activists. That was how professional revolutionaries had always done it, from Rosa Luxemburg to Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, and he followed their path.

Mario Tronti and Toni Negri, on the other hand, were university professors, as were Mandel or Bensaid. The fact that they shared experiences, debates, and choices with figures like Maitan, while participating in the leading bodies of the same movement, did not prevent them from also belonging to another social world that allowed them to be public intellectuals as well as political leaders. Perhaps this is what Italian Trotskyism lacked in the 1960s, at the time of its greatest influence.

## Between History and Politics

Let me now shift the focus from Maitan's life to his work. While history proved him right, politics did not, in the words of Italian feminist Lidia Cirillo. As Reinhart Koselleck has pointed out, it is not the victors who are the best interpreters of history. The most profound contribution to the knowledge of the past comes from the vanquished, whose gaze is not apologetic but rather critical.

Maitan was a champion of just causes that were almost always defeated. He made the right choice in his twenties to participate in the anti-fascist resistance, and then to join the Fourth International, rejecting the blackmail of the Cold War that divided the world into opposing blocs. He was right not to want to choose between US-led imperialism and Stalinism.

There was nothing natural or obvious about the choice to become a Trotskyist in Italy during the late 1940s. To be a heretical, anti-Stalinist communist meant condemning oneself to isolation, and there were few who opted for this path. But it saved the honor of the Left.

Maitan translated Trotsky's book *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) in 1956, the year of the Soviet invasion of Hungary. A few years later, he published for Einaudi a volume on Trotsky's legacy, and went on to translate the texts of the Polish left-wing dissidents Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski.

In Italy, he was among the very few

who condemned Stalinism without falling into anti-communism. Many socialists whom he had known in the postwar period followed the latter path, as did intellectuals such as Nicola Chiaromonte and Ignazio Silone, who ended up aligning themselves with the Congress for Cultural Freedom.

His choice to support anti-colonial revolutions in what was then called the "Third World" was equally correct. In Maitan's case, this support was enthusiastic, generous, and concrete, flowing naturally from the revolutionary cosmopolitanism mentioned above. He was a traveler of world revolution from Chile to Argentina, from Bolivia to Mexico, and from Algeria to Iran.

His writings on these revolutionary movements clearly illustrate this commitment. Out of these experiences came many friendships and sometimes bitter conflicts. To these revolutions, he brought ideas, experiences, and the material support that the Fourth International could offer.

## Entryism Sui Generis

The issue of so-called entryism in communist parties is more complex. This was a strategy for which Maitan was one of the main inspirations, starting in 1952. In his conception, entryism was not a conspiratorial operation aimed at infiltrating the apparatuses or at the subterranean preparation of splits, according to a Machiavellian vision of politics that was completely foreign to him. The strategy he favored, which came to be called "entryism sui generis," was based on the objective observation of the strength of communism.

The Italian case was clear evidence of this. In the 1950s, the PCI gathered more than two million members and possessed impressive social roots as well as an extraordinary aura deriving from the anti-fascist resistance. This force gave dignity and political representation to millions of workers, performing an irreplaceable function in the defense of their social interests and in many cases a pedagogical

function for their education and cultural growth.

It was a party full of contradictions, vertical and authoritarian, with a frightening gap between its leadership and its often barely literate base. The PCI was a Stalinist party that had organic ties to Moscow, but it had helped build a democratic republic in Italy. Being in this party to make a voice of dissent heard was the right choice, motivated by the rejection of sectarianism.

However, postwar Italy was transforming itself at a dizzying pace. Its sociology was changing as the working class was being modified from within, with huge masses moving from the countryside to the cities and from the south to the north. During the same period, the mass university was born, and a new rebellious generation appeared.

Italian Trotskyism had made itself an expression of this profound change. One need only think of the ephemeral but significant experience of a weekly such as *La sinistra* or the creation of a publishing house like Samonà e Savelli, which functioned for twenty years of the Italian equivalent of the French publisher Editions Maspero or the British Verso. Paradoxically, however, Maitan and his comrades had not understood all of its implications.

In his autobiography, Maitan mentions the fatal delay with which his current decided to end their practice of entryism, between late 1968 and early 1969, while tracing this "unconsciously conservative reflex" to purely tactical considerations. In fact, I think he had not grasped the political dimension of the profound transformations underway in Italy. His culture led him to see the labor movement through the exclusive prism of the PCI and the trade unions, but this understanding of reality was becoming obsolete.

## The Long '68

A new working class had arisen that did not want the "emancipation of labor" (according to the old social-democratic view) but practiced the

"rejection of labor" (*rifiuto del lavoro*). Students had appeared who were no longer fighting for the right to study (now largely achieved) but for a radical critique of the "bourgeois university" and market society. A new generation was taking to the streets and wanted to be protagonists and subjects of change.

The PCI, which had always looked with distrust on anything that moved outside its control, could not channel this revolt. *Operaismo*, with its theory of the "mass worker" and "class composition," had a better understanding of what was happening, and this is perhaps one of the reasons that it became the culturally hegemonic current in the radical left during Italy's "long '68."

Of course, many of the criticisms that *Bandiera rossa*, the Italian Trotskyist weekly, directed at New Left groups such as *Lotta Continua* or *Potere Operaio* were to the point. However, when it came to diagnosing the underlying trends of the time, workerism was more farsighted. Maitan had criticized the "theoretical deformations" of this current without detecting its historical premises.

In this sense, politics in '68 had proved him wrong. He thought that the PCI would channel a new wave of student, feminist, and workers' political radicalization. When he understood that this radicalization had taken place outside of the traditional left-wing parties, it was too late. In the early 1960s, Trotskyists led most youth federations of the Communist Party. By 1968, a very large section of their members and leaders had abandoned the party and joined the forces of a nascent radical left.

Italian Trotskyism was never able to establish an effective dialogue with workerism, which formed the intellectual backbone of the New Left in Italy. In 1964, there was a round table discussion between *Bandiera rossa* and *Quaderni rossi*, attended by thinkers such as Vittorio Rieser, Raniero Panzieri, and Renzo Gambino, but it was not followed up. This was a missed opportunity, because this confrontation would have been fruitful for both currents and perhaps might even have resulted in a different



outcome for the efforts of the New Left over the following decade.

During the 1970s, noting that the season of entryism had come to an end, Livio Maitan thought that the role of the Trotskyists was to provide a program for the unification of the far left. But they did so by offering a Leninist party model that was exactly what the New Left, pragmatically and confusingly, was trying to overcome. Politics proved him wrong once again.

## Guerilla Days

There is a striking contrast between the “unconsciously conservative reflex” that prevented him from grasping the transformations taking place in Italy and the headlong rush — I do not know how else to define it — that drove him, in the same period, to theorize the strategic choice of guerrilla warfare in Latin America. Maitan was one of the main inspirers of this strategy, responsible for drafting the resolutions of the Fourth International’s Ninth Congress in 1969, which were substantially reaffirmed by the next congress in 1974.

In Italy, he criticized the terrorism of the Red Brigades, which paralyzed the mass movements and pushed the government towards a repressive “state of exception.” In Argentina, however, a country where the Cuban experience could not be repeated, he supported the guerrilla warfare of the People’s Revolutionary Army (ERP), which was the military offshoot of the Fourth International’s Argentinian section. The Argentinian government even asked Maitan to mediate the liberation of a FIAT executive who had been kidnapped by an ERP commando.

The guerrilla turn had catastrophic results and a very high cost in human lives. Maitan knew many of those killed and paid tribute to them in his autobiography, but he never seriously discussed the outcome of this strategy. In his history of the Fourth International, he limits himself to a sober narrative, sometimes marked by an apologetic flavor, that does not get to the bottom of things. In his preface to the book, Daniel Bensaïd leniently calls it “incomplete and partial.”

Maitan shared the illusion that guerrilla warfare would be the path of revolution for the entire continent with a generation of Latin American revolutionaries. He did not merely share it from the outside — he was one of those responsible for it, as a theorist and as a strategist.

He was far more lucid when it came to the task of interpreting China’s Cultural Revolution. He saw this period of turbulence not as a libertarian explosion at all but rather as a regime crisis marked by the violent clash between two fractions of the Communist bureaucracy — a conflict that Mao managed to overcome by mobilizing the party’s base. His analyses were sharp, and the book he devoted to the Cultural Revolution remains one of his most important works, although his warnings against the influence of Maoism had a limited impact on the radical left.

## The Road of Resistance

Even at the end of his life, history proved Maitan right and politics wrong when he took part in the experience of Rifondazione Comunista

(Communist Refoundation) with generosity and enthusiasm. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, he did not resign himself to the triumph of capitalism in its most ostentatiously obscene version, that of neoliberalism, but immediately embarked, with stoic tenacity, on the road of resistance.

He had not shared the illusion of Ernest Mandel, who had deluded himself for a moment that Germany had once again become the core of world revolution at the end of the 1980s, as the link between an anti-capitalist revolution in the West and an antibureaucratic one in the world of “actually existing socialism.” I remember a conversation in 1991 in which he told me that we had gone back almost two centuries and would have to start from scratch, as it was in the origins of the labor movement. However, the prospect did not discourage him.

Politics proved him wrong, not because it was wrong to participate in the construction of Rifondazione, but rather because he did not understand that this party was responding to the advent of a new century and a historical defeat with the tools, structures, and ideas of the past. There was an attempt to forge a synthesis between the alter-globo movements of the early 2000s and the new party, but it failed.

Livio Maitan embodied revolution as it was conceived and lived in the twentieth century, a heroic and tragic era that is no longer with us. His legacy deserves to be remembered and meditated upon critically, but the radical left of our own century will follow other paths.

Source: [Jacobin](#).

# A revolutionary and internationalist activist, both in thought and in action

10 August 2023, by **Éric Toussaint**

Between 1971, when I was elected to the leadership of the Belgian section of the Fourth International, and at his death in 1995, I was in contact with [Ernest Mandel](#) (1923-1995). Contacts intensified from 1980 when I was invited to take part in the leadership of the Fourth International, known as the United Secretariat (USec), which met several times a year for 3 to 4 days, and the International Executive Committee (IEC), which met annually for 5 to 6 days. The collaboration intensified from 1988 when I became a member of the Bureau [\[11\]](#), a smaller body which prepared the meetings of the United Secretariat and met at least twice a month in Paris. I kept a close eye on contacts with social movements and revolutionaries in Central America, particularly in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and more widely in the region stretching from Mexico to Colombia. In the last years of Ernest Mandel's life, meetings became more frequent and we grew closer, particularly during the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the end of the Soviet Union in 1991, the 13th World Congress of the Fourth International in early 1991 and the preparation of the 14th World Congress in 1995, which took place a month before Ernest Mandel's death. In the meantime, we had carried out a mission to Nicaragua together in 1992.

I first met Ernest Mandel (1923-1995) in 1970 when I was 16. Shortly before I had decided to join the Fourth International (FI), after I had witnessed the help given by Belgian Trotskyists - the Jeune garde socialiste (Young Socialist Guard) and the Parti Wallon des Travailleurs (the Walloon Workers' Party) - to strikes in Belgian coal mines, first in the province of Limburg (in the Flemish-speaking part of the country) then in the Liège area (in the French-speaking part). Before joining the FI, I was active in high-school struggles, solidarity movements with workers' strikes, protests against the Vietnam war, solidarity with the struggle of Afro-descendants for civic rights in the US and also in support of the Cuban revolution... Ernest Mandel was one of the leaders of the Belgian section of the FI (Fourth International), and of the FI at the international level. I did not know this

when I decided to join. Considering the contribution of FI activists in 1968, its leading body had to be in Paris. It was pure intuition. I decided to hitchhike to Paris with a friend of my age in June 1970 to meet the FI. We spent the first night under the Pont Neuf. Then we endeavoured to meet the Communist League. We rang the bell at 95 rue Faubourg Saint Martin. The man who came to open the door was [Pierre Frank](#), who had been Trotsky's secretary, notably when the latter was in exile on the island of Prinkipo in Turkey in 1929; he welcomed us with great enthusiasm. Talking with him was quite enthralling. No doubt the fact that two young teenagers were coming forward to join the FI made him very happy. We did not know that Ernest Mandel was one of the key leaders and that if we wanted to meet the FI we could go and see him in Brussels.

Subsequently, I was able to witness first-hand that the leadership of the FI was collegial. Ernest Mandel never claimed to be its leader, unlike other organizations. I never saw him try to assert any kind of personal leadership. He never tried to take advantage of any priority or privilege. His influence was the result of his actions and his contribution to the analysis. Having been present with him at more than a hundred meetings between 1970 and 1995, I can say this without any doubt.

I saw Ernest Mandel for the first time in November 1970. He was one of the speakers at a major conference for Red Europe. The conference was convened by the organizations of the FI, which were at the time said to be "linked to the United Secretariat of the FI" because there are several branches of the FI or several international organizations claiming continuity with the Fourth International founded in 1938 with Leon Trotsky's participation. The FI, which I joined and Ernest Mandel led, was regarded as the "United Secretariat of the Fourth International," i.e. the result of the reunification of two major components of the FI: the majority of FI militants in Europe (led by the trio Ernest Mandel, Pierre Frank, and [Livio Maitan](#)) and the section in the United States, the Socialist Workers Party

(SWP), after they merged in 1963. [\[12\]](#) It was 1970, and the United Secretariat had convened a major two-day conference for Red Europe in Brussels. It was attended by over 3,000 young people from all over Europe, including France. Ernest Mandel, along with other speakers such as [Alain Krivine](#), [Tariq Ali](#), a Pakistani militant living in Great Britain, and Livio Maitan from Italy, gave very combative speeches, and, for someone like me who was 16, that gave me a lot of conviction and, at the same time, invigorated me.

I also got to know Ernest Mandel through his writings. As soon as I joined the FI in the summer of 1970 I began reading Mandel's work. I had previously read a number of his essays in the left-wing weekly *La Gauche*, which he had helped to found in 1956. What convinced me to join the FI was the high level of analysis as well as practice, for example the involvement of Belgian Trotskyists in the miners' strike and in the struggle against US intervention in Vietnam. I was convinced by the analysis developed in a text by Ernest Mandel entitled "The New Rise of World Revolution". The 9th World Congress of the Fourth International, convened in April 1969 in Italy, adopted this document. The text emphasized the dialectics of the world revolution's three components. It took into account what happened in 1968, specifically what happened in France, which had repercussions throughout Europe, but also in Czechoslovakia with the Prague Spring of 1968 and the Tet offensive on the night of 30-31 January 1968, when Vietnamese revolutionaries succeeded in provisionally taking Saigon, the capital of the South (foreshadowing the United States' total defeat in 1975). Mandel's text analysed the level of struggle and the balance of power in three sectors of the world revolution (the most industrialized capitalist countries, the Eastern Bloc countries and the Third World countries) and demonstrated how these three sectors were interconnected. May '68, 1968 and the events of 1969-1970 were obvious demonstrations of what was in the FI's foundational text and the type of intervention the FI desired.

The next important influence for me

was reading *Marxist Economic Theory*. I devoured the paperback edition at the end of 1970, during the school Christmas holidays. Shortly afterwards I avidly read another book by Ernest Mandel: *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx*, published by Monthly Review Press in 1971. This may seem early, but I had read the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels when I was 13, in 1967, and from that year on I began to read various books on revolutions, particularly the Chinese revolution, beginning with *Red Star over China* (published by the Left Book Club in 1937 and borrowed from my village library) in 1967 and *Red China Today: The Other Side of the River* by Edgar Snow in 1968. At the same time, I was reading K.S. Karol's 1966 book *China: the Other Communism*. In June-July 1971, after joining the Fourth International, I studied Leon Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*. This book left an indelible impression on me and convinced me of the author's extraordinary ability to analyse revolutionary processes.

In 1971, I became deeply involved in the new Belgian section of the FI. In June 1970, I had joined the Jeune garde socialiste or JGS (Young Socialist Guard), a youth organization run by FI members that had split from the Belgian Socialist Party at the end of 1964/beginning of 1965 when its leadership endorsed the repressive strengthening of the Belgian State. The JGS regarded itself as a revolutionary youth organization from 1968 to 1969. It had the status of a Fourth International sympathizing group. During youth revolts that began in 1968, the organization grew significantly, recruiting 150 to 200 young people in several Belgian towns. These were activists who were active in their communities, usually at college or, like myself, high school pupils, but also in working-class neighbourhoods. This movement was merging with the elder generation organized in the Confédération socialiste des Travailleurs (Socialist Confederation of Workers) in 1970. Ernest Mandel, of course, belonged to an earlier generation. He was 47 years old, having been born in 1923. Mandel wasn't old but to young people like me, who were 17, he was an elder and a representative of the older

generation. This was a generation that had fought hard during the Nazi occupation of Belgium from 1940 to 1945 and eventually got involved in a left-wing movement inside the Belgian Socialist Party and its youth organization. As a result, the JGS began a process of merging with the older members' organization, which had a substantial working-class implantation in workplaces, particularly in the steel industry in my hometown of Liège. At the end of 1970, I attended the last JGS conference in Ghent, which authorized the merger. The merger congress was held in Liège in May 1971, which was an important base for what was to become the new Belgian section of the FI. The Ligue révolutionnaire des travailleurs or LRT (Revolutionary Workers' League) arose from the merger of the JGS and the Confédération socialiste des travailleurs, which brought together three organizations: the Walloon Workers' Party in Wallonia, the Union de la Gauche Socialiste (Union of the Socialist Left) in Brussels, and the Revolutionaire Socialisten (Revolutionary Socialists) in Flanders, along with their newspaper *De Socialistische Stem* (later *Rood*). The merger congress was held in May 1971. Ernest Mandel was an active participant. International delegates included Alain Krivine of the Ligue Communiste (Communist League), the French branch of the Fourth International, and Livio Maitan, a member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International and its Italian section, Revolutionary Communist Groups. We were an organization of around 350 (you could even say there were nearly 500, all told), with a strong presence among industrial workers and a good presence in Flemish, Brussels and French-speaking universities, as well as in secondary schools. I was elected to the Central Committee, of which I was the youngest member. I wasn't yet 17 at the time. I believe there were about 30 members in all. There were industrial workers who had first joined following the winter strike of 1960-1961. There were comrades who had joined the FI like Ernest Mandel before the Second World War and who had taken part in the Resistance: Emile Van Ceulen (1916-1987) a

former leather worker who had joined the Trotskyist organization in 1933 (delegate in 1951 to the 3rd World Congress of the Fourth International, National Vice-President of the JGS after outvoting the pro-Atlanticist current at the 1954 Congress, official guest in China at the invitation of the Chinese Communist Party), René Gros Lambert, employee (co-founder of L'Action socialiste (Socialist Action) in 1935 with Paul-Henri Spaak, co-founder of L'Action socialiste révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Socialist Action) in 1936 with Walter Dauge and Léon Lesoil, arrested in 1940 and deported to the Vernet camp in France, delegate to the 2nd World Congress of the Fourth International in 1948, *Pierre Legrève* (1916-2004), a member of the Trotskyist organization since 1933, a teacher who had been elected deputy for the Union de la Gauche Socialiste (Union of the Socialist Left) from 1965 to 1968, very active in support of the Algerian revolution and in solidarity with political prisoners in Morocco. [13] There were industrial workers who played a key role in the steel industry in Liège and in the glass industry in Charleroi and Mons. There were also renowned intellectuals. Alongside Ernest Mandel, there was, for example, the lawyer *Nathan Weinstock*, who in 1969 published a remarkable and courageous book entitled *Zionism: False Messiah*. And the Central Committee, which met two or three weeks after that congress, elected me to the Political Bureau. I mention this because it was in the Political Bureau that I first came into direct contact with Ernest Mandel and his companion, Gisela Scholz (1935-1982), a German comrade who played an important role in the Fourth International. Mandel was 48 years old in 1971; his companion was twelve years younger and a member of the German revolutionary left, a friend of *Rudi Dutschke* (1940-1979) [14], known as Red Rudi.

In this PB there were several young activists, compared to Mandel's generation. Among the leading figures of this younger generation were *François Vercammen*, *Eric Corijn*, Denis Horman and Jan Vankerhoven. There were several women in their forties: the lawyer from Liège, Mathé Lambert, the journalist from Brussels,



Doudou Neyens, and more. There was also the urologist Jacques Leemans. François Vercammen (1944-2015) and Eric Corijn (1947-) were around ten years my senior, and when you're 17 and up against someone who's 27, they're "old". Gisela, who was 36, was also "old" to me. Thus we had a Political Bureau and a Central Committee with three or four distinct political generations, and it was there that I met Ernest Mandel. Every Saturday, the Political Bureau met in Brussels. I admired not only his historical and political knowledge and his theoretical contribution with the book *Marxist Economic Theory*, also how he behaved as a member of the leading body of a rapidly evolving organization, confronted with the radicalization of whole sections of the population in the industrial working class, the public sector, and among young people, and with radical methods of action.

After May 68, the FI organizations knew how to defend themselves against police repression and hence could prepare for it. We had honed our self-defence skills. We were also willing to participate in activities against very visible emblems of imperialism at times, for example the United States and its abominable role in Vietnam. In 1970 Vietnam was under American bombs, napalm was widely used. We also took action against the symbols of Franco's dictatorship, the symbols of the Greek colonels' junta. I'm talking about 1970, 1971, so Franco's Spain was very present and there was a Spanish community, including a large number of Republicans or children of Republicans who had left Spain between 1936 and 1939, victims of Franco's regime. There was also a Greek community, particularly among the coal miners, who were opposed to the regime of the Greek colonels. At the end of the 1960s, in Argentina, a major guerrilla organization had joined the Fourth International: the [Revolutionary Workers' Party - People's Revolutionary Army \(PRT-ERP\)](#), initially known as the PRT Combatiente (Fighting PRT). It was a very strong organization that claimed to be a member of the Fourth International and to support Guevara and Castro, the Vietnamese revolutionaries and the Chinese

revolution. The main leader of the PRT-ERP was [Mario Roberto Santucho](#) (1936-1976). He had been present in Paris in May 1968, when he became involved with the Revolutionary Communist Youth (JCR), which later became the Communist League. In the last quarter of 1972, Mario Roberto Santucho had a long meeting with Ernest Mandel (at Mandel's home in Brussels), [Daniel Bensaïd](#) and [Hubert Krivine](#). [15] Santucho, who had escaped from Rawson prison in Patagonia four months earlier, was about to return to Argentina to resume command of the armed struggle. [16] During this meeting, the participants noted that there were major differences of opinion on how to wage the armed struggle and in October 1973, the PRT-ERP announced its separation from the Fourth International.

As an example of the kind of action I took part in, in April 1970, there was a large demonstration in Brussels to protest against the Vietnam War, NATO and nuclear weapons. I believe there were between 6,000 and 7,000 demonstrators, and the JGS, the Trotskyist youth organization, had decided to persuade some of the demonstrators to go beyond the official route of the demonstration, to invade the North railway station in Brussels and get as close to the NATO building as possible by walking on the railway tracks, in order to condemn its action. I wasn't yet 16 in April 1970, but I was already involved in JGS activities, notably after the organization's engagement in the coal miners' strike. In the Liège region, I lived in a coal-mining community. This breakaway group involved many hundred people, possibly even 1,000. We didn't make it all the way to the NATO building, but we were near, and as we exited the railway tracks, we were heavily set upon by repressive forces. I was violently clubbed by the gendarmerie while supporting another young man who had been hit on the forehead and was losing a lot of blood. I was then detained and taken to a police station. Finally, after being arrested and questioned for hours for taking part in an unauthorized demonstration, I was not charged since I was under the age of 16 at the time. It was not possible to prosecute a teenager under the age of 16 for this

type of "offence" at the time. I evaded punishment despite the fact that the gendarmes falsely accused me of hitting and injuring one of their colleagues. It taught me how to deal with the police when I was questioned, and it taught me to take a straightforward approach: sign a statement indicating I had nothing to declare. This is critical when attempting to avoid prosecution. I mention this experience because, while reading Ernest Mandel's biography [17], I discovered that Gisela Scholz, who was 35 years old in April 1970, was one of the organizers of this runoff and the demonstration against the war in Vietnam, and that she was very pleased with our ability to organize such a difficult action, even though we didn't make it as far as the NATO office. Gisela Scholtz wrote to one of her colleagues at the time, reflecting on a similar action that had taken place a year before in Brussels:

The horses, the tanks, everything went into action at that point. We fought as hard as we could and are proud that only a few of us were hurt. At most, 40 people were slightly injured, with one badly injured (...) Two gendarmes shoved me over a car, but I was able to slow my descent.

[18]

An important story concerning my friendship with Ernest Mandel and the issues of repression and security. In September or October 1973, I was summoned to Brussels to the home of an old Fourth International activist to address concerns about the security of the Belgian section. The meeting was attended by Ernest Mandel and Hubert Krivine. What was the reason? Mandel and Krivine inquired whether I was putting the organization at risk by consuming and selling narcotics. When I told them I wasn't, things proceeded extremely easily, with no hint of annoyance or tension.

How did Mandel and Krivine manage to summon me to a meeting in a secret location when they were preoccupied



with critical issues like the leadership of the PRT-ERP in Argentina, the [June 1973 banning of the Ligue communiste \(Communist League\) in France](#), the expansion of the Fourth International and more? Here's how I explain it: I had been on the radar of the Belgian authorities from 1972. This was directly related to my role in the LRT's leadership. In February 1972, at the academic hall of the University of Liège, I presided over an LRT conference in which we gave the floor to an IRA (Irish Republican Army) representative, despite the decision of the Socialist Minister of Justice and Government, Alfons Vranckx, to prevent us from doing so. The LRT organized five meetings in the five major university towns, and each time the police were unable to apprehend the Irish comrade, who returned the next day in another town. There were over 500 persons in Liège. Despite a tremendous intervention by the police, who felt humiliated by a group of young people and were quite upset with us, especially myself, we managed to prevent them from arresting the Irish comrade. I was summoned to the Judicial Police in Liège in September 1972, just a few weeks after I had turned 18. The prosecutor who met with me threatened to charge me with raping a minor. It was an easy claim: I was dating a girl a few months my junior, and we were having sex. I could "automatically" be considered guilty of raping a minor as soon as I turned 18 because a juvenile could not consent. When I objected, the officer told me that the public prosecutor's office had asked him to summon me and open a rape case against me because I was a member of the LRT's political bureau and the [International Red Aid](#) management in Belgium, both of which were considered to be organizations that endangered state security. The officer stated that the rape charge would be withdrawn if I cooperated in supplying confidential information about these two organizations. When I declined to become an informant, he became enraged, threatened me, and claimed he would scratch me (sic!). The next day, the police showed up at my brother's house, then at my parents' house, and finally at the home of a journalist friend to scare us. I wrote

about it in the paper *La Gauche* on 22 September 1972, on page 3. I filed a complaint for violation of privacy and was never summoned again by the Judicial Police. My lawyers made the mistake of not seeking monetary compensation, which allowed the public prosecutor's office to disregard my complaint. I became a leader and speaker for a very powerful high school movement towards the end of 1972-beginning of 1973. According to the police, 160,000 secondary school students went on strike and demonstrated across the country in protest against a plan to require them to do military service from the age of 18. A few months after Belgium, the same type of action sparked a massive protest movement in France (known as the anti-Debré law movement). The government and its National Defense Minister accused the LRT of corrupting high school pupils. Given my involvement in the movement alongside other LRT members, the police's motivation to give me trouble was heightened. In the spring of 1973, I was informed by an older friend who had nothing to do with the LRT that the authorities were attempting to get me arrested for selling drugs. This friend informed me that he worked as a police informant. He informed me that the police were attempting to persuade him to testify against me. He went on to say that during arrests, police presented my photo to young individuals caught using drugs and temporarily detained in order for them to accuse me of being a drug dealer. A member of the LRT happened to be a social worker who attended interrogations at the prison. When he saw my picture among those of drug dealers, he was certain that I was harming the organization and, possibly, that I was a dealer myself. He forwarded the information to the organization without informing me. This was what led to my having to report to Ernest Mandel and Hubert Krivine. I must say that Ernest and Hubert treated me very decently, considering the baseless accusations that were levelled against me. Later, the police, specifically the Brigade de Sécurité et de Recherche or BSR (Security and Research Brigade), made another attempt to turn me into an informant, offering me sensitive information about neo-Nazi groups in

my region in exchange for information on the LRT and the Fourth International. They eventually gave up, but I remained in their sights. It would take too long to summarize the subsequent events.

Remember that the Socialist Minister of Justice, Alphons Vrankx, bore a grudge against the Trotskyists who were expelled from the Belgian Socialist Party in 1965, and that, during trips to the United States to strengthen security cooperation, he was convinced by the Nixon administration that there was a link to be made between extreme left-wing organizations and drug trafficking.

## The book *Marxist Economic Theory*

It is important to understand that *Marxist Economic Theory* provides an alternative to the treatises of Marxist economics that predominated among "Marxist" or "Communist" thinkers of the day. These were the essays and text-books on Political Economics that came from the Soviet Union or were produced in Beijing: they were dogmatic and poorly thought through, in theory and method. Marxist Economic Theory, which originally came out in French in 1962-1963, followed a genetic approach, working through human history from the earliest known stages of humanity, trying to see how human relations evolved and how different societies constructed their economies in different parts of the world. It is clear to critical Marxists that there are not 5 or 6 stages through which societies have passed, from primitive communism to societies practising slavery, through feudalism to small-scale commercial production, leading to capitalism and finally socialism, even communism. This idea of stages that all societies pass through was foreign to Marx's thought, perpetuated by Mandel. This is clear from Marx's works from 1850-1860, in the [Grundrisse](#) and other writings, particularly his [correspondence with Vera Zasulich](#) in 1881. Ernest Mandel's work scours meticulously the way that Marxism was practised until his time. Obviously, he was not alone but there were not many who adopted

the same approach and because of this he had a powerful impact on a whole generation. That was the generation before mine, in the years 1963-1964 until 1968. I myself belong to the '68 generation, and we were fortunate enough to experience the huge mobilizations that brought revolution back onto the agenda. Our generation, like others before us, immersed ourselves in Marxism to try to understand the society we lived in, destroy capitalism and build a society free of all forms of oppression. To destroy capitalism, you needed to know exactly how it functioned; and to this end, Ernest Mandel was a powerful aid to many activists. His work, *Marxist Economic Theory*, contained in its fourth volume an analysis of societies in transition towards socialism. He tried to understand and explain the reality of "real socialism" and of societies like those of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, how a society in transition to socialism had degenerated into a bureaucratic dictatorship, though without any restoration of capitalism, despite all. In the third volume, Mandel succeeded in explaining what capitalist society was like in the years 1950-1960. This, then, was the society inherited from the economic boom that came in the aftermath of the Second World War, referred to in French as "les Trente Glorieuses" (the thirty glorious years). Mandel describes the characteristics and contradictions of post-war capitalist society to reveal that crises have always been a constant of capitalist society which needs to put capitalism behind it and adopt a revolutionary solution. For more information on Mandel's book *Marxist Economic Theory* I recommend Chapter 5 of Jan Willem Stutje's biography, *Ernest Mandel: a Rebel's Dream Deferred*.

When I first met Ernest Mandel in 1971, he was a leading member of the Belgian Revolutionary Workers' League (Ligue Révolutionnaire des Travailleurs, referred to here by its French initials LRT). He was teaching at the Free University of Berlin where he travelled once a week to give lectures to 1000 students. [19] He had just finished his doctoral thesis that he wrote and defended in German. I well remember his enthusiasm when he

announced this to us at an Executive Committee meeting of the LRT in summer 1971. The thesis gave rise to a book published in English under the title *Late Capitalism* in 1975. (The German edition, entitled *Spätkapitalismus*, came out in 1972). Ernest Mandel was at the zenith of his intellectual powers. He had many contacts and worked tirelessly, as was plain to see. He was also professor of Politics at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (the Flemish-speaking section of the Free University of Brussels). He worked many hours each day reading, writing and carrying out his militant activities.

## Ernest Mandel's influence over the trade-unions

His influence was felt throughout the realms of trade-unionism, the working class and student youth. Among the working class, especially in Belgium, he was well known since the 1950s as one of [André Renard's](#) close collaborators. Renard was the main Belgian trade-union leader in the radical wing of trade-unionism where Socialist, Communist and Trotskyist activists were to be found. This was the Fédération générale du travail de Belgique or FGTB (General Labour Federation of Belgium) which had over a million members. Two conferences, in 1954 and in 1956, on the theme of Holdings and Economic Democracy introduced the idea of anticapitalist structural reform. [20] Mandel was one of the instigators. He wrote a great many documents for André Renard and was invited to give an enormous number of talks in factories, trade union sections, and to take part in trade union conferences. He had the gift of making apparently complicated issues simple and easy to understand. He was also good at showing his audience that they had to act to change the status quo; so he would often take examples such as how a union delegation could fight within a transnational corporation, what contacts could be made with workers in other sites of a factory, how to communicate, how to try to unite in carrying out actions. Self-governance and worker control were

central elements in this fight. [21] For Ernest Mandel it was not merely a matter of explaining how Capitalism functions, but also of showing, through concrete examples and concrete struggles, how workers could become capable of controlling what the bosses did, especially by demanding to see the accounts, overruling the number of working hours, imposing a reduction of working hours; and when having recourse to strike action, organizing the strike in such a way as to render it the most efficient to win concessions from the bosses as soon as possible. A strike can spread and enable workers to win significant rights; but it can also lead to a general strike or even an insurgency. Mandel therefore spoke at workers' assemblies on such topics. As well as this, he naturally ran training courses for anti-capitalist militants and revolutionary activists within the LRT and sections of the FI. He was a passionate communicator and an instructor of the highest level. I took numerous training courses under Mandel and they enabled me to become an instructor myself. Many activists will remember his teaching, the courses he gave on the German revolution, the Russian revolution, on what constitutes a general strike, and how to move from a general strike to an active strike with occupation, a general strike leading to the creation of organs of workers' power on the basis of the most progressive experiments of the May 1968 protests in France and Italy, and also the experience of Italian workers' councils in 1920-21, Hungarian councils in 1918-19 and of course the soviets of the Russian revolution, organs of people's power or organizations of workers and peasants in the Spanish revolution of 1936-1938/39. Mandel was thoroughly acquainted not only with the history of the emancipation struggles of the 19th and 20th centuries but with the long history of Humanity the world over. He had deep knowledge and understanding and the desire to communicate to the younger generation the best use that could be made of all this experience.

## His writings on

## trade-unionism

Ernest Mandel was constantly attentive to ongoing struggles, whether in the workers' movement in his own country Belgium, in the rest of Europe more generally or throughout the rest of the world. He participated in them all. He produced an enormous quantity of articles in the weekly newspaper he had founded with other anti-capitalist militants to the left of the Socialist Party. This was *La Gauche* (The Left) that he had founded in 1956 with the support of the trade-unionist mentioned above, André Renard. Relations with Renard became increasingly tense as Renard began to adopt a moderate position. *La Gauche* also "had" a Flemish version (*Links*) in which he also played an important part. He wrote hundreds of articles, and also wrote in numerous other journals in other languages, newspapers, magazines, reviews read by unionists and academics. In Belgium he produced crucial reports for the trade union FGTB, on the structure of capitalism in Belgium, and how a series of large capitalist companies, especially holdings companies, controlled the Belgian economy.

There was one pamphlet he produced, about 60 pages long, that I consider of great significance. This was "*Le socialisme par l'action*" (Socialism through action) which was signed by André Renard and of which tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of copies were distributed. It was read by tens of thousands of union delegates in Belgium and had a strong influence on them in the second half of the 1950s. Let us recall that at that time, Belgium saw several big strikes. First of all, during the Second World War, there had been numerous factory strikes and resistance against the Nazi occupier in which a younger Ernest Mandel had taken part. (Indeed, he was arrested three times by the Nazi authorities and managed to escape twice). Then there was the general strike for the republic, calling for the king to abdicate, in 1950. There was also a major miners' strike in the 1950s calling for nationalization and a very large steel- and metal-workers' strike for a thirteenth month's salary. There

was a general strike in the winter of 1960-61, with over a million workers out on strike, in a country with a population of ten million. Mandel was in his element. His ties to the workers' movement became even closer. One of his priorities was to stimulate a push towards self-organization.

Mandel had lived through 30 years of activism in difficult conditions. However, in the second half of the 60s came the profound radicalization of youth and the working classes all over Europe; and in 1971, the founding of the new Belgian section of the FI, the LRT, strongly influential in factories, showed Ernest Mandel that his proposals were coming to fruition in the practice of workers' power in several large Belgian factories, in particular the Cockerill steelworks in Liège and the Glaverbel factory in Gilly, a glass plant in the Charleroi area.

## Mandel and the youth movement

I have mentioned the influence Mandel had on the working class in Belgium from the years 1950-1960. This influence spread to other countries as militant workers and trade-union delegates and leaders heeded his proposals in France, Italy, Germany and Great Britain at that time, then later in Spain and Portugal. He also had an impact on radicalized students in Germany with the anti-capitalist and internationalist student movement, Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund or SDS (German Socialist Students Union). One of the leaders of this movement was Rudi Dutschke, with whom he had been in close contact since 1966-1967, i.e. before May '68. In 1966 Mandel married one of the leaders of the student movement, Gisela Scholz. And of course he had an impact on young French Trotskyists, such as the twins Alain and Hubert Krivine, Daniel Bensaïd, [Henri Weber](#), [Pierre Rousset](#), [Janette Habel](#), [Catherine Samary](#), [Josette Trat](#) and her twin sister Janine, who together founded the Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire or JCR (Revolutionary Communist Youth movement), after being expelled from the Union des Étudiants Communistes

or UEC (Union of Communist Students) in France. He had an impact in Belgium on radical student youth some of whom had joined or led the Jeunes Gardes Socialistes or JGS (Young Socialist Guards), that merged with the Confédération socialiste des travailleurs or CST (Socialist Confederation of Workers) to form the LRT in May 1971.

In 1971, as mentioned earlier, having just completed his doctorate at the Free University of Berlin, Mandel became a professor at the Free University of Brussels in the Flemish-speaking section known as the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. At the time I was based in Liège when, under pressure from the student movement and progressive Marxist lecturers, Mandel was invited to lecture on Marxist economics at the University of Liège, in 1972-73-74. This was when I had just enrolled as a student, along with other students of my generation. Among them I will name [Luc](#), one of the two [Dardenne brothers](#) who went on to become internationally acclaimed film-makers, winning the Palme d'Or award at Cannes twice, once for the film *Rosetta*. Luc Dardenne and I attended Ernest Mandel's classes together at the University of Liège.

## Ernest Mandel in debate with other Marxist intellectuals in front of full lecture halls

If it is significant that Ernest Mandel's talks had a huge impact from 1967 to the end of the 1970s, the impression made by his writings over the same period was no less important. He debated with such great names in Marxist scholarship as [Perry Anderson](#), [Ernst Bloch](#), [Herbert Marcuse](#), [Roman Rosdolsky](#), [Lucien Goldman](#), [Robin Blackburn-<<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robin...>>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Paul\\_Sartre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre)]. He argued with the great



historians, economists and philosophers of the French Communist Party such as [Charles Bettelheim](#), [Jean Ellenstein](#), [Louis Althusser](#) in public debates. And when he took the floor in certain meetings where his presence had been previously announced, there would be 1,000, 2,000, 2,500 or 3,000 people in the audience throughout the entire period from 1967 to the late 1970s. This was true in Germany in 1967-68. And it became true again in Germany, in a big way, in 1988-89, in debates with critical Communist leaders such as [Gregor Gysi](#) with 3,000 or 4,000 people in Berlin. In May '68, he spoke at an enormous meeting organized by the JCR on 9th May, the night of the barricades in Paris, with an audience of 2,500; in 1971, he took the floor at the commemoration of the centenary of the Commune of Paris, near the Père Lachaise cemetery, where there must have been between 15,000 and 20,000; meetings in Portugal just after the Carnation Revolution in 1974-75 with 2,000 to 2,500 in the audience; meetings in Spain at the fall of Francoism, again with 2,000 or 3,000 participants; a big European meeting of the FI, previously mentioned, in November 1970, at the Free University of Brussels with 3,500 participants.

Mandel was thus a highly regarded mass orator among the radicalized avant-garde, capable of addressing students and workers together. He expressed himself with great ease in German, French, English, Flemish/Dutch, and did not hesitate to give talks in Spanish in Spain and Latin America, in "Portuñol" (a mixture of Portuguese and Spanish) in Portugal, in Italian when in Italy. He combined exceptional powers of analysis with an impressive ability to convey in his public talks analysis, a message, energy, calling on each occasion for anti-capitalism, internationalism, and the project of emancipation and revolution.

## The Fourth International

Ernest Mandel joined the FI at the age of 16, in 1939, just before the war. He

joined the resistance from the beginning of the German occupation and was arrested three times by the Nazis. The second arrest occurred as he was handing out tracts to steel workers in Liège, on 29 March 1944. He was arrested by the German Army, tried in St Leonard's prison in Liège and condemned to years of forced labour. He was "lucky" to be condemned by the German Army as a political resistent rather than by the Gestapo. Had he been condemned by the Gestapo, he would have been simply sent to an extermination camp or executed straightaway. Deported to Germany in early June 1944, he escaped from one of the first camps where he was imprisoned thanks to his ability to enlist the sympathy of two prison guards, one of whom was a former member of the Socialist Party and the other of the Communist Party. He was soon recaptured and transferred to various camps. In all, he was imprisoned successively in six camps in Nazi Germany. He was liberated in March 1945 by the US Army from the camp where he then was. The camps where he was interned are listed in the German Archives, and also cited in Jan Willem Stutje's biography. [22]

From the end of the Second World War, Ernest Mandel became a leader of the FI. He had taken part in the first clandestine European conference to relaunch the FI, during the occupation and before his second arrest. There had been a meeting of Belgian and French FI delegates in a farm at St Hubert in the Belgian Ardennes in February 1944. Then he participated in the revival of the FI after Liberation. This time, along with [Michel Pablo](#), he became one of the most important leaders of the FI. He was 23 years old at Liberation. His role as a leader of the FI during the years 1940-50 until the early 1960s was both very important and discreet. He was known as a Marxist economist from the publication of his book *Marxist Economic Theory*, he was a founder of the Belgian French-language weekly, *La Gauche*, he was a journalist on the Socialist daily, *le Peuple*, and he became a journalist on the Liège FGTB trade-union daily, *la Wallonie*. It was not until the end of the 1960s, having been expelled from the Belgian Socialist Party in the

mid-60s and straight after May '68, that he appeared in public as a leader of the FI. This, and his role in the international students' and workers' revolutionary movement, immediately resulted in him being denied access to several countries by various governments. These included the French government which denied him access to French territory, the United States government, the Swiss, German and Australian governments. In the case of Germany, it was all the more scandalous as he had resisted Nazism and been decorated by the post-war German government for his participation in anti-Nazi resistance; yet he was denied access to German territory, despite holding a doctorate from Germany and despite the protests of German anti-Nazi intellectuals and of course the students' movement, which demanded the ban should be lifted. Indeed, I remember that Ernest Mandel asked me to speak out in Liège when the Socialist Chancellor Helmut Schmidt visited the University. He asked me to make a public protest against his banning from German territory. The bannings did not prevent him from crossing borders. Ernest Mandel travelled a great deal, and in particular, despite being banned from entering France, he crossed the border on a regular basis. For example, I clearly remember, as will thousands of French demonstrators, his arrival at the Commemoration of the Commune of Paris, in May 1971, invited by the Ligue communiste (Communist League) and Lutte ouvrière (Workers' Struggle). We must have been easily ten or fifteen thousand demonstrators when Ernest Mandel arrived to speak on the back of a motorbike driven by Hubert Krivine. Occasionally he was arrested by the French authorities and returned to Belgium. On one occasion after having been sent back to Belgium upon his arrival at Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport, on the same day, a comrade from Brussels drove him back to Paris by a discreet route.

*In the second part I will discuss Mandel, the Cuban revolution and Che Guevara.*

Translated by Christine Pagnouille, Vicki Briault and Sushovan Dhar.



# Adolfo Gilly, Great Latin American Left Intellectual, Dead at 94

6 July 2023, by **Dan La Botz**

Born in Argentina in 1928, Gilly helped create the Workers' Revolutionary Movement (MOR), but at the end of the 1940s he moved toward the Trotskyist Fourth International (FI). In Latin America, the FI was dominated by the tenacious, daring, and later in his life, rather bizarre figure of Juan Posadas. The FI sent Gilly to Bolivia in 1956, shortly after the Bolivian Revolution of 1952 in which the Trotskyists of the Revolutionary Workers Party (POR) had played a central if ultimately disappointing role. From 1960 to 1962 he worked for the FI in Europe, mostly in Italy. Then in 1962, following the Revolution of 1959 he was sent to Cuba, but he became persona non grata because of his critical articles. From 1964-1966 he was in the Guatemalan Revolutionary Movement November 13 (MR-13), but the government's fierce repression forced him to flee to Mexico to save his own life, but shortly after his arrival he was arrested, tried and imprisoned by the Mexican government. He was held from 1966 to 1972 in Lecumberri Prison where he wrote his Marxist history of the Mexican Revolution, *La revolución interrumpida* (The Interrupted Revolution) [23], the book that won him the reputation of Marxist historian of Mexico and first rate intellectual.

When released from prison, Gilly went to Europe and worked for the FI there, but as he writes in an autobiographical essay, he found the work alienating. Disillusioned with Posadas, he returned to Mexico and joined the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), a quite exciting small but growing left party in the late 1970s and 1980s. But when Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of the legendary president Lázaro Cárdenas, broke with the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Gilly

supported his presidential campaign and then with the founding of the Party of the Democratic Revolution, he became an advisor to Cárdenas. When the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) led the Chiapas Rebellion in 1994, Gilly became a supporter of the movement and interpreter of the events. An academic in Mexico, Gilly's professional career has been as peripatetic and as stellar as his revolutionary experience, teaching at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), and at the University of Chicago, Columbia, NYU, Stanford, Yale, and the National Humanities Center.

I remember when in June of 1971 I picked up Gilly's *La Revolución interrumpida* in El Sótano bookstore on the Alameda Central in Mexico City and then read it on the bus back to San Diego, California where I then lived. I found the book's analysis of the revolution, footnoted throughout with references to Karl Marx and other socialists, to be a revelation.] I was not the only one. Octavia Paz, the great leftist Mexican poet shared the same view, that Gilly had made a major contribution. Only later did I learn that Gilly had written *La Revolución interrumpida* while he was in prison. Fifty years later it remains for me—on the shelf with a dozen other excellent histories—the most important book on the subject. It turned me into a lifelong reader of and admirer of Gilly, even when I sometimes disagreed with him.

Gilly wrote two other major books on the Mexican Revolution and its history. For Gilly, the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) represented the end of the revolution. His book *El cardenismo, una utopía mexicana* (Cardenism, a Mexican Utopia) explains and examines Cárdenas' attempt to create a kind of

state-supported peasant socialism in Mexico. While it does not have the magisterial character of *La Revolución interrumpida*, El Cardenismo is full of interesting anecdotes and raises important questions. Finally, in this trinity of his major books, his monumental *Felipe Ángeles, el estratega* (Felipe Ángeles, the Strategist), a biography of the Mexican general who served the revolution. Gilly was fascinated with this *hombre congruente*, that is, this man of integrity, who though himself not a revolutionary, placed himself at its service. Beyond these three major histories of the Mexican Revolution Gilly wrote constantly, essays on the revolutionary movement in Central America in the 1980, on Mexican politics, and later on the Zapatistas in the 1990s and beyond.

Through these writings in *Paths of Revolution* you can see his evolution from Trotskyist revolutionary, to enthusiast for Lázaro's and Cuauhtémoc's left-nationalist populism, to champion and advocate of the Zapatista indigenous rebellion. His political evolution, I think, can be explained by the fact that for the first fifty years of his political life—from 1928 to 1979—revolution seemed on the agenda or at least a possibility, while from 1980s until today, though there have been many important social upheavals, neoliberal, conservative, reactionary, or authoritarian regimes have predominated. So, it seems that Gilly made the decision to support movements, parties, and leaders who might advance the radical social and political movements as long as no new revolutionary opportunity presented itself, or until it did.

There is much more to say about Gilly and his work, hundreds of articles and various other books, but for now we

say: Adolfo, thank you, we salute, and we will miss you.

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Source [New Politics](#).

# Revolutionary, peasant leader: Hugo Blanco (1934 - 2023)

26 June 2023, by **Maria Sundvall**

For many years, Hugo was a member of organisations affiliated to the Fourth International, first in Argentina where he arrived as a young student and then after his return to Peru in the late 1950s. That is where he participated in and played a leading role in the campesino movement against the cruel, neofeudal latifundista reign in the Peruvian Andes. The peasants' demand for land was met with brutal repression. Hugo took part in the forming of armed self-defence. In one confrontation a policeman was killed. Hugo was put on trial in a military tribunal and the prosecutor argued for a death sentence, but in the end he was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

An international campaign for the liberation of Hugo Blanco was launched immediately after his arrest. Hugo himself has commented that on every occasion his life was threatened - and indeed, there were a lot of occasions - the Fourth International led the way in the campaign to save him. In Sweden, Amnesty International made him their Prisoner of the year in 1968. He was liberated after a supposedly progressive military regime had taken power in Peru in 1970 but was deported some time later to Mexico.

During the Allende period in Chile, Hugo moved there but was forced to flee the country after the military coup in 1973. Like many others he was saved by the Swedish ambassador Harald Edelstam and got asylum in Sweden. That was the beginning of a

long relation between Hugo and socialists, solidarity organisations and social movements in Sweden. He returned several times to see the family he had formed there - but also on repeated occasions after being deported or having escaped death threats in Peru.

During a period in the 1970s-80s he was elected to parliamentary assemblies in Peru as a representative of left fronts in which the Peruvian organisation of the Fourth International participated. In the year of 1980, he ran as a presidential candidate in the elections.

During his exile in Mexico, he met and was inspired by the uprising of the Zapatista movement in 1994. He was inspired by their orientation towards building power from below, basing themselves on the traditions of the indigenous peoples. Later Hugo resumed his work in the peasants' movement in Peru. During the last decades of his life, he dedicated his efforts mainly to the struggle for the rights of indigenous people and for the defence of natural resources against exploitation. He started publishing the monthly newspaper *Lucha Indígena* (Indigenous struggle), that focuses on indigenous issues and is still being published by Hugo's comrades.

Hugo's health was frail for many years. He had been beaten too many times in prison and by police and the military. In 2002 he had a brain operation in Mexico and was treated in Cuba after the operation. In 2019

he visited Sweden, and the visit was prolonged by travel restrictions due to the Covid pandemic. In spite of his deteriorating health, he participated in climate manifestations with Greta Thunberg and Fridays For Future and met activists from the organisations of the Sami, an indigenous people in the northern parts of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia.

Hugo Blanco did not compromise in political struggles, and he neither surrendered nor was enticed by privileges he was offered. For instance, he totally rejected offers of joining the half-hearted land reform of the military regime in the beginning of the 1970s. He opposed self-appointed leaderships in parties and movements. Hugo stressed the importance of being practically involved in the daily work of the movements and of listening to all concerned. He also had a rare quality of reaching out to and convincing people. One example is how he addressed his prison guards in the military trial and explained that he made a clear difference between them and their superior offices. During his prison custody and during the trial, his guards repeatedly had to be exchanged since they grew too sympathetic to him. He was present in dramatic moments in world politics, and he managed to convey strategic lessons from every struggle to the rest of us.

In April this year, the Red Room Publishers (Bokförläggarna Röda Rummet) published a biography of Hugo in Swedish, a translation of the

book *Hugo Blanco – a revolutionary for life* by Derek Wall. Those of us who worked with the book in the publishing house were especially pleased that the book was finished in time for him to receive it. At the book launch in Stockholm in early June, there was an intense moment for all

present when Hugo participated with a militant greeting on a zoom link from his hospital bed in the city of Uppsala. At the launch, his daughters described what Hugo had meant in their life and in their common political work. One of his daughters, Maria,

concluded her presentation with the slogan that will always be associated with the peasants' movement in Peru in the 1960s and with Hugo Blanco:

***Tierra o Muerte! Land or death***

26 June 2023

# So long, comrade! Farewell to comrade Mimis Livieratos (1927-2023)

19 June 2023, by **OKDE-Spartakos**

His life interweaves with the history of the revolutionary movement; to write it down is to write the history of the movement itself, at least until 1974. Here, all we can achieve is a brief historical sketch of his revolutionary turbulent life.

Mimis Livieratos was born in 1927 in Petralona, a worker neighborhood of Athens, and lived there until today. During the Nazi Occupation, he initially participated in the Nea Epochi group, formed around Costas Anastasiadis and included, among others, several young activists, such as Giorgis Dalavangas – his intimate lifetime friend, Leonidas Kyrkos, Cornelius Kastoriadis, but also figures like the Historian Yiannis Kordatos. They eventually came into contact with the typographer and former secretary of the KKE, Thomas Apostolidis, to form, along with other activists, the Revolutionary Socialist (Communist) Party of Greece (ES(K)KE), publishing a paper initially under the title of Socialist Idea and then Red Flag.

Mimis joined ELAS (Greek People's Army) and attended its Reserve Officers School. Soon after the Liberation, in December 1944, ES(K)KE fused with ELD to form SK-ELD. Mimis and a group totaling about 15 activists initiated an independent tendency to participate in the discussions on the new revolutionary party together with the EDKE, DEKE, and the Thessaloniki Regional

Committee of the International Communist Party. They finally resigned from SK-ELDA and took decisively part in the founding conference of KDKE (Communist Internationalist Party of Greece), which took place at the end of July 1946 in a ravine of Penteli. During the Civil War, the KDKE openly and critically supported the struggle of the Greek Democratic Army while predicting its defeat! By the end of 1947, the Workers' Struggle was banned; The paper was compelled to become mimeographed, and the 2nd congress of the party took place in 1948 in deep illegality.

Comrade Livieratos was then forcibly drafted to the army only to be sent for reformation in the concentration camp of Makronisos, where several members and cadres of the now-illegal KDKE were also detained.

In the 1950's, along with other comrades and youth socialists, formed the Socialist Youth League. From 1951 on, he participated in the Free Trade Union Movement of Dimitris Stratis and, from 1955, in the Democratic Trade Union Movement.

At the fifth conference of the KDKE, which decided the entry-ism in the EDA as a party-building strategy, Comrade Mimis was one of the protagonists. This decision provoked strong reactions and the expulsion of many dissenting cadres from the party.

A little later, at the behest of the International, which had played a leading role in the solidarity movement with the National Liberation Front of Algeria, M. Livieratos left for Morocco. In the middle of the Sahara desert, surmounting incredible difficulties, a group of European revolutionaries – joined by comrade Theodosios Thomadakis from the Greek section – was to set up an illegal weapons factory (producing rifles and mortars), as Mimis brilliantly records in his book *The Invisible Factory*.

After the victory of the Algerian revolution, Livieratos returned to Greece, where the KDKE, since 1959, publishes the Marxist Bulletin, and from 1964 the magazine *Our Discours*. He writes for both; he is a member of the Central Committee and the Politburo and participates in all the struggles of the time and, of course, in the Ioulia uprising. Shortly before, after the eighth conference of the KDKE, another tendency, disagreeing with the EDA's entry-ism tactics, had quit the party and formed an independent organization named OKDE (Organization of Communists Internationalists of Greece) which from October 1964 on publishes the *Workers Democracy*.

At the same time, there are developments in the International. After the unifying conference of 1963, the tendency of Michalis Raptis (Pablo) is in the minority, to be

excluded from the FI, for reasons of discipline two years later. This exclusion causes reactions in almost all parts of the International, in which Mimis Livieratos is involved. Following tensions in the Central Committee of the KDKE regarding the publication of an article by Michalis Raptis. Livieratos is temporarily excluded from the Central Committee. He rehabilitated to the CC on the very day of the coup d' état (!), which, in a brief session, decided to found the Democratic Resistance Committees, which are rapidly growing. Comrade Mimis escapes arrest and flees first to France and then to Germany. Having departed from both the Section and the International, he works closely with Pablo and PAK, publishing the paper *Liberation* among Greek political émigrés.

Comrade Mimis will return to Athens shortly after the fall of the dictatorship

to join PASOK along with a group of former members of the Greek Section of the Fourth International. He will be a member of the first Executive Office of the party and Giorgos Dalavangas member of the Central Committee. They resigned from PASOK in 1977 to form with old comrades the Unity and publish the magazine of the same name for years. After Unity, comrade Mimis Livieratos will not join any of the organizations of the Trotskyist movement, maintaining friendly relations with almost all of them. He persistently dealt with the history of the labor movement, trying to save the memory of the prewar class struggles. He published four volumes and wrote, among other things, on the history of the GSEE (General Confederation of the Greek Workers) and the Ioulia uprising. He publishes dozens of pamphlets as part of the Unity project, and, for many years, the paper Unity,

with economic news, focusing on the particularities and dynamics of Greek capitalism.

To us, Mimis Livieratos has been a valuable comrade. But he is also a historical legacy of the Trotskyist movement. Spartakos has hosted many of his articles while he participated as a speaker at conferences of the Pantelis Pouliopoulos Institute for Social and Political Research.

The Organization of Communist Internationalists of Greece - Spartakos, the Greek Section of the Fourth International, pays tribute to Comrade Mimis Livieratos, a revolutionary who, from 1942, almost as a child, until 2023, in his old days, for more than 80 years, remained loyal to the red flag and the socialist revolution!

Source *Spartakos*.

## A life for the revolution - Winfried Wolf (1949-2023)

2 June 2023, by **Angela Klein**

Until the end, he flourished when it came to politics. Winnie was a driven man, a project maker, a workaholic. His projects were all of a journalistic nature: newspapers, magazines, books. His favourite line of business was newspapers for mass agitation: 8-12 two-colour newspaper pages in Berlin format, each with its own editorial board and advisory board: BLIND, SoZ-extra, desert! anti-war newspaper, Faktencheck Hellas, Faktencheck Europa, Faktencheck Corona, Newspaper against the War, Zero Covid.

He put his heart and soul into it when he could support an action of colleagues in the company with such an agitation, like the Ford colleagues in Cologne with the newspaper *Links eröm*; or twice the GDL strike (of drivers for Deutsche Bahn). (2014/15 and 2021) with several issues of the

strike newspaper on each occasion. These papers sometimes achieved circulations of up to 30,000, once even 80,000 - without any apparatus, only with the support of a few comrades, friends and his address book.

He dreamed of much higher circulations. Whenever something was moving, he wanted to intervene journalistically. Like hardly anyone else, he saw the newspaper as a collective organiser. This also means that although he was an expert in economics, and later in transport - and an author and much sought-after speaker in both fields, science was not an end in itself for him, it had to be in the service of enlightenment and mobilisation of the broad population, preferably of colleagues. First and foremost, he was a political activist. He translated his scientific findings into political messages and went on a

publicity tour with them.

### The activist

As an activist he naturally also tried to build political organisations - first the Gruppe Internationale Marxisten (GIM), the German section of the IV. International, and from 1986 (with the KPD/ML) the United Socialist Party (VSP). When this failed because of "reunification" (of Germany), he joined the PDS and stood for the Bundestag from 1994 to 2002 on its behalf. Since 2006 he has been "happy without a party", as he writes in the autobiographical sketch on his blog. His self-image: "radical socialist and utopian", naturally a member of Ver.di, from the very beginning. In 2008, he founded the magazine *Lunapark 21* - (the) magazine for the critique of the global economy; it



remained "a matter close to his heart" to the end, as he writes. Against all economic trends and at a time when printed matter is said to have less and less of an audience, he succeeded in "maintaining the magazine on the market", as the saying goes. It was in the black.

He imagined Lunapark as a kind of German left-wing Financial Times, hence political modesty was not his thing, he liked to reach high.

The political initiative for which he worked the longest and until the end was, since its beginnings in the mid-90s, the movement against the Stuttgart 21 low-level railway station. It had the charm of fitting the content of his body and stomach topic and also of being located in Ländle, his homeland - Winnie was born near Ravensburg, Lake Constance region, and cultivated his friendships there throughout his life. On his blog, he introduces himself as a "self-confessed Swabian".

## Revolution in the East?

He joined the GIM in Berlin in the early 1970s. Leading members of the Fourth International - Ernest Mandel, Alain Krivine, Tariq Ali - had played a leading role in the Vietnam Congress in February 1968, in the Paris May or also in the protests against the suppression of the Prague Spring by troops of "socialist brother states". His central point of reference in Germany at that time was Rudi Dutschke. He was on the masthead of the first issue of *Was tun*, which appeared as a monthly newspaper from May 1968. The newspaper was then continued under the direction of Lothar Boepple in Mannheim. When Winnie joined the editorial staff in 1973, he explicitly saw himself following in Dutschke's footsteps. Decades later, he was still concerned with defending the 1968 movement against its defamation, but also against its slide into sectarianism.

The international revolt against war and authoritarian regimes was, of course, also Winnie's first course in political awakening: mainly against the fascist Obrist dictatorship in

Athens and against the US war in Vietnam. In the early 1980s he was active in solidarity work for Solidarnosc; he accompanied it with three paperback volumes entitled *The Long Summer of Solidarity and Winter Belongs to the Crows* (1981/1984).

Winnie does not mention this part of his political work in his autobiographical sketch, nor does he mention the founding of the VSP or the period of German unity. This may have to do with the fact that the hopes for a political revolution in the Warsaw Pact countries, of which Solidarnosc was the most developed expression, were so cruelly dashed. In any case, subsequent events, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan and the speed with which the slogan "We are the people" became "We are one people" in the autumn/winter of 89, led to considerable disillusionment with that part of the Fourth International's programme which placed hopes in a "political revolution".

It led Winnie to oppose and eventually break with the Fourth because it clung too long to the distorted image of the bureaucratised "workers" state, did not condemn the invasion of Afghanistan from the beginning, and had long illusions about a progressive turn in the process of German unity. Later he also left the VSP when its remnants refused to join his move to the PDS.

## Germany

The "dialectic of sectors of intervention" had worked negatively - and this has effects until today, when one sees how helpless the left is in front of the war in Ukraine. Admittedly, the path that was then taken, namely the support for the Gremliza [24]initiative "Never again Germany" with the demonstration of the same name in Berlin, also only drove the German radical left into a dead end. Ultimately, this orientation was the late consequence of an attitude that Winnie developed in the 1970s in a controversy with Günther Minnerup about the nature of the détente policy and the so-called German question, i.e. how to deal with the division of Germany.

Winnie's position was that Germany as a whole was no longer a point of reference for left politics; the national question could not be dealt with by the left in Germany. In this, he followed the left mainstream of effectively retreating to a West German identity. The events of '89 proved him right on the one hand, but on the other hand also pushed the socialist left into a pure naysayer corner, from which it is only laboriously working its way out with the help of globalisation-critical and ecosocialist positions, to which Winnie's sketches of an economic and transport alternative also contributed a lot. Winnie then moved more and more towards the positions of the peace movement - from 1999 he started publishing a newspaper against war twice a year, the last one appeared for the Easter marches in 2023.

His position on the EU was similar. With great vehemence he fought against wanting to see something progressive in the EU. That was good, right and helpful, but it did not answer the question of an alternative that did not mean a relapse into the nation state.

## Automobiles

In the 1970s and early 1980s, he distinguished himself as a Marxist analyst of the economic cycle with the ambition of predicting the next downturn, which he sometimes got wrong. In the second half of the 1980s, he concentrated on catching up on his doctoral thesis. The result was a standard work of criticism not only of German transport policy, but of the automobile-driven capitalism on which the German economy depends: *Eisenbahn und Autowahn*. The book appeared in three editions and was also translated into English as *Car Mania: A Critical History of Transport*.

Winnie did pioneering work there. He was one of the first to call for the abolition of the car as an individual means of transport - at a time when this was still tantamount to a kind of insult to majesty. He waged a veritable campaign against the privatisation of the railways, the takeover of the management of this

group by managers from the car industry (Hartmut Mehdorn) and the efforts to take it to the stock market at any price.

He rejected the flight into the e-car when this technology still appeared to a majority as a lifeline. He has brought an "economy of short distances" into the debate, which is far from being spelled out. He has used the examples of Berlin and Marburg to show how a car-free city can be organised in concrete terms. He has exposed major projects such as Stuttgart 21 as a gift to the real estate industry and actively supported the initiative with his expertise. He gave the impetus for the founding of Bahn für alle (Rail for All), and later of Bürgerbahn statt Börsenbahn (Citizens' Rail instead of Stock Exchange Rail). At the very end, when he had fallen out with the majority of Bahn für alle on the issue of splitting the railway company into network and rail, he founded the group "Bürgerbahn - Denkfabrik für eine starke Schiene". Known internationally as a car critic, he has long since gone down in the history of technical literature; unfortunately, he abandoned his economic analyses in the 1990s.

## Friends

Winnie was a disciple, especially in his relationship with Ernest Mandel. Later, it was always important for him to count important personalities of political and cultural life, all of them men, among his friends. He himself never built up a following; his projects were too disparate for that, although they were designed with staying power. Rather, he was likely to fall out with those who did not want to follow him into his next project. There was at times a relentlessness about him in political matters that was frightening because it was so regardless.

He easily counted people among his friends, and yet he had a relationship with them that was as naively trusting as it was instrumental. However, this was always "for the cause", never for personal gain. He always put his extraordinary working capacity at the service of those who needed it. His friendships were political friendships, with all the limitations that entails. He nurtured them conscientiously.

Winnie was one of the outstanding figures produced by the 68 movement. He had and continues to have an impact far beyond with completely new themes. The German left owes

him much. The SoZ and the ISO would not exist without him. We are losing a dear comrade.

The list of his publications is impressive, he has compiled it on his blog.

Winnie was a Brecht fan and liked to accompany his non-fiction articles with appropriate poems.

### In praise of communism

It is reasonable. You can grasp it. It's simple.

You're no exploiter, so you'll understand.

It is good for you. Look into it.

Stupid men call it stupid, and the dirty call it dirty.

It is against dirt and against stupidity.

The exploiters call it a crime.

But we know:

It is the end of all crime.

It is not madness but

The end of madness.

It is not chaos,

But order.

It is the simple thing

That's hard to do.

[Winfried Wolf blog](#)

May 2023

## In Honour of Marijke

**21 May 2023, by Daniel Tanuro**

Honouring the memory of Marijke requires mobilizing many qualifiers. Marijke was an extremely intelligent person. She was a scientist attached to reason, rigor and integrity in the apprehension of reality: facts, facts, facts, because "A fact is worth more than a lord mayor" ...

Marijke was a biologist, in the deep, existential sense of the verb "to be". It was much more than a profession: a formation of thought. As Pips pointed out, Darwin was her hero. Like him, Marijke had curiosity, sympathy and empathy for all that lives.

The idea that humanity is part of nature while being distinct from other animals, the idea in other words that human history is intertwined with natural history while also obeying social laws, which are not "natural", was obvious for Marijke. For her, most of these questions had been resolved by her mentor, in his second great work, "The Descent of Man", unfortunately less well known than "The Origin of Species". Like Patrick Tort, Marijke saw civilization as a "reversive effect" of natural selection.

Biologists of Marijke's calibre are

never cold fish. We think of Stephen Jay Gould, Rachel Carson, and many others. Marijke was a person of great control, of great balance. She did not speak lightly, and always in a measured tone. But outrage at exploitation, oppression, brutality and cowardice boiled within her, and surfaced in her speech.

"Stille water, diepe gronden" ["Still waters run deep"]: this Flemish saying - which has no real equivalent in French - sheds light quite well, I think, on the personality of our comrade. Marijke was a passionate

person, with a calm but intense passion. When she spoke, one felt a great determination, a moral strength anchored on very solid foundations where personal considerations were never in the foreground.

Marijke was radical in Marx's sense: to solve a problem, we must identify its root rationally, and act accordingly, revolutionarily. She mastered the categories of historical materialism - mode of production, relations of production, classes and social strata, capital, social overproduction, value, surplus value and so on - but it was the opposite of dogmatics. A free spirit, Marijke was not afraid to leave the beaten track when reality dictated it.

In addition to the trade union struggle, in which she participated as a teacher, Marijke's contribution was particularly important on two levels: feminism and eco-socialism. In both cases, it was a question of going beyond the limits, indeed the blinkers, of a certain Marxist tradition, patriarchal and productivist.

Along with other activists in the Women's Commission of the Belgian section [of the Fourth International], Marijke played a key role in the fight for the decriminalization of abortion. If the women of the Christian Workers' Movement (MOC) were convinced to rally to the Lallemand/Herman-Michielsens bill, it is to these comrades that we owe it. It was a huge victory for emancipation in our country. A few years later, Marijke took over and played a leading role in the vast united campaign "Women

against the crisis".

At the same time, Marijke was one of the first in the Fourth International, and the first in the Belgian section, to take full measure of the terrible barbaric threats arising from the vertiginous fall of biodiversity, the irreversible disruption of the climate, the chemical and radioactive poisoning of the planet. She devoted a regular column to it in our newspapers, *La Gauche* and *Rood*. From the beginning of the 1980s, in the context of a training day, she challenged the members of the Belgian section by stressing the need to go beyond the essentialist changes, in particular by eating substantially less meat.

For fifteen years, Marijke had been working on eco-feminism, a privileged concept to converge the two great struggles of her activist life. While distancing herself from the essentialist conceptions of some women authors for whom women are "by nature" more ecologist than men, she did not hide her admiration for the commitment of a Vandana Shiva. She was not afraid to point out that the domination of women and the domination of nature have more than similarities in form: they are two sides of the same coin.

An excellent teacher, Marijke made it a point of honour to express the most complicated things in simple terms. Her teaching skills, sincerity, humanity and dedication earned her the esteem and recognition of many. This is particularly the case for women

activists from the global south who had the chance to follow her training at the Amsterdam Institute, of which Marijke was co-director for four years.

Marijke was modest. She hated the show-offs, the upstarts, the navel-gazers of all kinds. And could not stand the beautiful talkers - usually male and very verbose - who believe that using or inventing many complicated words gives them the quality of "philosophers".

Militant life is made up of many defeats, some successes and a lot of personal disillusionment, with its share of pettiness and jealousy. Marijke sometimes suffered, but this did not call into question her loyalty to revolutionary, feminist, internationalist and eco-socialist Marxism. In this age of unbridled narcissism, this deserves immense respect that we owe to her steadfast, upright nature and fierce will to struggle.

In the last years of the last century, the example of Marijke encouraged me to use my scientific training to help our political current to consider the centrality of the global ecological crisis. It is an understatement to say that I am grateful to her.

On behalf of the Belgian section of the Fourth International, I pay tribute to our comrade Marijke, formerly known by her pseudonym of Lida.

On my own behalf, I salute a very dear friend, to whom I owe a great deal.

Companera Marijke presente!

# Thank you Marijke! Having met you inspires us to continue..

## 21 May 2023, by Oksana Shine



For you Marijke, with a special

thought for Pips and all the people who were dear to you.

I speak today on behalf of the

comrades of the Anti-Capitalist Feminists to thank you for all your teaching, your comradeship and your militant commitment.

For us, it is a whole heritage of feminist struggle in Belgium that you take with you... but not without having shared it with us. With all your educationals, your interviews, your analytical texts, you have done precious and and rigorous work of leadership and transmission for years and years.

You did it in all humility, letting yourself be taught by the struggles of new feminist generations. For us, you were demonstrating that a 70-year-old woman could be much more progressive and free than a 20 year old girl. No wonder, you who had been at the forefront of the vanguard of ecological and women's struggles within our organisation!

Being an activist in a competitive and in some ways macho environment, you had experienced it. And that's why you often called our attention to the atmosphere in the activist spaces.

Your experience made the link between the women's movement in the 1970s and the feminist strike movement of recent years. You wove a purple thread between ecological, feminist and labour struggles.

In 2019, some of us were lucky enough to have your presence to organise a campaign against the political bargaining around abortion rights in Belgium.

You who 50 years ago supported the building of the first abortion centre in Flanders.

Hundreds of comrades, men and women, have been educated by you through all these years and throughout the world in ecosocialism ecofeminism and class struggle feminism.

Since the announcement of your

death, dozens of messages from feminists have reached us from France, India, Spain, Brazil, Portugal, England, Italy, Denmark, Switzerland and the Netherlands...

Many of them underline your qualities in passing on experiences and languages.

(Chichi tells me to tell you that she has finally started to learn Dutch as you urged her to do so several years ago.)

You leave us a legacy without a will. An experience without a prescription for future struggles But a firm and assumed invitation to defend a revolutionary anti-capitalist orientation

No feminism without class struggle!  
No class struggle without feminism!

Thank you Marijke! Having met you inspires us to continue... .

# In memory of Marijke Colle - an ecofeminist and an internationalist

**21 May 2023, by Bong Fenis**

We share the sadness that comrades in the international community felt for the death of Comrade Marijke Colle on 16 April 2023 at the age of 75.

The International Institute for Research and Education - Manila and its network of mass and political activists in the Philippines offer the highest salute to an ecofeminist and an internationalist Marijke!

We've known Marijke and Pips in several international conferences and finally when she took the challenge to be the co-director of the IIRE-Amsterdam. It was also the implementation period of launching IIRE in Asia (Manila).

She never denied invitations to the Asian Global Justice School and was even excited to join. The last one that she joined and gave lectures on ecofeminism and other theoretical topics including the public speaking engagements in the University of the Philippines in Luzon and in Mindanao was in 2019.

She was an important figure in the ecofeminist and ecosocialist struggle. In women and ecology commissions and wherever discussions and debates, Marijke was fierce and firm in the intersectionality of the class and revolutionary internationalism.

We will forever treasure Marijke's

friendship, comradeship and revolutionary and internationalist commitment.

Our thoughts go out to her family and friends, in particular to our comrade Pips, her companion. Thanks for the Inspirations! You'll never be forgotten and we will pursue your struggles, our struggles.

Salute!

In the name of the IIRE-Manila and its network in Mindanao and Philippines,  
Bong Fenis  
Co-Director  
IIRE-Manila  
April 27, 2023



# **Marijke Colle, presente!**

**16 April 2023, by Gauche anticapitaliste/SAP Antikapitalisten**

Born in 1947 in a very conservative Flemish Catholic family, Marijke studied biology in Ghent and became radicalized like many young people of her generation in the 1968 wave.

She became a member of Dolle Mina (a Dutch-speaking feminist group) in the early 1970s, and later of the socialist feminist groups that formed a coordination throughout Flanders.

It was also during this period that she participated in the foundation of the Ligue Révolutionnaire des Travailleurs (LRT)-Révolutionnaire Arbeidersliga (RAL), the Belgian section of the Fourth International, which has now become the Gauche anticapitaliste - SAP - Antikapitalisten.

Together with her comrades in the organization's women's commission, she played an important role in the struggle for the decriminalization of abortion in Belgium. She contributed to the emergence of both an autonomous women's movement and a class struggle feminism.

Marijke was also the first to address the ecological question in the Belgian

section and one of the pioneers in the Fourth International, more than thirty years ago. Marijke's commitment remains marked by these three dimensions of her life, which inextricably intertwine revolutionary Marxism, feminism and ecology: she defined herself as both Marxist and ecofeminist.

Marijke also spent many years working (as a teacher) and campaigning in different countries: England, France and the Netherlands, where she was co-director of our International Research and Training Institute in Amsterdam.

Since her return to Belgium about ten years ago, she had continued to nourish the reflections and political orientations of the organisation and its feminist commission, which became Anti-Capitalist Feminists, and its ecosocialist commission.

At the time of the Covid pandemic, she provided us with valuable reflections on the links between capitalism, the ecological crisis, zoonoses and the crisis of care, and the responses to be made.

The comrades of the Gauche anticapitaliste-SAP Antikapitalisten and of the Fourth International will remember her strength of character, her rigour, her frankness, her pedagogical and transmission capacities, put at the service of a lifelong revolutionary and internationalist commitment to collective emancipation. These qualities serve as an example for us. Our thoughts go out to her family and friends, in particular to our comrade Pips, her companion.

The best tribute we can pay to her is to continue her struggle, which is ours.

Thanks to you for everything, comrade.

Marijke, present!

NB: Among her many commitments, let us also mention her participation for many years in the leadership of the combative CGSP-Education (ACOD Onderwijs) of East Flanders, and more recently her involvement in the climate movement with Climaxi in particular in Ghent.

## **Ahmed Shawki (1960-2023)**

**9 March 2023, by Florian Wilde**

Of Egyptian origin, Shawki grew up in London, where he joined the British International Socialists (Socialist Workers Party, or SWP after 1977) as a teenager and was trained by SWP founder Tony Cliff before moving to the US in 1976, where he began studying at Brown University and joined the US International Socialists.

The IS in the US stemmed from a specifically American strand of Trotskyism, the Independent Socialist Clubs around Hal Draper and Joel Geier, inspired by Max Schachtman's theory of bureaucratic collectivism and centred around the concept of "socialism from below". Despite some differences vis-a-vis Tony Cliff's

analysis of state capitalism, both organizations had maintained strong relations with each other for a long time. Beginning in 1976, a part of the International Socialists strongly influenced by Cliff instigated a faction fight and split from the organization one year later, constituting themselves as the ISO and soon joining the SWP's

International Socialist Tendency (IST), which did not officially emerge until the early 1980s.

Shawki quickly gained a great deal of influence within the ISO and became part of its leadership in the early 1980s. The ISO was strongly oriented towards the SWP under his influence, but Shawki also played an important role within the IST itself. He regularly attended its informal meetings and successfully aided in the building of ISO-Zimbabwe, which even succeeded in electing a member of parliament in the 1990s.

In line with Cliff's analysis of the "downturn", the ISO, like other sections of the IST, opted against the turn-to-industry approach dominant in other Trotskyist organizations at this time, and instead shifted the focus of its agitation away from factories to the universities. Shawki participated in this campaign by building an ISO student organization at Brown University. Based on the theory of state capitalism, the ISO, like the other sections of the IST, welcomed the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and saw the 1990s as a decade of growth opportunities. Growth opportunities that they knew how to use: from around 150 in 1990, ISO membership skyrocketed to around 1,000, surpassing organizations like the American SWP or the Communist Party, both of which were once much stronger. Ahmed Shawki played an important role in this upswing of the ISO against the backdrop of a collapsing radical left.

In the 1990s, he regularly spoke at the SWP's 8,000.-strong "Marxism" congresses at the University of London, where I also had the opportunity to hear this great speaker several times. I will never forget Ahmed's incredibly energetic, albeit somehow dishevelled and yet charming and eccentric performances, wolfing down a pizza and smoking countless cigarettes before and after giving a speech on "China since Mao", delivered with sparkling eyes and a thundering voice

Shortly after Tony Cliff died and Alex Callinicos took his place in the leadership of the IST and the SWP in 2000, a conflict broke out between the

SWP and the ISO concerning their different positions vis-a-vis the anti-globalization movement. The conflict between the London headquarters and Chicago grew even sharper after Ahmed Shawki was accused of having forced the split of the "Internationalist Workers' Left" (DEA) from the Greek IST section, SEK. In 2001, Callinicos forced the expulsion of the ISO from the IST - against which I and several others in the German IST section, "Linksruck", unsuccessfully sought to resist. Splitting our International and expelling our second-most important section (and in the heart of the imperialist beast, no less!) right in the middle of the upswing of the anti-globalization movement due to petty disagreements struck us as an utterly grotesque manoeuvre.

This experience was one of the reasons why I and several others left the IST and Linksruck a few months later during a split caused by revelations of sexual harassment cases within the leadership of the organization, highlighting the obvious democracy deficit within the IST. The IST, which had grown to up to 30 sections in the 1990s, was massively damaged by the expulsion of the ISO and the splits in Linksruck, SEK and other sections. It would never fully recover from these blows.

As he now needed his own publishing house and conferences, Shawki founded Haymarket Books in 2001 and the Socialism conferences in 2002, which have been held in Chicago every year since. Additionally, he served as the editor of the International Socialist Review, with a wide readership beyond the ISO. Even after its expulsion from the IST, the ISO stayed loyal to its political roots, especially to its resolute anti-imperialism, which led to its resistance against the patriotic wave and the "War on Terror" after 9/11. At the same time, however, the group endeavoured to adopt a more open Marxism in comparison to the British SWP, integrating intersectionality and concepts taken from identity politics into its theory as well as political practice. When I attended an ISO meeting in Los Angeles in 2005, I was struck by how diverse the chapter was, led by gay, black, and brown people. Shawki's organization now

began to move towards the Fourth International, whose world congresses it attended as an observer. An internationalist with his whole heart, Shawki regularly travelled to Latin America, visited Egypt several times after the 2011 revolution to support the development of the Revolutionary Socialists and, together with DEA, accompanied the process of Syriza's rise and fall in Greece.

I met Ahmed Shawki several times in the 2010s while attending the Historical Materialism conferences in London and most recently at a "Marx-is-muss" conference in Berlin, where he laid out his critique of the lack of democracy in the SWP tradition to me in detail. This led to a deep crisis within the party in 2013, when the SWP Central Committee tried to cover up a rape allegation against a member of the leadership, failing to deal with it properly due to the lack of a culture of democracy within the organization. It is a bitter irony of history that this same mechanism would soon lead to the disintegration of Shawki's ISO.

The ISO adopted an increasingly defensive political stance in the second half of the 2010s, initially in response to Bernie Sanders's campaign and the subsequent growth of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), astronomical by US standards. While its strict rejection of activity within the US party system, with its polarization between Republicans and Democrats, and its insistence on the necessity of building a left completely independent from the Democrats had long been a condition of the ISO's success, sticking to this line under different political conditions increasingly became a hindrance. A growing number of members left the ISO and joined the DSA.

The crisis of his increasingly isolated organization pushed Shawki into a minority position within the ISO leadership for the first time. In 2019, a rape allegation against a member of the leadership became public, similar to the events within Linksruck in 2001 and the SWP in 2013. Trust in the leadership dwindled among the ISO membership, and a lack of strategic orientation eventually caused the newly elected majority to dissolve the

ISO following a survey of the members, who now either joined the DSA, withdrew into private life, grouped around the Tempest collective and magazine of the same name, or worked in local revolutionary groups.

Shawki and his long-time partner Sharon Smith (who had also been part of the ISO leadership for nearly 40 years) sought to continue their politics in the small "International Socialism Project". Shawki was hit hard by the cover-up allegations against his partner in particular, and by the self-destruction of his life's work, the ISO. His health was also in serious decline, not least as a result of his sometimes excessive consumption of alcohol and other drugs. Now, he has died.

With him, a giant among the dwarves of the US revolutionary left has

passed. While most of these organizations were crumbling, Shawki proved successful in carrying the tradition of a "socialism from below" and a vibrant organization into the 21st century - and bringing new generations of activists into contact with this version of Marxism.

Yet Shawki was also a tragic figure. For decades, he dedicated his life to the revival of socialism in the US and struggled tirelessly to prepare this revival politically and organizationally. But when new movements like BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo and the climate strikes came onto the scene and millions of young Americans got excited about democratic socialism and trade unions in the wake of the Sanders campaign, Shawki and his organization proved unable to relate to these developments productively.

Unable to escape decades of marginality, they were ultimately broken by them.

By the end of his life, Ahmed had lost almost everything: his party dissolved, his magazine closed, his publishing house and his conferences taken away from him, his reputation damaged by harassment allegations, his health ruined, his right leg amputated. And yet at least some of his work is likely to last for the decades to come. Thousands of American leftists were politically inspired by him. The successful Haymarket Books will continue to distribute Marxist literature, and the annual Socialism conferences (with 1,700 attendees and another 1,600 online last year) will continue to offer an important platform for debating the socialist ideas to which Ahmed Shawki dedicated his life.

## Daniel Pereyra, a Life Well Lived

9 March 2023, by **Jaime Pastor** , **Roberto Montoya**

On Viento Sur's behalf, we hope to pay him the tribute he deserves soon, but in another article recently published on our website, one of his closest friends and fellow fighters, Roberto Montoya, has reminded us of his first steps and his active participation in the process of building successive revolutionary organisations in his native Argentina and in Peru and his subsequent exile in Madrid after the triumph of the military dictatorship in his country.

Daniel Bensaïd in his memoirs, *Une lente impatience* (2004) [English translation: *An Impatient Life: A Memoir* Verso, 2014] gave testimony of how he met Ché Pereyra when he travelled to Argentina in 1973: there, he said, he found that "this former young metal worker was a legend (...). His unchanging joy, his courtesy, his humour, his chivalrous elegance, contributed not a little to winning our support for the orientation of armed struggle ". And indeed, part of that

legend, especially his harsh Peruvian experience, has later been reflected in films, books, such as *Avisa los compañeros*, pronto [Warn the compañeros quickly], and other works.

Some members of the editorial staff and Board of this magazine met him later, together with his partner Juanita, when he arrived in Madrid in 1978 and immediately joined the activities of the Liga Comunista Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Communist League/ LCR), willing to assume any type of task, such as the one that he took on arranging the logistics for our 5th Congress, held in Madrid a few months later. Since then, he has participated in the activities of this organisation, always with his own political opinions and, more than once, freely expressing his differences with the decisions that were made, as for example, regarding the unification process with the Movimiento Comunista [Communist Movement/MC] as recounted in his

Memoirs. [25]

Besides his Memoirs, Daniel authored other works, amongst them: *Del Moncada a Chiapas. Historia de la lucha armada en América Latina* (1994 y 1996), *Argentina rebelde* (2003), *Mercenarios* (2007), *Che, Revolucionario sin fronteras* (2017) and with Roberto Montoya, *El caso Pinochet y la impunidad en América Latina* (2000). He also wrote a long list of articles in different magazines and media. Among them, by the way, a harsh criticism under his pseudonym Luis Alonso in 1984 of *Historia de Mayta* [published in English as *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta*], by Mario Vargas Llosa, an anti-Trotskyist pamphlet that, according to him, gave Kremlin propaganda little to envy. Probably one of his last published articles was one that appeared in special number 150 of Viento Sur. In it, one can see his concern for taking stock of the different experiences he had gone through in the Spanish State

and attempting to contribute some ideas to a "party-movement" project in which the political and the organisational were always closely intertwined.

We also know that he was writing some notes in which he tried to draw lessons from the experience of armed struggle in Latin America during the 1960s, 1970s and later.

The description that Daniel Bensaïd gave of Ché Pereyra when he met him in Madrid after a long time sums up his mood very well: "As dynamic and joyful as ever, he has gone through the depressing post-Franco years without giving up, attentive to the slightest regrowth of hope, faithful to his commitments, to his colleagues and to his dead." Daniel "el Gallego" [the Galician] was, in short, a great friend of his friends from very different generations, always kind and respectful of other opinions, far from sectarian, and open to what might seem heterodox at first glance, but seeing that it could be impregnated with a subversive, revolutionary and prefiguring potential of a communism worthy of the name.

As the poet Miquel Martí i Pol wrote in his *Lletra a Dolors*, it will be difficult for us to imagine that he will be absent forever, but there are so many memories that he gave to us and those memories demand that we always remain faithful to his legacy.

*Jaime Pastor*

*February 10, 2023*

Translated by David Fagan from [Viento Sur](#).

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## A Consistent Internationalist Militant

**He was born Daniel Pereyra Pérez, however, like the majority of revolutionary militants, he was known by other names.**

In the Peru of the 1960s, the media called him "Che Pereyra." He was Argentine and, like Che, had gone to another country in solidarity with other comrades to provide armed support to the peasant guerrilla led by Hugo Blanco. There he was captured, tortured and imprisoned in the El Frontón high security prison, located on an island. In his militant work in Argentina, he used the alias Alonso, both in the first political formations in which he participated and when he did so in the founding of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores-El Combatiente (Revolutionary Workers' Party-The Fighter / PRT-EC) and later when he broke with them to create the Grupo Obrero Revolucionario (Revolutionary Workers Group/ GOR).

Daniel was born just ten years after the October Revolution and it marked him from an early age. When he was only three years old, Argentina experienced one of the many bloody military coups that the country has suffered, this one led by Generals Uriburu and Justo that ended the democratic government of President Irigoyen.

The son of a woman who cleaned other people's houses and of a father who became unemployed after the crisis of 1929, whom Daniel lost when he was very young, he dropped out of secondary school at the age of 17 to work in order to survive. He first worked as an apprentice in a printing house; then in metallurgical factories where he was elected union delegate by his colleagues. It was at this time he became involved in politics; he joined the GOM (Grupo Obrero Marxista / Marxist Workers Group) and began to devour books on Marxism and to read Marx, Lenin, Trotsky.

From those years until February 6, 2023, he never stopped being a militant, it was such an essential part of his life. He died at the age of 95 in a residence for the elderly on the outskirts of Madrid, proudly claiming to have been part of the Fourth International, and to continuing to be a militant of Anticapitalistas and a member of the Advisory Council of Viento Sur.

There were many acronyms that revolutionary Marxism adopted in

those first decades of its militancy in the 40s: GOM, Partido Obrero Revolucionario (Revolutionary Workers Party) Trotskyist Revolutionary Socialism, Política Obrera (Workers' Politics.) He was strongly marked by the presence of Spanish Republicans who arrived in Argentina fleeing the Spanish Civil War. Daniel lived under the governments of Juan Domingo Perón whilst in the ranks of the GOM with 'Nahuel Moreno' (Hugo Bresano), and would recognise years later the sectarian position he took himself against Peronism, attacking it with the same fierceness that he attacked those who ended up overthrowing Peronism in 1955 with a bloody civil-military coup supported by the Catholic Church and the United States.

Shortly after, the POR (Partido Obrero Revolucionario), successor to the GOM, made a self-criticism of its serious error and entered Peronism through a front, the Movimiento de Agrupaciones Obreras (Movement of Workers Groups/MAO), it created to include different trade union associations opposed to the dictatorship but also opposed to the Peronist bureaucracy.

During those years, Daniel met Juana Perelstein, Juanita, who would become his compañera for life. Juanita was a member of the Socialist Party and daughter of a communist, and they began living together that same year. A year later they would have their only son, Carlos.

In his Memoirs, Daniel also recognised the sectarian vision, the new serious mistake committed in 1959 by the Morenista formation of which he was a part, Palabra Obrera, in the face of the triumphant Cuban revolution. A year after that triumph that would cause a shock throughout Latin America and the Caribbean and that would change the world geopolitical scenario, Palabra Obrera continued to characterise Fidel Castro as a "puppet of the United States." However, Daniel reminds us in his Memoirs, shortly after there was a sudden change in characterisation and he went on to support the new Cuban regime and also the armed struggle.

While the organisation decided to



create a first military team led by Vasco Bengoechea, who trained with other comrades in Cuba, Daniel Pereyra was assigned the task of leading a small group to travel to Peru and support the Peruvian sister party the Partido Obrero Revolucionario-Frente de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Workers Party-Revolutionary Left Front/ POR-FIR), through bank expropriations to raise funds and other military operations.

After an operation at a bank in Lima that ended in a shootout, Daniel and other participants were arrested. They would spend five years in jail before being able to return to Argentina in 1967. Hugo Blanco was also arrested in 1963.

By the time Pereyra returned to Argentina with his compañeros, the political differences with Nahuel Moreno had grown greater. Moreno came to use the Peruvian press as a channel to attack Pereyra. "Pereyra is a madman and an adventurer (...) It was Pereyra who coordinated the assault and the revolutionary plans," he wrote in Lima newspaper La Prensa on May 29, 1962, distancing himself from a plan that had been approved by the Political Bureau of Palabra Obrera.

In 1964, Vasco Bengoechea had already separated from the organisation to form the FARN (Fuerzas Armadas de la Revolución Nacional/Armed Forces of the National Revolution) after a hard debate in a party meeting. A few months later he would die when a bomb that he was handling exploded in an apartment in Buenos Aires.

The political situation had changed in Argentina by the time Pereyra and his compañeros arrived back from Peru. In 1965 Palabra Obrera had begun a process of discussion and cooperation with the FRIP (Frente Revolucionario Indoamericano Popular / Popular Indo-American Revolutionary Front) founded in 1959 by Mario Santucho, centered mainly in the northern provinces of Santiago del Estero and Tucumán. In May of that year, the first unified congress of the two organisations had been held, thus giving birth to the PRT (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores /

Revolutionary Workers' Party).

A year later, a second congress of the new organisation took place, which approved joining the Fourth International, although already at that moment important differences could be perceived between the two merged groups. While Santucho described the situation in the sugar mills of Tucumán as a pre-revolutionary one, Moreno maintained that it was neither insurrectionary nor pre-revolutionary. That same year there was a new coup, led by General Onganía, who overthrew the government of Humberto Illia, of the UCR (Radical Civic Union), the main opposition party to Peronism.

The Morenistas managed to impose their stamp on the third congress of the PRT, rejecting the intention of the Santucho supporters to launch a mobile guerrilla column in Tucumán and exclusively approving certain defensive actions. From that time the coexistence of the two internal currents became more and more difficult and in 1968, when the IV party congress took place, the differences on the characterisation of the stage and the priority tasks sharpened and the rupture took place between the PRT-La Verdad (The Truth, newspaper of that current) headed by Nahuel Moreno, and the PRT-El Combatiente (The Fighter, newspaper of that group), led by Mario Santucho, with whom Daniel Pereyra and the majority of the party aligned themselves.

In that congress, Leon Trotsky, Che, the Vietnamese Nguyen Van Troi and Ángel Vasco Bengoechea, were elected honorary presidents and a substantial turn was given to the party's strategy, focused fundamentally on "preparing and starting the partial armed struggle linked to the labour movement throughout the country." At that time, the "creation of an army in the countryside and promoting the urban guerrilla" was proposed, and the idea of creating the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP/Revolutionary Army of the People) began to take shape.

In 1969 PRT commandos participated in the massive popular uprisings that took place in the provinces of Córdoba

and Rosario, occupying a radio station to broadcast communiqués and storming a police post from which they took weapons. That same year, Pereyra traveled to the Italian city of Rimini to attend the 9th Congress of the IV International as a delegate of the PRT-El Combatiente, where this organisation received formal recognition as an official section, thanks to the support of the majority sector represented by Ernest Mandel, Pierre Frank, Livio Maitan and others. The representatives of the PRT-La Verdad and the Socialist Workers Party of the United States were against this decision and the resolution approved in that congress in support of the armed struggle in Latin America.

The divisions did not stop there and that same year internal differences in the PRT-El Combatiente deepened when Mario Santucho, head of the Military Committee, presented a broad plan of military activities throughout the country, a plan that a sector of the party, which included Pereyra, considered disproportionate to the level of consciousness and struggle that the workers showed at that time. In his memoirs, Daniel criticises the manoeuvres carried out by Santucho to prevent the opposition from hindering his plans. These included the convening of the 5th party congress on an island in the Paraná River in July 1970 without notifying the opposition which had previously presented an alternate document. In that congress, the creation of the ERP was formally decided and a very broad plan of military operations in different regions of Argentina was approved to publicise the fact.

In 1971 the sectors critical of this new stage of the party decided to leave: Pereyra, heading a group that would end up forming the GOR; another group, led by a member of the Central Committee, Eduardo Urretavizcaya, would form the Orientación Socialista-Fuerza Obrera Comunista (Socialist Orientation-Communist Workers Force) and a third, led by Horacio Lagar, Sergio Domecq, Oscar Prada and others, Sindicalistas-Milicia Obrera (Syndicalists-Workers Militia.) "The difference", Pereyra would say, "was that they were constituting an army. Ours was an accumulation of

forces in accordance with the march of the class struggle and the partisan forces (...) We understood armed struggle as a phenomenon of support for the labour movement and resistance”.

In 1972 the PRT-ERP suffered another split, the PRT-22 de Agosto, which moved closer to leftist Peronism, and in 1973 that of the Red Fraction of the PRT-ERP, whose leadership I was part of, which obtained the support of the Fourth International, with which the Santucho leadership had broken.

In 1975, in circumstances of full repression by the Government of Isabel Martínez de Perón and her Triple A parapolice, the GOR said: “We assume and promote the armed struggle to defend the organisation and contribute to the defense and development of workers’ and popular struggles. It is not about supplanting the action of the masses or exercising any kind of paternalism”.

The GOR, like all left-wing organisations, would suffer from General Videla’s new coup d’état of 1976. Under the lashes of a repression unknown up to that moment in the country, the lives of 30,000 “disappeared” ended and the class-struggle trade union currents and all

kinds of resistance were destroyed. After the arrests and assassinations of GOR leaders and militants in 1978, what was left of the leadership decided to embark on the path of exile.

Daniel arrived with Juanita in Madrid in July 1978, leaving everything behind, as so many thousands had done in recent years, and beginning a new life in those turbulent years of the transition to democracy in Spain, only three years after the death of Franco.

Both began to organise their new life and immediately joined the ranks of the sister organisation in the Spanish State, the LCR (Revolutionary Communist League).

Despite the heartbreak suffered and the impotence before the daily news of the scope of the repression in Argentina, both found -as we found others- their political family, an immense solidarity, camaraderie and friendship with compañeros and compañeras, which allowed for a rapid integration .

Juanita died in 2016 and Daniel, despite being ill since 2008 and with increasing mobility problems, did not stop being a militant, first in the LCR and later in its successor

organisations, Espacio Alternativo (Alternative Space) from 1994, Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anticapitalist Left) since 2008 and Anticapitalistas (Anticapitalists) since 2015. He was part of the Advisory Council of Viento Sur, where he published numerous articles.

Daniel collaborated with different newspapers and magazines in the Spanish State and also published several books, including *Del Moncada a Chiapas* (1994), one written with myself, *El caso Pinochet y la impunidad en América Latina* (2000); *Argentina rebelde* (2003) and *Mercenarios, guerreros del imperio* (2007).

His autobiography, *Memorias de un militante internacionalista* (2014), summarises in its very title what Daniel Pereyra was: a class-conscious internationalist revolutionary militant from a very young age, consistent, coherent until the end of his days.

Rest in peace dear compañero and friend, goodbye Gallego.

*Roberto Montoya*

9 February 2023

Translated by David Fagan from **Viento Sur**.

## Arend van de Poel 1948-2023

16 January 2023, by **Herman Pieterse**

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On 21 August 1968. Warsaw Pact tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia to end an experiment in democratic reform. That same afternoon, twenty members of the Socialist Youth (SJ) stood on the Dam Square in Amsterdam with protest signs, flags and a banner. That same evening on the front page of *Het Parool* there was a picture with Arend van de Poel,

among others.

On 4 January 2023, I received the news that Arend had died. I had feared it; he had been in a coma in hospital for some time. The last time I spoke to him was on 15 December at a book launch at the IIRE. His foot had been ailing lately, but he was in good spirits, he was feeling a bit better.

The first time I spoke to Arend was at a meeting of the SJ in late 1966. Like me, he had joined the SJ, the independent left-socialist youth

organisation of the time. After that, we saw each other more and more often. He also lived in Amsterdam West, and together we joined the leadership of the branch. Arend came from a dissident communist nest, with ties to the ‘Bridge Group’, later the Socialist Workers Party – a group that had left the Communist Party in the late fifties. In the autumn of 1968, *Esjée*, the SJ’s magazine, published an article by Arend about the Scholieren Kern Groep. Many students from his high school would become members of our branch. When the SJ-leadership

wanted to abandon the course towards a new revolutionary socialist party, Arend was part of the emerging opposition. At a chaotic congress in September 1969 we were expelled from the SJ. Together with others, we formed Revolte, first as a federation, later with the title 'revolutionary communist youth organisation'. Arend was active in the Amsterdam branch and in its daily leadership. The speed at which he cycled through Amsterdam was legendary.

Arend was also the one who read the most books of all of us, and certainly on a wider range of subjects, from Nordic Sagas to Ben Traven, from classical Russians to modern English. And from Luxemburg to Mao. Not surprisingly, his party name in the 1970s was Wieland.

For some time, Arend had also been a member of the left-socialist Pacifist Socialist Party. When inside PSP the action group Proletaries Links (PL) was formed, he joined it. Active both through Revolte and PL, he contributed to the creation of a new united section of the Fourth International in 1972, the Revolutionaire Communistenbond. The RCB merged with PL in the formation of the IKB (Internationale Kommunisten Bond - International Communist League) in 1974. Going forward, he wrote for its magazines and held various positions in the Amsterdam branch.

Arend van de Poel was above all a rock-solid and reliable party-activist.

Not one for hyper-activism, on the contrary. If things got too busy for him, he sometimes took a time out. Then he always came back. But if, for understandable reasons, there was some resistance to our fast pace, he didn't think you had to have a different policy because of it.

In recent years, I saw him less often. Arend remained a member of Grenzeloos, I did not. He became the librarian of the IIRE. There we still spoke to each other regularly. Always in broad agreement when it came to the broader view of the world, Arend always equally sharp and erudite. He had an almost British kind of humour. We know we will always miss that now.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from **Grenzeloos**.*

## Netherlands - Maurice Ferares (1922-2022) always in resistance

23 December 2022, by **Alex de Jong**

### When Dutch Workers Took a Stand Against Nazi Genocide

*On this day in 1941, Dutch workers went on strike in solidarity with Jews facing Nazi persecution. Maurice Ferares is one of the strike's last surviving organizers, and his life of activism links him to some of the last century's great political struggles.*

The Dutch Jewish socialist Maurice Ferares turned a hundred in January this year. Ferares is one of the last surviving participants of the famous Amsterdam strike against the Nazi persecution of the Jews in February 1941. The story of his life links us to a whole world of political struggle in the European workers' movement of the last century, from the fight against Nazism to solidarity with anti-colonial

revolutions in the Global South.

Ferares was born into a poor Jewish family during the interwar years. His father was a shoemaker whose workshop took up part of the small family home, and Ferares shared a room with his parents until he was eighteen. They wanted the young Ferares to become a professional musician, hoping that it would offer him an escape route from poverty. When his friends were playing soccer or watching movies, Ferares had to practice the violin.

His father also made him attend a Jewish religious school, which opened connections to wealthier members of the Jewish community. His father hoped that this would enable him to continue his studies, and Ferares did eventually receive a scholarship from a Jewish association.

At the age of sixteen, Ferares took his conservatory exam. His parents now

envisaged a successful career for their son. However, in May 1940, Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands, sending his life onto a different path.

### Joining the Resistance

Ferares had grown up among socialists and communists and heard stories about Nazism from German refugees. "After Trotsky's exile and the Moscow trials, my father felt no sympathy for Stalin's movement," he recalled. Still, every week his father would donate a few pennies to "Uncle Guus," a German communist making his rounds to collect money for the International Red Aid, an organization that helped victims of political persecution. One day, Uncle Guus stopped coming: the Dutch police had deported him back to Nazi Germany.

A few months after the occupation

began, Ferares was asked to give violin lessons to a friend of a friend from music school, the artist Cor Winkel, who would paint his portrait in lieu of payment. Winkel was a member of the underground Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN), which had begun to publish illegal leaflets and agitate among Dutch workers.

In the early stages of the war, with the Hitler-Stalin pact still in place, the CPN leadership insisted that the war was between two imperialist camps and the working class should remain “strictly neutral.” However, the experience of the occupation meant that opposition to the Nazis became the central issue in practice for many Communists.

After he had showed his reliability by doing some small jobs for the party, the CPN invited Ferares to join. He did not need much convincing. The Nazis had already introduced the first antisemitic measures, such as banning Jews from all public functions. The members of his party cell included Cor Winkel, as well as the friend who had introduced him to Winkel, a hairdresser, and a young nurse called Tinie.

Unlike the others, Tinie did not survive the war. Ferares did not know much about her, her reasons for joining the party, or even if Tinie was her real name: “You did not ask your comrades in the underground such questions.” One afternoon, Tinie was caught putting up CPN posters with another comrade called Joop. Two police officers arrested Joop but initially let Tinie go.

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*The combination of direct Nazi rule, an efficient state bureaucracy, and Dutch security forces that for the most part loyally carried out the orders of their new masters, made the Netherlands an extremely dangerous place for Jews.*

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She decided she could not abandon her comrade and threw the can filled with glue at the cops. They were startled, perhaps thinking that Tinie had thrown a grenade, and Joop was able to escape. Unfortunately, Tinie tripped while running away and was captured. As Ferares remembered: “We quickly learned where she was imprisoned and that she was terribly abused. She never said anything about our activities and did not disclose our names or identities.” The Nazis executed her in prison.

The occupiers had put the Netherlands under the direct control of a governor, instead of ruling through a collaborationist regime like Vichy France. The combination of direct rule, an efficient state bureaucracy, and Dutch security forces that for the most part loyally carried out the orders of their new masters, made the Netherlands an extremely dangerous place for Jews. Only a quarter of Dutch Jews would survive the war — a much smaller proportion than in Belgium or France.

The flat, unforested, and densely populated landscape also did not offer many opportunities for sanctuary or guerrilla combat. Yet people still engaged in various forms of resistance. At some point during the occupation, more than three hundred thousand people went into hiding from the Nazis, including Jews, political activists, and people avoiding forced labor in Germany. These *onderduikers* (hideaways) needed shelter, food, ration cards, and other kinds of support.

As Ferares put it:

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*Especially at the beginning, the possibilities for armed resistance were very limited. Spreading information through pamphlets and illegal journals and calling for passive resistance and strengthening of morale*

*in opposition to the continuous German intimidation were the main forms of resistance, in addition to aiding people in hiding and the families of victims.*

As well as distributing illegal pamphlets, Ferares stole ration cards so people in hiding could obtain food and helped forge official papers, becoming in his own words “a skilled burglar and con man.”

## The Amsterdam Strike

The CPN’s underground activities played a key role in the **strike of February 25-26, 1941**. Dutch Nazis were becoming increasingly violent under German protection, marching through Jewish neighborhoods and left-wing strongholds. They attacked Jews in the streets, threw them off public transport, or broke into their homes and stole their possessions. Tensions were especially high in Amsterdam, with its large Jewish community.

In his history of the Dutch Jews under the occupation, Ondergang, **Jacques Presser** identified two important developments. First of all, Jews began organizing to defend themselves in fighting groups. They mostly came from humble backgrounds, “small merchants, peddlers, vendors, working people.” Secondly, as Presser wrote, they received support from “non-Jewish Dutch people with a similar social background.” People drew on existing social connections, such as the membership of the Jewish boxing club Maccabi.

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*Jewish self-defense groups met attempts at violent intimidation with resistance, beating up Nazis, and sometimes throwing them into Amsterdam’s canals.*



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These self-defense groups met attempts at violent intimidation with resistance, beating up Nazis, and sometimes throwing them into Amsterdam's canals. A particularly fierce clash took place on February 11, 1941, and one Dutch Nazi was killed. The occupation forces retaliated by arresting scores of Jewish citizens and indiscriminately assaulting people who were thought to be Jewish.

Several groups suggested that workers should go on strike in solidarity with the Jews. The underground Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg-Front, the continuation of **Henk Sneevliet's** Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party, circulated a pamphlet celebrating the resistance to antisemitic violence and calling for a strike. The CPN leadership also concluded that conditions were ripe for action. Roughly twelve hundred of the party's two thousand underground members lived in Amsterdam.

On February 25, Communist activists addressed a meeting of municipal workers, and the combative atmosphere convinced local party members that now was the time. That evening, the party produced a leaflet with a headline that would become iconic: **"Strike! Strike! Strike!"**

The Communists themselves were surprised by the rapid response to their call, as protest spread through the city. When local police attempted to disperse the crowds, people responded by throwing stones. Ferares and his comrades joined groups that forced trams to stop and overturned the cars to block the lines.

The authorities mobilized German forces to smash the strike. They opened fire on the crowds and threw hand grenades, killing at least thirteen people on the evening of February 26 and wounding dozens more. The repression effectively broke the strike, and there was a renewed hunt for Communists and other left-wing activists in the aftermath.

Carrying on with his musical studies

was hardly a priority for Ferares at the time, and in any case, the Nazis excluded all Jewish students in the early months of 1942. With persecution of the Jews intensifying, Ferares decided that he needed to go into hiding. That very day, July 15, 1942, saw the first deportation of 1,137 Jews from the Netherlands for the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

It was only after liberation that Ferares discovered the Nazis had murdered his entire family during the war. Every day he checked the lists of those whose deaths had now been confirmed, until eventually, he found the names of his relatives there.

## Restoring the Empire

By his own account, Ferares was a "Stalinist through and through" during the war. He followed the party line, defending the Hitler-Stalin pact and the later dissolution of the Communist International by Stalin in 1943 as clever tricks in the class war.

He knew that there were other left-wing radicals who took different positions. A member of the Trotskyist **Committee of Revolutionary Marxists**, a continuation of the Marx-Lenin-Luxemburg-Front, had provided with him false papers. According to Ferares, he appreciated the solidarity, but continued to see the repression of Trotskyists and other dissidents in the Soviet Union as a tragic necessity.

There was a general sense among CPN members, he recalled, that there might be a revolutionary eruption in Europe after World War II, just as there had been after the 1914-18 conflict. But they did not spend much time pondering such questions:

*We had only vague ideas of what the post-war government should look like, and neither did we know how the workers could take power. We did not pause to think about this. First, the fascists needed to be beaten.*

But party publications seemed more interested in maintaining an alliance with what they called the "democratic bourgeoisie" than in propagating anti-capitalist revolution. Ferares was even more concerned when Stalin delayed the advance of the Red Army outside Warsaw in July 1944, enabling the Nazis to crush the city's uprising: "Was this not a betrayal of the Polish peasants and workers?"

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*After the German surrender, there was unprecedented goodwill toward the Communist Party of the Netherlands because of the bravery shown by many of its members during the occupation.*

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After the German surrender in May 1945, there was unprecedented goodwill toward the CPN because of the bravery shown by many of its members during the occupation. The party leadership hoped it could now play a more prominent role in Dutch parliamentary politics. But preserving the wartime popular front required the Communists to sacrifice central points of their program so as not to repel their liberal allies.

In the Dutch case, one central issue was imperialism. On August 17, 1945, the Indonesian leaders Mohammad Hatta and Sukarno declared an independent Indonesian Republic after centuries of colonial rule. But the Dutch government went to war in a bid to retain control over the archipelago and would not recognize Indonesian independence until the end of 1949.

Dutch troops burned down villages, **tortured** and executed prisoners, and carried out **massacres** of **civilians**. This colonial war killed more than a hundred thousand Indonesians by the most conservative estimates, with many more dying as a result of hunger and disease.

The social democrats of the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) were part of the government coalition **throughout the war**, despite having pledged never to support colonial warfare in 1946. The PvdA leader Willem Drees served as prime minister after August 1948. The party leadership shut down attempts to organize resistance to the war among its members, and thousands left the party.

For its part, while the Communist Party opposed Dutch military operations in Indonesia, it refrained from calling for independence, fretting instead about “disastrous” developments that could lead to a **“complete loss of Indonesia.”** The party called for a commonwealth between Indonesia and the Netherlands instead of separation. The party newspaper even carried recruitment ads for Dutch forces in Indonesia.

Ferares criticized this retreat from traditional anti-colonial positions at a meeting of Amsterdam party activists. In response, the CPN leader Paul De Groot branded him as a fascist, despite his five years of dangerous underground work. This prompted him to leave the party.

## Networks of Solidarity

Soon afterward, Ferares joined the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), a Trotskyist group that developed from the Committee of Revolutionary Marxists. The RCP was a small organization, with a couple of hundred members at most, but it was the only party to unconditionally support Indonesian independence.

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*In September 1946, thousands of Dutch workers joined a spontaneous strike against the dispatch of soldiers to Indonesia.*

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A poll conducted in July 1946 revealed that more than 40 percent of the population opposed sending troops to Indonesia. The following month, large protests broke out in Amsterdam, and the police responded with violence, killing one demonstrator. In September of that year, thousands of workers joined a spontaneous strike against the dispatch of soldiers.

The RCP hoped to attract disappointed social democrats and communists, but it was too small to seem like a realistic alternative. Ferares ran unsuccessfully as an election candidate, but the RCP never came close to winning any seats. He had more success as a trade unionist, becoming the secretary of the Dutch musicians’ union in 1956.

Ferares found one of his early tasks as secretary very painful. Striking Hollywood musicians contacted the union to ask their Dutch colleagues to boycott a film that was being shot in Amsterdam: *The Diary of Anne Frank*. As Ferares put it: “No Dutch musician was involved in making it. But you can understand how difficult this was for me.”

In the late 1950s, Ferrares welcomed the Greek Trotskyist leader **Michel Raptis** — better known as Michel Pablo — and his wife Hélène in his home. Raptis had helped organize a network of support for the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) when the main French left-wing parties opposed Algerian independence. The network helped raise money and distribute the FLN’s underground publication in France.

Its members were also involved in **smuggling papers, money, and sometimes weapons**. Pablo arranged for left-wing activists with relevant skills to go to Morocco, where they produced arms for the FLN in secret factories. Ferares said that some of his Dutch comrades were involved, although he described his own contribution to this effort as “nothing

more than office work.”

## A Player in the Orchestra

Ferares remained active in solidarity work over subsequent years, organizing support for anti-colonial struggles in countries like Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. He carried on as secretary of his trade union until he was seventy, and still edited its publication after stepping down. In 1991, he published a memoir of his wartime years with the title *A Violin Player in the Resistance*, and also wrote novels and poetry, often inspired by the events of his own life, as well as another nonfiction book, a critical study of the Dutch left and the Indonesian independence struggle.

A 1976 Dutch intelligence report described Ferares as someone who had been unable to find much support for his Trotskyist ideas, but whose continuous activity “allows him to play his own part in the orchestra of the Dutch radical left.” The struggle against colonialism and all its legacies remained central to his political engagement. He spoke out in favor of Palestinian self-determination, calling for a single, democratic state with equal rights for all, and denouncing Israel as an apartheid regime.

Late in life, he was still active as a member of the **Komite Utang Kehormatan Belanda** (Dutch Debt of Honor Committee). This is an organization that has fought with some **success** for legal recognition of, and **compensation** for, the crimes of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia.

Looking back on his life, Ferares said that he “never regretted my activities in the past, but I do regret sometimes how comrades fought each other — the sectarian behavior, the name-calling that accompanied conflicts.” It was his wartime years that had left him “deeply scarred . . . my political activities cannot be separated from that.” He always remembered the victims of Nazism: “I was able to save my skin and every day, I steal a day from Hitler by staying alive.”

# In memory of Göte Kildén (Sweden)

8 December 2022, by **Eva Nikell, Gus Kaage**

## Goodbye Göte, friend and comrade!

Today I received the news that my friend Göte Kildén had passed away. So sad. I looked forward to Göte starting work at Volvo trucks with great anticipation, I believe it was in 1978. After high school and a short period of military service in Östersund, I myself had started working the second shift in the assembly factory in August 1977.

I didn't know Göte then, I had perhaps met him fleetingly in the socialist movement, but he was surrounded by a sort of air for me: a journalist at the newspaper *Internationalen*, an agitator of rank in a way that cannot be found today, an ardent anti-Stalinist, one of the founders of today's Socialist Politics (SP) during the late 1960s, diligent in the debates around employee funds, Stalinism, the environmental and nuclear power issue and with a broad international outlook.

One of the rare wild strikes at Volvo broke out during the same week that Göte started working at Volvo Lastvagnars' factory in Lundby. One memory is a photo where Göte was one of the first in line to get through the factory gates at Torslandaverken, in order to get the metal workers there to participate in the strike. The main issue was, of course, the salary, but the conditions with assembly lines, time study workers, tightly bound jobs, poor working environment were also relevant, among other issues.

In Metall (the trade union for the metal workers), the Social Democrats had an almost total hegemony. If you didn't have the right party book, you wouldn't be elected. Top-down management was almost total.

Members were seldom consulted. The contract negotiations were concluded through a sort of "win-win-method" with the company management. Finding out who became the winner of the Metall members and P G Gyllenhammar (CEO and chairman of Volvo) was not so difficult to calculate.

At Volvo, a Trade Union Opposition (Facklig opposition) arose in the mid-1970s. It was partly a collaboration of the motley left-wing groups which flourished at the time. But above all, the opposition was a movement with growing support among colleagues within the trade union. Facklig Opposition acted for fighting and democratic unions, for the agreements to be based on voting, for a more radical orientation in terms of working environment, emissions, attrition, for trade union skills and members' support to weigh more heavily than the party book. And with an outward look both at striking seamstresses who wanted to defend their jobs as well as union activists who suffered from the dictatorships in Latin America or the Eastern Bloc. Facklig opposition grew and challenged the Social Democrats within the Volvo Workshop Club, the largest in the country, with tens of thousands of members. Despite various bureaucratic loopholes and real obstacles, the Facklig Opposition managed to reach over 48 percent in the club election in 1979. This was an accomplishment with a ballot containing all the names, with possibility to erase, against a party ballot.

Facklig Opposition was voted in at the Lundby factory trade union for a couple of decades and within Group board number 11 (where I was the secretary) for around 10 years. One of the leading forces at Lundby was Göte, the truck driver, who was elected chairman.

The combination of agitator and

journalist made it possible for Göte to write flyers with headings such as "Gold in the 5-mile race (ski competition) - at the bottom of the wage league". On Sunday, I guess that Thomas Wassberg had sprinted to the gold, which all his colleagues saw from the TV sofas, but there was far from any gold in their wallets.

Within SP, we met in debates at countless conferences. Most of the time we agreed, but sometimes disagreed. It was stimulating, but I was probably "a quiet Benjamin" against the agitator when he entered the pulpit. And what a fervor there was during the organizing around the People's Campaign against nuclear power, against the Directors' March (4th of October), Barsebäck and all other questions.

So many memories appear when one loses a friend. Such a foodie and a good cook. Crayfish parties with the Volvo gang in the house. Conversations, both live and during recent years mostly by phone. We had long conversations, about our families, children and grandchildren, about literature and film. About his grief for his wife Karin, who he was not living together with after retirement. About the development in politics which he followed on a detailed level and had clear opinions about. During the last years, Göte also joined the Left Party (Vänsterpartiet), but was prevented from participating actively due to various ailments.

My thoughts are with Göte's children and family.

Gus Kaage

## The first editor of *Internationalen*

Göte Kildén was the first editor of the weekly magazine *Internationalen*. The

magazine has been published weekly since 1974. It was not easy to publish a weekly magazine where the editorial board demanded high quality, due to small economic resources. I know through my own experiences, as the magazine's editor from 1989 to 1993.

Göte was not a trained journalist, but he knew how to write. This was useful for him later on during life when he was commissioned to write the history of the Gothenburg area of Hisingen. But above all, Göte had the ability to analyze and tell a story so that people in general understood.

Göte and I went together on an electoral tour to the North of Sweden

in 1976. On the train to Kiruna, I remember Göte citing Mayakovsky's "A cloud in trousers", and he had the idea that one should not be too smartly dressed at electoral meetings in a proletarian town such as Kiruna. I myself was skeptical, having experienced that poor people, like my own mother, thought it was important to be well dressed when doing something important. And electoral meetings were important.

It is amusing to think about which anecdotal images that sometimes stay in one's memory. Many people have memories of Göte Kildén from Volvo or from other party activities. Personally, I mostly remember him writing. And

the brilliant speech he gave in the autumn of 2019 when the Association of Socialist Politics (SP) was finally formed, after fifty years of party building. A speech that did not in the least breathe resignation or loss, but looked to the future with confidence.

For Göte Kildén, a party or a newspaper was not an end in itself but a tool in the constant struggle for an equal and just society, regardless of designation.

Eva Nikell

For more memories see the Facebook page [Remembering Göte Kildén](#)

# The Political Importance of Mike Davis

2 November 2022, by **Phil Hearse**

For the Left internationally, Reagan was a brutal enemy; overseer of US intervention which drowned the El Salvador revolution in blood and destabilised the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua with 'contra' terrorism; author of the 'Star Wars' nuclear weapons systems and the new cruise missiles aimed at the Soviet Union; the President who had authorised the imprisonment of the striking PATCO air traffic controllers; and together with Margaret Thatcher, enabled a new wave of capitalist economics that would ultimately crystallise as neoliberalism.

The huge demonstration is not much remembered, perhaps because CND's demonstrations against the missiles a couple of years later were much bigger, up to 400,000. Mike used this occasion for a new round of theorising. He was one of the few authors on the Left who linked the nuclear confrontation of the superpowers to imperialism. He helped edit a Verso collection called [Exterminism and Cold War](#). The debate was initiated by the Marxist historian E.P. Thompson, who argued that the nuclear confrontation

between the East and West had established a new world system that he called "Exterminism." For him, this military-nuclear system had escaped rational control and had its own logic, which led to war. Thompson helped start European Nuclear Disarmament (END), an offshoot of CND that called for the East and West to be disarmed and for an area from the Atlantic to the Urals to be free of nuclear weapons. Mike wrote a keynote article on "nuclear imperialism," which argued for the imperialist origins of the Cold War and the "nuclear umbrella" under which America organised its military interventions worldwide. And he pointed out that when the United States had come closest to using nuclear weapons, it was against revolutionary and nationalist victories in the Global South. For example, the plan to use nuclear bombardment to relieve the French armies at Dien Bien Phu, the US retreat from the Cochín reservoir in Korea, the siege of Khe San in Vietnam and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

Mike was from a working-class background, starting out as a meat

cutter and truck driver, and came to left politics through militant trade unionism, not academia. He attempted in his first major book, [Prisoners of the American Dream](#), to answer the question that Marxists had long wrestled with-how does the American capitalist class retain its dominance? How come there is no US labour party independent of the capitalist class? [26]

He showed, with copious evidence, that American capitalism had been sustained by both brutal and repeated class-struggle violence and pernicious division. As each new wave of migrants arrived from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries, the already established national groups were mobilised to defend their position with brutal division—English against Irish, Germans against Irish, and white against black. [27] As the different white immigrants became more integrated, the legacy of slavery-anti-black racism persisted, causing massive historic obstacles to class unity. Racism in the South underpinned the Dixicrats and then the Republicans. Trump and Trumpism would have been



inconceivable without this racist underpinning, still going strong in the furious reaction to Black Lives Matter and the battle over “critical race theory.”

Mike’s last book, *Set the Night on Fire*, shows how the 1960s Californian left was centrally involved in the struggle against racism, and in particular the ‘freedom buses’ that travelled through southern states, breaching segregation laws and getting brutalised by the forces of “law and order.” Black members of the Communist Party in Los Angeles were heavily involved in building support for this work and in riding the buses. Angela Davis’s (no relation) transition from the Black Panthers to the Communist Party would have been less likely without it. The whole of the Los Angeles left had to come to grips with the rise of Black Nationalism and the Black Panthers, an essential but difficult unity.

The power of Mike Davis’s cultural criticism was on full display in *City of Quartz*, which looked at how the elites of different national groups in Los Angeles, the second largest city in the United States, came together to form a single capitalist power. He shows how the Los Angeles Police Department was still, in the 1950s and 60s, being used as an active force against black encroachments in white middle-class areas, beating up black residents and smashing up their homes. Mike went beyond the usual Marxist frameworks to look at the social ecology. He looked at how the power structures merged with the built environment, which was a city made for cars with no identifiable centre.

On returning to the United States in the mid-1980s, Mike settled in San Diego, the city divided by the border with Mexico—the other side is the infamous Ciudad Juarez, a centre of mass [femicide](#).

Two of his most important books came in the ‘noughties’—*The Monster at Our Door* (2004) and *Planet of Slums* (2006). The book *Monster* analyses the different waves of avian flu that had emerged in the previous decade, causing the mass slaughter of fowl and thousands of dead human victims

worldwide. As evidenced by its title, Mike predicted that there would be a new and massive pandemic—and of course, he was right. I re-read *Monster* in 2016 and wondered if Mike hadn’t been exaggerating, especially in light of how easily — seemingly — the Ebola virus had been contained. Three years later, I realised how right he had been.

By the time the COVID-19 virus struck, Mike had been ill for five years with two terminal diagnoses, and his work capacities were greatly impaired. He put together a re-issue of *Monster* called *The Monster Enters*, updating his analysis but mainly using text from the original. If he had not been so ill, and he had been able to speak at more Zoom meetings and on TV, there would have been an even stronger wave of new Mike Davis fans. Prophetically, in the 2004 book he wrote:

Access to lifeline medicines, including vaccines, antibiotics, and antivirals, should be a human right, universally available at no cost. If markets can’t provide incentives to cheaply produce such drugs, then governments and non-profits should take responsibility for their manufacture and distribution. The survival of the poor must at all times be accounted a higher priority than the profits of Big Pharma.

After *The Monster at the Door* came *Planet of Slums*. Mike started by noting that at the turn of the millennium, the majority of humanity now lived in urban areas, no longer in the countryside. But this has not resulted in the integration of the majority of urban newcomers into either formal jobs or reasonable housing. On the contrary, the new elites that took control in the 1940s and 1950s excluded the new urban poor:

Polarized patterns of land use and population density recapitulate older logics of imperial control and

racial dominance. Throughout the Third World, post-colonial elites have inherited and greedily reproduced the physical footprints of segregated colonial cities. Despite rhetorics of national liberation and social justice, they have aggressively adapted the racial zoning of the colonial period to defend their own class privileges and spatial exclusivity.

Because of this, the poor built their own slums and mostly worked in informal jobs. However, in many areas, the slums have become well-established and workers find employment in factories, construction, and even offices. Mike predicted that the slums would become major arenas for social and political conflict.

In *Late Victorian Holocausts* Davis analyses how imperialist brutality in the 19th century created avoidable droughts and famines, leading to the deaths of around 31 million people. He always saw imperialism and white supremacy as the key enemies of the Left that had to be overthrown. Lois Beckett [interviewed him](#) recently and commented:

Davis’s focus on how white supremacy and capitalism had shaped southern California, and how they continued to endanger its landscape and its people, led to dismissals and backlash early in his career, particularly from the real estate developers and regional boosters he savaged in his books. But over the decades, his warnings kept coming true.

In essays like *The Case for Letting Malibu Burn*, Davis has argued that California’s natural disasters are not really natural at all, but the result of greed, racism and lack of foresight from the region’s power brokers. In *City of Quartz* – published in 1990, two years before the Rodney King uprising – he depicted Los Angeles as a white supremacist police state that had successfully marketed itself as paradise.

Like the great Marxist historian, Isaac Deutscher, Mike never got a stable university job. He was too hot to handle, and the American right attacked him mercilessly, accusing him of distorting facts to suit his arguments. He briefly joined the American International Socialists but dropped out well before that

organisation self-destructed.

His work is unique and a treasure trove for socialists, class struggle fighters, and environmental activists. Mike had a fiercely critical intelligence that mastered the subjects by appropriating all the relevant details. He read everything. His writing is important for all those who

want to discover the origins of the great environmental, economic, and social crises that we are living through.

*Mike Davis's books can be viewed at [Verso](#) and [Haymarket](#). Dozens of his essays can be accessed by a simple internet search.*

## Mike Davis (1946-2022) “A stalwart of revolutionary Marxist politics”

30 October 2022, by **Against the Current** Editors

In his many books, starting with *Prisoners of the American Dream* (1986) and *City of Quartz* (1990), he could take full command of an intricate narrative with copious threads. A towering figure on the U.S. Left, he audaciously went into new areas with *Ecology of Fear* (1991) and *Late Victorian Holocausts* (2001) to display a magisterial conceptual grasp. The result was a deepening of his understanding of Marxism,

recently on display in *Old Gods, New Enigmas* (2020).

Mike was distinctive in having had an activist background in both the Communist Party (USA [28]) and the International Marxist Group (Britain [29]). Remaining a stalwart of revolutionary Marxist politics who blazed with rage against oppression until the end, he seemed to be a different breed entirely from most

radical academics.

Against the Current was honored to have Mike as a member of its advisory board and to publish at least 15 pieces by him. We express our condolences to his family and friends; in a forthcoming issue of the journal we will pay further tribute and discuss his contributions to Marxist culture.

Source [Against the Current](#).

## My Revolutionary Inspiration, Barbara Ehrenreich

18 September 2022, by **Lynne Segal**

However, by the time *Nickel and Dimed* was published, Ehrenreich had already had a long career stretching back to the heyday of women's liberation, when she'd left her indelible mark on the movement by battling to preserve within it the revolutionary socialist current initially at the heart of Western feminism. First and foremost she was, and remained, the archetypal socialist feminist. Like Sheila Rowbotham in the UK, Barbara helped shape its

meaning, as part of an “internationalist anti-racist, anti-heterosexist feminism.” In her germinal essay “[What is Socialist Feminism?](#)” (1976), she explains that socialist feminists are distinct from classical Marxists in that they aim “to transform not only the ownership of the means of production, but the totality of social existence . . . women who seemed most peripheral [to Marxists], the housewives, are at the very heart of their class—raising

children, holding together families, maintaining the cultural and social networks of the community.” She maintained this distinctive stance in all she said and did until her dying breath, having just turned eighty-one.

The very first time I met her, in the late 1970s, she was visiting me in North London at the Islington Community Press, where I helped produce an alternative local paper, committed to supporting the colorful

diversity of radical grassroots struggles. "We must form an international conspiracy of feminist guerrillas," Barbara laughed. Captivated by her witty, thrilling company, I soon visited my exciting new acquaintance in her home in Syosset, Long Island, meeting her charming children Rosa and Benjy, and her militant Teamster second husband Gary Stevenson. Later I would also stay in her lush home in Sugarloaf Key, Florida. I also had the huge pleasure of welcoming Barbara to my own home on several visits she made to London to promote the launch of her many books over the years. "How come you've kidnapped the sexiest men in London and got them holed up here servicing you?" she quipped, with characteristic exaggeration, surveying my collective household in the 1980s. Men sharing domestic responsibilities with women really met with her approval, since she feared that feminism might assist men in avoiding housework and caring responsibilities—that men would suddenly feel freer to abandon newly "independent" women.

This was a topic she tackled in one of her earlier books, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (1983). There she argued that even before women's liberation, some men were cheerfully resisting domestic ties and duties, envious of the life they saw in *Playboy*, in whose pages women were still submissive, nurturing, and responsive, yet also financially independent. By the 1980s, with the arrival of recession and welfare cutbacks in much of the West, Barbara feared that feminism might have "freed men first," leaving more women only a divorce away from chronic poverty, left trying to support themselves and their children without men's higher wage. Always a personal inspiration, I often seemed to be following in Barbara's footsteps: by the end of the decade, I was writing my own book about men after feminism, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (1990), although in it I didn't fully share Barbara's robust cynicism of men, since in the left libertarian households I knew household chore rotations and shared childcare were sacrosanct.

Within her career, *The Hearts of Men*

was an outlier, however: Barbara's heart always remained largely focused on women, especially the most oppressed and exploited. The point of her socialist feminism was not to waste her time berating men; she was happier poking fun at what she saw as the residual pathetic "rubble of patriarchy." In one of her late articles for *The Baffler*, "[Patriarchy Deflated](#)" (2018), she encouraged any woman to "laugh out loud at every instance of male and class-based pomposity," while pondering "what a world shaped by the female pursuit of pleasure might look like."

Barbara was all too aware of the cruelties and exploitation women have always faced, simply from being born female. Indeed, her first international best-seller, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses* (1972), written exactly half a century ago with Deirdre English (former editor-in-chief of *Mother Jones*), reminded readers of the grotesque history of witchcraft persecution. The book argues that accusations of evil-doing directed at women healers and midwives helped the emerging medical profession to exclude women from the expanding (male) power of the medical profession.

Later studies complicated that story, suggesting that the majority of people persecuted during the long period of Western witch-hunts were predominantly not women healers, but simply destitute women, especially older women living on their own. However, that book was important in highlighting women's prolonged exclusion from the medical profession until well into the twentieth century. Two subsequent books by Ehrenreich and English on the effects of such exclusion, *Complaints and Disorders* (1973) and *For Her Own Good* (1978), cover the routine sexism evident in the treatment of women as the weaker, pathological sex. They also highlight the deeply contrasting class and race differences in the levels of care and respect patients receive from doctors and psychiatrists. Her interest in the wholly inadequate nature of health care in the United States had actually begun well before, when living with her first husband and enduring friend, John Ehrenreich. Together they wrote *The American Health Empire: Power,*

*Profits and Politics* (1971), after having participated in and researched the global dimensions of student revolt in the late sixties for *Long March, Short Spring* (1969).

Yet, always a militant feminist, Barbara also knew that whatever the enduring evils inflicted on women because of their sex, "there is no way to understand sexism as it acts on our lives without putting it in the historical context of capitalism." It was exploring that shifting historical context that became her life work, even as she mourned the decline of socialist feminist organizing in the United States. In her essay "[Life without Father: Reconsidering Socialist-Feminist Theory](#)" for *Socialist Review* (1984), Barbara described how, back in the seventies, socialist feminist conferences had been irreparably damaged by the activities of a few Marxist-Leninist and Maoist groups. It was the very success of the autonomous socialist feminist movement by the mid-1970s that attracted the aggressive incursions of a few women determined to impose on other feminists the forms of hierarchical discipline and outlook drawn from their own fringe left grouplets. As Barbara later mourned, these "sects" joined and harassed more than twenty socialist feminist groups around the United States, "dragging almost all of them down to their deaths in arcane squabbles over the 'correct line': "I have never seen an adequate—or even inadequate—account of this nasty phase of left feminist history that addresses . . . why socialist-feminist organizations, including the successful and level-headed Chicago Women's Liberation Union, crumbled in the face of so much bullshit." In sync again, I would later report similar sectarian battles undermining socialist feminist conferences in the UK at much the same time in my reflections on the decline of socialist feminism in the UK, *Is the Future Female: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (1987). Other British feminists were also troubled by the shifting feminist terrain when the ties between feminism and the left were fragmenting, along with the weakening of the left itself.

Undeterred, with socialist feminism

soon overtaken by a more aspirational, distinctly women-centered feminism in the United States, Barbara joined and soon cochaired the independent activist alliance the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in the 1980s, alongside the late Michael Harrington. Her daily work turned then to recording and protesting the “decade of greed” ushered in by Ronald Reagan, a year after Margaret Thatcher moved the right into power in the UK. That decade of increasing inequality and poverty was generating anxieties even among the professional middle class. In *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (1989), Barbara revealed them now struggling to preserve their privileges and provide every possible advantage for their children to ensure their upwardly mobility in the face of rising hardship among the working class.

With Clinton’s election in 1992, Barbara was busy organizing against his destructive “reforms”, cutting welfare and food stamps, thereby forcing women, especially those supporting dependents on their own, to work in jobs that denied them even a living wage. This is what led to her research for *Nickel and Dimed*, with its vivid descriptions of the plight of women forced to work not one but two or more jobs, struggling at home and at work simply to keep themselves and their families from total destitution. She succinctly summarized this suffering in a 2009 blog:

The recession of the '80s transformed the working class into the working poor, as manufacturing jobs fled to the third world, forcing American workers into the low-paying service and retail sector. The current recession is knocking the working poor down another notch—from low-wage employment and inadequate housing toward erratic employment and no housing at all. Comfortable people have long imagined that American poverty is far more luxurious than the third world variety, but the difference is rapidly narrowing.

In *Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream* (2005), written as a companion to *Nickel and Dimed*, but also as a kind of sequel to *Fear of Falling*, Barbara this time entered the anxious world of job-seeking middle-class women to observe them struggling to find work within the corrupt networking cultures of the corporate world. Chronic failure to secure employment left them with a massive sense self-blame, even as it pushed them onto the expanding slide of downward mobility.

However, there was always a global dimension to Barbara’s socialist feminism, and she was quick to underscore the worldwide reach of the harsh entrenchment of class, ethnicity, and gender in her homeland. The low-wage workers struggling in an inhospitable world were increasingly drawn from international care chains of the most hyper-exploited women. It was the other side of the imperial plunder that had helped impoverish the birth places they felt forced to leave. After teaming up with eminent sociologist Arlie Hochschild, Barbara cowrote *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (2003) to address the distinct disadvantages, insecurities, and indignities faced by immigrant domestic and sex workers in the United States. These women were shouldering the U.S. “care deficit” so that they could send remittances to their own families and children whom they’d left far behind.

Yet, amidst so much gloom, Barbara never lost faith in the power of radical direct action, nor in people’s potential for collective celebration. She was the severest critic of the United States’ pernicious promotion of individual optimism, cheeriness, and the power of “positive” thinking. In another passionate publications, *Bright-sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America* (2009), published in the UK with the more concrete command *Smile or Die*, she excoriates the new “science of happiness” as an ideological move to discourage people’s acknowledgment of loss, sorrow, or anger, since in neoliberal times, even the emotional life must be made to serve market interests. The relentless pressure to present a cheerful face, she argues, encourages

a morbid preoccupation with feelings of guilt for failing to flourish against impossible odds, while deliberately undermining people’s courage to resist abuse and exploitation, or even their capacity for critical reflection. This same ideology also lay behind the most rapacious and destructive aspects of U.S. capitalism at the national level. Its blind insouciance to anything impeding profits, she argues, facilitated the reckless financial gambling responsible for the economic collapse of 2007–8. Its repudiation of suffering also fostered engagement and compliance with U.S. military aggression which, while first and foremost catastrophic for the countries invaded, was always devastating for anyone caught up in the mutilations of warfare.

So where is joy? Unfailingly outraged by the prevalence of suffering everywhere, Barbara was nevertheless always on the lookout for sources of pleasure and hope, sometimes finding them in the grimmest of situations. Her call for collective joy was one that came from a deeply held belief that such celebrations were essential for the health of any society. Never frightened of encompassing the broadest geographical and historical sweep, in her book *Dancing in the Streets* (2007) Barbara traced the repeated clashes between rapturous merrymakers and righteous moralizers right back to Pentheus, the king of the Thebes, in Greek mythology. And, following Max Weber, she saw the rise of capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as responsible for the gradual suppression of free, exultant public festivals, with church and state colluding to prevent them once industrialization required workers to remain sober and disciplined year-round. While Weber wrote of the widespread disenchantment accompanying the spread of the Protestant ethic, Barbara attributed the prevalence of widespread depression in our own times to the gradual disappearance of carnival life and the dampening down of community celebrations. As ever, I cautiously borrowed aspects of Barbara’s thinking for my own book *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy* (2017). For both of us, the fundamental point was to promote collective engagement with the world,



escaping the sad self-monitoring that we are urged into at every turn.

Entertaining as Barbara's writing always was, her most lasting legacy is her tireless involvement in the political domain. She never sought and tended to dislike the celebrity bestowed upon her after *Nickel and Dimed*. As a socialist and a feminist, she was horrified with injustice in the world at large, which once took her on a trip to Palestine, where she would be interrogated at length on her departure from Israel, the border authorities even confiscating her vacation reading, a harmless thriller. And she was outraged at the wretched poverty expanding unremittingly in the richest country in the world. Barbara's sharp anger and denunciation of the chronic exploitation and abuse which the affluent ignore, or assist, was invariably delivered with acerbic wit and gritty humor. It's why she was always exciting to encounter or observe. Both her outlook and performance provided a model of how to remain an engaged socialist feminist, while supporting all forms of progressive resistance. Not long ago, when interviewed by a young journalist, Gabriella Paiella, for *GQ* (March 2020), she explained that the best way for her to express anger was through humor: "Humor contains a lot of aggression. That's one good way to

let the anger and aggression out, and it's always been a source of inspiration to me." The crucial point for Barbara—which I try, no matter how inadequately, to follow and spread—was that we can find joy in collective resistance. In that conversation with Paiella, Barbara suggests that, if asked to give one piece of advice to young leftists, it would be this: "Don't forget to have a good time. . . . Political work . . . should also be pleasurable, sociable, fun. And if we can't create organizations and enterprises and cultures like that, we're not going to succeed. . . . We have to provide more attractive places to be, socially and collegially."

She knew in the short term that we are likely to have only small victories, especially with the rise of the right, with the reality that Trump, the Tea Party, and MAGA still steer the Republican Party. But, as she modeled for us, she would die fighting. And she did. Her last great cause was the Economic Hardship Project which she founded in 2012, funded by money she earned from *Nickel and Dimed*. Its goal was to encourage other journalists to write about class deprivation and to embolden the voice of poor people themselves, especially women struggling to support themselves and their dependents.

It was such a privilege to have known

Barbara. Her children, Ben Ehrenreich and Rosa Brooks, continue her legacy, both writing on injustice and destitution, near and far, leaving their mother immeasurably proud of them both. Ben tells us today that Barbara's dying wish would be for us to "fight like hell" for a better world. But whenever we can manage to continue fighting, in preserving Barbara's spirit we must also try to ensure we enjoy it as much as we can. I see it in some recent left feminist movements, today more often outside of the West. A new wave of feminist internationalism is now evident in the huge marches to defend women's rights to abortion in Poland, and in the recent Green Wave of feminist militancy (symbolized by women waving or wearing large green handkerchiefs) that has swept across Latin America, with huge mobilizations to end violence against women and secure women's reproductive rights. Turning history on its head, these activists sometimes say they hope to inspire women in the United States to defend their own reproductive rights. It could, I believe, lead Barbara to rest happily, knowing that resistance continues, and that her voice can inspire us still. You never know, socialist feminism may rise again in our own heartlands, at least for those who come after us. Barbara Ehrenreich must not be forgotten.

Source [Boston Review](#).

## Sarah Parker: socialist feminist and tireless fighter for Kurdistan

16 September 2022, by **Anti\*Capitalist Resistance**

At the time of her death, Sarah was a member of the ACR steering committee. In the late 1970s, Sarah joined the International Marxist Group; after the 1985 split, she was one of the comrades who founded the International Socialist Group, the main precursor of the ACR.

Sarah had been politicised, mainly

around issues of women's oppression, during her period as a student at Newnham College, Cambridge. Sarah's parents had been members of the Communist Party in Hornsey, part of the London borough of Haringey and much of Sarah's activity was in this north London borough, which is a centre of Turkish and Kurdish activism. Until recently Sarah had

lived in houses on the 'Ladder', a series of roads off Green Lanes in the heart of the Turkish and Kurdish community, an area with many Turkish/Kurdish food shops and restaurants.

Sarah was deeply involved in the work of the Broadwater Farm defence campaign, after 369 young people,

mainly from the Black community, were arrested following the death of a policeman during the 1985 rioting caused by the shooting of a local Black woman, Cynthia Jarrett, by the police. She was also a regular part of local protests against incidents of police racism outside the notorious local police station in Tottenham.

Her commitment to anti-racism went beyond work in the borough. She was instrumental in setting up the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers (CDAS) in 2000 when Blair's New Labour made clear their intention to make for refugees even more difficult than the Tories had, establishing an "asylum detention" complex, run by the likes of G4S and Serco under Home Office contracts. She served as CDAS treasurer and was a fixture at protests in defence of refugee rights.

Sarah was also involved in Women against Fundamentalism, set up in 1989 to work at the interface of feminism and anti-racism, in struggles against both religious fundamentalism and the excesses of neoliberalism in the wake of the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.

In the 1990s Sarah's main focus shifted to the Kurdish struggle for self-determination, and Sarah became well known to Kurdish activists for her tireless work on this issue. [30]

Although she was diffident about her writing ability, Sarah contributed articles to a range of left magazines and websites, including [Socialist Resistance](#), [Left Unity](#), *International Viewpoint* and the [ACR](#). She was also the joint author of a long [Left Unity pamphlet](#) on the Kurdish Struggle and the rise of dictatorship in Turkey,

which she wrote together with Phil Hearse. Among Sarah's articles was a [contribution](#) to debate inside the Fourth International about the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party), and the role that the organisation and its supporters in north Syria, the YPG (Peoples Defence Units) played in the liberated zones, collectively known as Rojava. Sarah led an [online ACR discussion](#) about the Kurdish struggle.

Sarah was a voracious reader and an extremely talented linguist. She did Classics at Cambridge University, a difficult course that demands high grade A Levels in Latin and Greek. Because of her interest in the Kurdish struggle, she taught herself Turkish and some Kurdish. She was always learning new languages, as she put it, 'for fun.'

She was a good cook, capable of turning her hand to a number of international cuisines, and very fond of her own cooking.

During key events like the Kurdish turn towards [self-governing communities](#), which led to a brutal backlash by the Turkish state; the 2013 uprising sparked by the [struggle at Gezi Park](#) in Istanbul; the building of the broad left-wing, Kurdish-led party in Turkey, the [HDP \(Peoples Democratic Party\)](#); 2016 attempted military coup in Turkey; and the struggle for Rojava in northern Syria, Sarah's front room resembled a war room where she would sit up half the night, scouring the web, watching Kurdish TV programmes and reading books and documents. While exasperated by what she saw as indifference by most of the British left, Sarah made herself one of the left's most knowledgeable people on this issue.

She approached her illness with unflappable matter-of-factness. Just three weeks before her death she was telling friends that her cancer had spread to her liver and spine, but there was nothing to worry about, and that her oncologist had said that people often lived for some time with her condition. It is doubtful that she actually believed that. Her optimism was more for her friends than for herself.

Sarah had an MA in translation and could have had a profitable career as a translator; instead, she chose to devote herself to many years as her mother's carer, to her studies and above all her activism in support of the most progressive mass force in the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean.

The struggle for [Rojava](#) in Syria and the self-governing communities of North Kurdistan embody a unique experiment in local self-government, but also a radical turn in the Kurdish/Turkish left, the promotion of women to be leaders at all levels of community and regional groups, but also crucially the mayors of cities and towns. Wherever a man was elected to a position, then a woman must also be selected to share the post with him. The armed fighters of the PKK and the YPG have built [women's brigades](#), which share the fighting at all levels. The integration of women's leadership with radical democracy was an objective that inspired Sarah, as it has inspired many socialists worldwide. Her friends and comrades will ensure that Sarah's struggle continues.

5 September 2022

Source [Anti\\*Capitalist Resistance](#).

# Living with Political Clarity: A Tribute to Xiang Qing

4 September 2022, by [Au Loong-Yu](#)

MY MENTOR, XIAN Qing, passed away at age 100 this year on July 9th. I first traveled from Hong Kong to visit him in Macau in 1977. I was 21 at the time and had first joined the Young Socialist Group (青年社會主義組), a youth left-wing organization that shared rental space with the editorial office of October Review (十月), which ran a small bookstore in the unit.

I only understood that they were Trotskyists after reading more upon joining the Young Socialist Group. At the time, the Chinese language and Protect Diaoyutai (“Baodiao”) movements had died down and social movements were ebbing overall, and I felt troubled about not knowing what to do.

One day, I discovered an internal document analyzing the political situation in China and Hong Kong by someone named “Xiang Qing” that impressed me, so I tracked him down and brought a friend to meet him in person.

Mao Zedong had just passed away a year before, and the elders of October Review and the young Trotskyists were all optimistic about the democratic struggles on the mainland. But I realized that Xiang’s political analysis was able to address many aspects that others neglected — and since then I saw him as my movement mentor.

## The Poverty of Leadership

Under the restrictions of colonial rule, it was extremely difficult for left-wing youth to develop enough analytical tools to adequately assess the political situation of Hong Kong and China. Social movements in Hong Kong, especially left-wing ones, faced many pressures and differed from some other countries where there was more continuity between movements across generations.

One time I was in the U.K., and a friend took me to a church in Oxford, where some community members and other sympathizers every year would commemorate some soldiers executed by Oliver Cromwell during the English

Civil War.

These soldiers were part of a radical group called the Levellers, who were executed by Cromwell for refusing to obey his orders to invade Ireland.

This is a history made alive by living movements. But in Hong Kong, let alone in China, there are barely any movement histories that are independently preserved. New generations of activists are forced to discover tools anew, and stumble on many errors.

A key reason for this lack of historical memory and continuity is state repression. At the time, the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) sympathizers in Hong Kong also faced pressure, but they had a mountain to lean on, so the British did not dare to overstep certain lines. But other movement activists were not so fortunate, and worse if one was a leftist.

It was not until the early 1970s when the colonial regime loosened its grip a bit, but at first, the new wave of student activists then was completely oblivious to the fact that there were a group of elder leftists around, who were labelled as “Trotskyists.”

In 1952, all remaining Trotskyists in China were rounded up and sent to prison — leaving only the ones in Hong Kong. But if the Trotskyists in Hong Kong were to be discovered, they would be deported by the British. It was at this time when Xiang was deported to Macau.

Those who were not deported would have to remain underground for the long term. In this condition, it was hard for the October Review comrades not to become disconnected with the youth, and it would be difficult for the youth to learn about them.

It would take quite a few years for left-leaning youth to connect to old leftists, like Peng Shuzhi (彭樹之) from overseas, and Wang Fanxi (王範西) and Xiang in Macau. But by 1975, Wang already moved abroad to England (it would take me another five years to get a chance to write him), so I could only mainly learn from Xiang.

## Rule of Law and People’s Self-governance

Although the colonial regime then loosened some of its authoritarian control, it would still harass leftist youth demonstrating or flyering on the streets by giving them a hard time or prosecuting them — only at least then they did not charge them with severe crimes. There was no consensus about whether a leftist should plead guilty, appeal for a lesser sentence, defend oneself in court, appeal, or hire a lawyer, and more broadly, how to even relate to the very institution of the colonial rule of law.

Someone at the time wrote an article titled, “The rule of law is already dead, the rise of people’s self-governance” (法律已死，人民自治的興起), which denied the former. Xiang gave me some old publications and some of his articles that addressed my questions on these topics. He explained as such in a 1973 article titled “the rule of law and the people’s self-governance” (法律與人民自治):

“A rule of law that does not take the people’s self-governance as a foundation would only be a dictatorship of the few ruling over the masses. Since only the people’s self-governance can safeguard the rights and interests of the broader masses, some think the masses only need to struggle for the people’s self-governance, without needing any rule of law; but opposing the rule of law and the people’s self-governance in a binary would also be incorrect.

“Contemporary anti-authoritarian movements for democracy are at the same time also a movement to demand a more sufficient rule of law. The early democratic movements in the 17th century first demanded the limitation of the monarch’s administrative powers ... with the rise of the workers’ movement and the right to universal suffrage ... these all helped strengthen the true spirit of a genuinely democratic rule of law. And so, the rule of law and the people’s self-governance should progress together...”

He stressed that for young leftists who want to develop a socialist stance on the rule of law, they must advocate for the freedom and liberation of the working-class as a key principle to replace the traditional aims of the rule of law under bourgeois democracy.

The rule of law is impoverished under capitalism, but we must not deny the basic essence of a rule of law, but work to introduce a newer, more sufficient rule of law that safeguards the power and interests of the workers. His article inspired me to rigorously study the historical development of different forms of democracy, and laid the groundwork for my later intervention in approaching the fight for universal suffrage.

## On Hong Kong Self-determination

In 1982, Hong Kong became a key bargaining chip in the rivalry between China and Britain. Beijing declared that Hong Kong's sovereignty belongs to China, and Britain was reluctant to let go. So some in Hong Kong civil society advocated for a plan for Britain to return the city's sovereignty to China in exchange for retaining the right to govern.

Xiang, on the other hand, thought that genuine democrats should not request the British to extend its colonial rule, while also not completely accepting the CCP's conditions of return. Around that time, he wrote a pamphlet titled 'Hongkongers' Path Forward: Struggle for Democracy, Demand Sovereignty' (香港前途與民主的鬥爭) reminding readers that calling for the return of the city's sovereignty should only be one aspect of our demand.

The other aspect lies in the principle of "sovereignty lies with the people" (主權在民): a country's sovereignty does not lie in within the party or state bureaucracy, but its people.

The missing link between these two aspects lies in the framework of Hongkongers' right to democratic self-determination (民主自決), because "without the masses holding power, a nation's so-called sovereignty would

be nothing but a dead weight on the body of the masses ... the question of when and in what manner should Hongkongers' return to China should be wholly determined by the Hong Kong masses."

The long period of colonial rule has weakened Hongkongers' democratic awareness, such that Xiang's principles still only have minimal influence even 20 years later — even during and after the mobilizations against the Tiananmen Square massacre. Many Hongkongers still thought that they were the "geese that laid the golden egg," and so Beijing would handle us liberally. It was only until a new generation of activists in the year or two before the Handover when there were similar demands.

It was not until a year before the Handover that the idea of Hong Kong's sovereignty belonging not to any political party but rather to the people became more popularized, and a small circle of young activists began to act. On the night before the Handover on July 1st, 1997, hundreds of protestors marched (illegally) on the street to insist that the sovereignty belongs to the people, while many of the mainstream pro-democracy liberal parties refrained from hosting any street protest.

In 2003, Beijing attempted to introduce national security legislation, only retracting it to avert a political crisis after 500,000 Hongkongers took to the streets. But people later came under the impression that Beijing seemed to respect Hong Kong's autonomy, and so that generation of youth did not give much serious thought to how Hong Kong's road to democracy should continue.

But the seeds of dissent were planted then, and next time, the youth acted differently: 11 years later, they led the Umbrella Movement. Even though it failed, it triggered a serious discussion among civil society about the political direction of Hong Kong's future: from the left, right and center, to advocates for self-determination, independence, pro-democracy, etc.

Though later the main voices for Hong Kong's self-determination may not be directly related to Xiang or our

political materials, and few people knew of Xiang's writings, it proved that his thinking on democracy and sovereignty symbolized a bridge between democratic movements in China and elsewhere and the struggles of what I call the "1997 generation," who sparked the Umbrella movement and the 2019 resistance movement.

Xiang had long been isolated in his small flat in Macau, but was never one of those intellectuals who would, in isolation, become cynical and wallow in despair. The generation born around the Handover did not succeed in 2019, but neither did the early pro-democracy activists' demand to accept the limitations of the Basic Law and advocate for a gradualist path toward universal suffrage.

Hong Kong is too small, and there is already little chance for success if Hongkongers' attempt to organize without connecting with the democratic movements in China. This is what Xiang's pamphlet, early on, already presaged.

## Democrat and Socialist

Xiang Qing was not only a democrat, but a socialist. Once when we were discussing this topic, he stressed that genuine socialism can only mean the total manifestation of democracy. And so his key work (collected in *On Bureaucratic Socialism and From Bureaucratic Socialism to Bureaucratic Capitalism*) sought to expose and critique the CCP's inauthentic brand of socialism.

In 1966, when tens of millions of students were "rebellious" at the peak of the Cultural Revolution, there were many youth from all across the world who echoed their slogans. But Xiang argued in his "Brief Remarks on the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" that "even though the movement unleashed by Mao Zedong is painted with the colors of the left, its basic structure is neither progressive nor revolutionary, but conservative and reactionary, aiming to safeguard Stalinist authoritarian rule and the elite privileges of Mao's ruling clique."



His erudition and self-cultivation always kept him politically clear-headed.

In the last decade or so, Xiang's output slowed, but he continued to study and reflect on world affairs. His last long-form piece analyzed the global political situation in 2013, suggesting that "the 2008 financial crisis not only triggered a political and social crisis, but also pointed toward the unprecedented climate crisis. Mass-scale anti-government movements, even revolutionary ones, are growing in power in and between different countries."

His article also discussed the situation in China: "In the next few years, a revolution that few can predict is

entirely possible."

He even speculated that the first phase of the revolution would see liberals first taking power, but they themselves cannot solve China's politico-economic crisis — only a democratic government with workers leading other oppressed groups has the power to do so.

I did not share his optimistic assessment at the time. I began solidarity work with Chinese workers at the turn of the century in order to more concretely grasp the situation on the ground, and came to the conclusion that he overestimated the power of not only the labor movement, but also the liberals, in the mainland.

But differences in political assessment

are quite normal; Xiang was also coming from a place of care for people — for working people. In retrospect, a great majority of his work can stand the test of time.

He often joked that he might have 120 years of life, which he ultimately did not. But I know that he would not mind: he joyfully lived a simple and virtuous life, without any care for his own self-interest.

Goodbye, Xiang Qing.

*Source: The article, written on July 19, 2022, was originally in Chinese and was published by the online media **Linking Vision**. It was translated by Promise Li for [ATC 220](#), September-October 2022.*

## Rosario Ibarra: Mexican Socialist Feminist, 1927-2022. Presente!

21 April 2022, by **Dan La Botz**

Ibarra became a human rights activist after her son Jesús Piedra Ibarra disappeared on April 18, 1975, presumably kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by the Mexican government as happened as well to 500 others during the 1960s and 1970s. He was a member of the September 23 Communist League (LC23S), a clandestine urban guerrilla group that engaged in violent attacks against wealthy institutions and individuals and opposed the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party.

Following her son's disappearance, Rosario Ibarra, together with 100 mothers of the disappeared, created the Committee in Defense of Prisoners, the Persecuted, the Disappeared, and Political Exiles. After succeeding in finding out the fate of 148 such disappeared people, they changed the organization's name to Eureka, meaning we have found them.

Years of fighting for human rights turned Ibarra into a public figure. In 1982, the small new Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) asked her to be its presidential candidate, the first woman to run for the country's highest office. She held election rallies throughout the country speaking about the needs of working people and the need for a socialist alternative. It was in that campaign that she defined herself as a socialist feminist, running as the candidate of the common working woman and housewife.

Miguel de la Madrid of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) won the presidency that year in a typically corrupt election with 75 percent of the vote, the Conservative National Action Party (PAN) receiving 15 percent. But Ibarra received 416,488 votes or 1.77% of the total, about half as many votes as the long established and much better known Mexican Communist Party. Her

campaign served both to enhance her reputation and to put the PRT on the political map.

Six years later, she ran again, but with Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of Mexico's legendary president Lázaro Cárdenas running for president she received few votes.

Ibarra was a magnificent orator in the dramatic Mexican style whose speeches, with their long perorations inspired her audiences. As her interpreter at a large public meeting at the United Electrical Workers union hall in Chicago in the 1980s, I was both thrilled and challenged to put her dramatic speech into English, especially when it was constantly interrupted by the applause and cheers of her audience.

From the 1970s until her death, Ibarra remained active in all of the causes of Mexico's working people and the oppressed whether as a private person or after 2006 as a Senator.

In 2019, when the Mexican Senate voted to honor her with the Belisario Domínguez award for human rights work, she had her daughter Claudia Ibarra return the medal to Mexican

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, saying she could not accept it until Mexico learned the truth about its disappeared, who now number

nearly 100,000 — 98% of them from 2006 onward, disappeared during an era of the government's war on drugs.

Source [New Politics](#).

# Neil Faulkner - Charismatic Revolutionary

## 21 February 2022, by [Phil Hearse](#)

In short, he had extraordinary charisma. But more than that, in the last six years of his life, Neil was embarked on an odyssey to understand and explain the crisis of our time which threatens the very existence of humanity, a theoretical journey he undertook with comrades in Anti-Capitalist Resistance, and with others, especially [William I Robinson](#) in the United States.

Neil came into politics at Cambridge University during the late 1970s, through the Anti-Nazi League – and hence into the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). He worked for Anti-Apartheid from 1980-82, then he spent a year in Sudan teaching English in a boys' school, and after became a school teacher for nearly a decade in the UK. After that he became a professional historian and archaeologist, from 1996 spending weeks every summer at the [Sedgeford dig](#) in Norfolk, as well as escorting groups of mainly well-heeled tourists on tours of archaeological sites in the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe and sometimes Russia.

He wrote a series of books starting with [The Decline and Fall of Roman Britain](#) in 2000, and including [Empire of the Eagles](#) (on Rome), [Apocalypse](#) (on the Jewish uprising against the Roman Empire), [Lawrence of Arabia's Wars](#) and [Empire and Jihad](#), about the Anglo-Arab wars of the 50 years after 1870. Wearing his archaeologist hat he made appearances on Channel 4's Time Team and the BBC's Timewatch, as well as making a number of appearances on BBC radio.

Neil spoke at lectures all around the country, and at the SWP's summer Marxism events. Here he caused some

controversy with his iconoclastic ideas about Rome – he contradicted Marxist orthodoxy that the Roman Empire was an example of the 'slave mode of production.' On the contrary, he argued, what kept Rome going was 'robbery with violence', extremely brutal conquests which resulted in vast quantities of booty, including slaves, as well as colonies which supplied many of Rome's material needs.

All the time Neil sought, in the best Marxist tradition, to explain and chart new theories, not just to describe. For example, his work about Sedgeford led him last summer to conclude that Saxon feudalism emerged autonomously in East Anglia, as early as the seventh century, a really original theory.

Neil developed a specialism in military history, editing Military History Matters magazine. This enabled him to intervene on military matters and war, for example the 100th anniversary of the first Battle of the Somme in 2016. He ambushed right wing military historian Max Hastings on Radio 4, manoeuvring him into accepting that all the main participants in the First World War were imperialist powers. I saw him speak at a meeting in Hampstead, where the programme of poems and songs from the trenches was interspersed by short Marxist explanations from Neil – "What ended the First World War? Revolution across Europe! "

In stark contrast to government celebrations of the centenary marking the end of the First World War Neil wrote a hard-hitting expose, [No Glory](#),

[the Real History of the First World War](#), published by the Stop the War Coalition. In it he argued that World War One was a military disaster and a human catastrophe, a war driven by the imperial powers' competition for wealth and power around the globe.

Neil visited some of the sites of [famous WW1 battles](#). He explored Loos, where his grandfather fought with the Civil Service Rifles, and also High Wood on the Somme, where his grandfather was wounded (living with shrapnel inside him for the rest of his life). Neil also went to Gallipoli and saw his great uncle's name inscribed there. He said, 'It is all very moving. There is nothing like it for underlining the futility and injustice of imperialist war.'

Neil left the SWP with the split that created Counterfire, but after a few years he developed differences over perspectives and especially over internal democracy and left the organisation. In 2014-15 he was the driving force behind the [Brick Lane debates](#), a series of meetings held at Vibe bar and other social centres in the lane. Hundreds came to debate climate change, the housing crisis, fashion and a clutch of topics precisely aimed at young people. This is what inspired and energised Neil – being able to explain Marxism as applied to the contemporary crisis, to young people. But the Brick Lane debates eventually died away in 2015 because they couldn't adequately answer the question they posed – what was to be done, from a campaigning and organisational viewpoint, about the crisis?

Neil by this time had become

absolutely convinced that the existing far left organisations were finished. I had numerous discussions with him on this topic, and he changed his view only slightly, in relation to [Socialist Resistance](#). Right at the end of his life he said, 'I remain in the tradition of [Tony Cliff](#) and socialism from below, but I have been greatly influenced by the tradition of the [Fourth International](#).'

What convinced him most about the existing far Left's inability to interpret the modern world was the debate over Brexit. The majority of the Left supported Brexit and Neil was appalled. He thought it self-evident that the Brexit campaign, led by right-wing Tories and Nigel Farage's Brexit Party, was the key instrument for building support for nationalism and the hard right. He saw Brexit as absolutely in line with Le Pen in France, Matteo Salvini's Lega party in Italy, the Alliance for Germany and the Austrian Freedom Party.

Opposition to Brexit strengthened his convergence with Left Unity and Socialist Resistance. He was alarmed by the complacent attitude to the rise of the far right in much of the Left and its underestimation of the extent to which the far right of existing capitalist parties could act as the mechanism for modern fascism. 'Fascists in suits' became Neil's mantra.

The second, and more substantial edition of [Creeping Fascism](#), was launched at the No Passaran conference in March 2017, where Neil made an exceptionally blunt exposition of his theory, which caused a lot of controversy. But the actions of the Trump administration in the United States, the election of Bolsonaro in Brazil and the growing strength of far right parties in France and Italy were strong evidence for the creeping fascism idea. At any rate, the idea that modern fascism will not come with jackboots and swastikas, but will try to come to power through elections, and utilise the apparatus of the capitalist state to secure power, seems increasingly obvious. And the tumultuous events of [January 6 2021](#) in Washington where Trump incited a crowd of fascists and other far rightists to attack the Capitol building,

seemed like confirmation of the idea of an [interaction between the fascists and the hard right of the capitalist parties](#).

A small group of people around Neil formed Mutiny to take these ideas to young people, but it became clear that you couldn't put a cigarette paper between Mutiny and Socialist Resistance, and the process of unification was begun that formed Anti\*Capitalist Resistance.

Neil was among the [most sceptical](#) in Anti\*Capitalist Resistance about work in the Labour Party. But the key thing for him was increasingly the theoretical effort to understand the present crisis. He made contact with the American Marxist William I Robinson, whose work on the thesis of the Global Police State increasingly influenced Neil.

He now embarked on an attempt to explain the modern crisis as the accumulation and growing integration of, a number of crushing contradictions from which modern capitalism seemed incapable of escaping and which threatened to bring about societal collapse – [unless revolution intervened to prevent it](#).

At the centre of everything was the notion of the '[dual metabolic rift](#)', which Neil borrowed from the radical American scientist [Rob Wallace](#). The [environmental crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic](#) could not be understood as separate processes, but both involved modern capitalist farming and agribusiness which had disrupted the natural barriers between the pathogens of the forest and human civilisation. At the same time capitalist farming, in particular the massive feed stations for cattle and pigs, was a major contributor to global heating and environmental degradation.

Neil thought that modern capitalism had rendered some of Marx's writings about [surplus creation and accumulation](#) outdated. In particular in articles written with me, he insisted on the strengthening of 'accumulation at the point of consumption.' Drawing on the work of Guy Debord, he argued this, in turn, had created a form of capitalism in which there was a split between mass immiseration of the

excluded and huge consumption of consumer goods by better off sections of the working class and the petit bourgeoisie. This generated a [vast capitalist 'spectacle'](#), an alienated system in which the reality of exploitation was obscured with a vast system of images, creating a dream world, often in the form of celebrity culture.

Neil wrestled with the contradictions of capitalist globalisation, in which capital seemed to become 'denationalised', eliminating nationally-based capitalism and inter-imperialist competition that goes with it. He soon recognised that the conflicts between China and the United States did not allow us to eliminate the concept of imperialism. The idea of the [Global Police State](#), rightly emphasising the escalating police repression and militarisation across the globe, should not allow us to dismiss imperialist competition between the major powers.

In the last year of his life Neil became increasingly focused on the social crisis and the [mass psychology of fascism](#), an investigation pioneered by William Reich, which has frequently enabled fascists and the radical right to become the beneficiaries of economic and social crisis. Neil wanted to write a book on this, but was also writing a book on the revolution and civil war in Spain (1936-39) and wanted to publish a collection of the military writings of [Tom Wintringham](#), a British Communist who fought in the Spanish Civil War.

Neil became a member of the steering committee of Anti\*Capitalist Resistance, and of the website editorial board. He was excited by the Black Lives Matter demonstrations, and he was present at the mass London demonstration in May 2020. He was also present when, in March 2021, [police attacked the Sarah Everard vigil in south London](#), which became a general protest against violence against women. In both he saw the seeds of a radicalisation of young people that could take on the system as a whole. As the storm clouds of fascism and the crisis darkened, he became increasingly impatient of all forms of reformism.

He identified himself and our political tasks with a single word: revolutionary. Neil would only want one thing – that his comrades pick up the baton of revolutionary resistance, and continue his political and theoretical work.

The last time I talked to him I conveyed the information from Chinese comrades, that his book [A Radical History of the World](#), had been translated into Chinese and was being used as a semi-official textbook in some universities. ‘That has really

cheered me up’, he said. He laughed uproariously at the fact that the chapter on contemporary China, which explains the evolution of bureaucratic capitalism, had been removed.

Source: [ACR](#)

# Hasta siempre Helena!

21 February 2022, by **Michael Löwy**

## Tribute to Helena

Helena and I met while we were both working in the National Health Service in Chile, and we were also trade unionists. Union activity was her first experience, on the way to an acute awareness of the inequalities that divide the population of capitalist societies and of the need to fight to put an end to them.

## The conflagration

The time when Helena became politically conscious was not a normal time. A process of radicalization was setting Latin America ablaze. In Chile, the experience of Christian Democracy had for a time concealed this evolution and distorted the appreciation of this process of radicalization. But despite the financial efforts of American imperialism to help the success of this reformist experiment, proposed as an alternative to neutralize the winds of change blowing from the Caribbean, the demands for radical change were confirmed during the year 1970.

But radicalization, naturally accompanied by the aspiration for more democracy, also came up against the bureaucratic behaviour of traditional organizations.

Our small organization had made a good start in establishing itself in our sector of activity. In addition, we had just received a very important influx of new energies. With the split in the MIR, caused by militaristic deviations

and the total absence of democracy, the October Revolutionary Tendency decided to join the International, and merged with the existing section. At the same time, Helena and I decided to share our lives.

It was within this framework, an organization still of modest size, but capable of developing, a political capital anchored in the history of the labour movement, that, when the time came, she was able to choose the Fourth International as the organization where she wanted to be active.

Our respective origins, categorically rejecting the climate imposed by bureaucratically distorted operating methods, stimulating the development of frank camaraderie and critical vivacity, shaped the beginnings of her militant experience and never left her.

## Prison

We developed our activity, perceiving the danger.

The blindness of the traditional leaderships, all opposing obstacles to mobilization, to the accomplishment of the programme which they carried, provoked the bloody abortion of the process in September 1973.

Repression came down on us, fierce, seeking to eradicate to the root the causes of the fear experienced by the propertied classes.

We were not spared.

Helena thus had— dramatically—in this new experience the opportunity to test the solidity of the convictions she had acquired. And she was able to show exemplary courage and dignity.

Neither prison nor torture managed to undermine her confidence in the validity of the fight in which she had chosen to participate. Neither the brutality nor the vexations to which women were primarily victims undermined her certainties. On the contrary, she became a support, a source of encouragement for her fellow prisoners.

She was freed. I was sent to a concentration camp, in the middle of the desert reputed to be the driest in the world, Helena became my only means of communication with the world that existed beyond the barbed wire and the minefields.

More than 2,000 kilometres separated us. And she managed to overcome this distance to bring me her comfort and the supplies that could make our life as prisoners easier. And she did this several times.

## Ireland

A programme for the release and exile of a certain number of political prisoners was then drawn up by humanitarian organizations, with the support of the UN. No one knows why some and not others found themselves on the list of those who had to go into exile in exchange for their release.



We had already had to regret the "disappearance" of the mother of my daughter Natalia, which had led to the breaking of all ties with Natalia. We didn't know where she was. For her mother we suspected. But for her, we had no hypothesis.

I knew Helena was inclined to stay. There were many reasons to. But the danger was too present. My demand not to leave without her was finally accepted. Then the question was: where to go. The choices were limited given the number of candidate countries at the start.

And it was Ireland: an unexpected choice, under pressure.

From our first stammerings in English, we proposed to advance towards the construction of a movement of solidarity with the victims of repression in Chile. The Irish Communist Party and its Official Sinn Féin allies favoured bureaucratic methods that allowed the leaders responsible for the Chilean debacle to be supported without having to be held accountable. We then began a very fruitful collaboration with our comrades in the Revolutionary Marxist Group, Irish section of the Fourth International, but also with forces like the Socialist Workers Movement, which enabled us to counter and, in many cases, defeat the orientation of the reformist bureaucracies. Limerick, Shannon, Cork, Galway, Dublin, Belfast, and I forget some of the other places, saw the creation of democratic structures, where the debate was open to all.

Again, it was Helena who did most to make the work of coordination progress.

## Households

The experience of exile continued in France where, after a long year without papers, we succeeded in obtaining recognition of our condition as political refugees. A year where we worked, like all undocumented migrants, in jobs reserved for this category of people: she was a cleaning lady, I was a handyman.

But not just any cleaning lady. A job offer taped to the window at the butcher's led a friend to suggest that Helena go and have a look. It was 22 rue de Bièvre. The interview had a positive result, Helena got the job. Neither she, having just arrived in France, nor the friend, certainly not very politicized, knew that the woman who had just hired Helena was Danielle Mitterrand and that this address was François Mitterrand's official residence. And Helena's main activity was going to be, precisely, cleaning François Mitterrand's office.

And there you have it, a successful career as a cleaning lady. As time passed, her French improved, facilitating her communication with the Mitterrand family. And, when she left this job, she was able to maintain very good relations with the family, in particular with Danielle; in full knowledge, for their part, of Helena's political activism.

But this gleaming career (it made everything shine!) was no longer justified once our situation was regularized. Now we could resume a normal life. And act openly.

Which we did.

## La Brèche

Just at that time, the future bookshop "La Brèche" was circulating a job offer. Helena applied and was accepted. And, in the year 1979, she began a new career.

Quickly, her training as a librarian and statistician led her to propose new working methods, which, fitting into a real rescue plan, would enable the bookstore to overcome a very serious crisis, which led to fears of its disappearance.

And from that moment, until her death, she was committed to bringing this experience to life.

Associations, groups and various organizations, even political parties, not having at their disposal the expertise accumulated by "La Brèche", were able to benefit from it.

The successes of the bookstore, during the summer schools of the LCR and then the NPA, were, in large part, the result of her flair in the selection of titles to offer. That flair was also present in the proposals she made to the various clients.

Not that this was an individual success. It was teamwork, where her qualities contributed to collective success.

Until her death, the bookshop was for her a combat post, a tool in the struggle to change society. A combat that she did not give up, except when she was forced to by the disease which killed her.

Helena joined the ranks of our organization, suffered the consequences of this choice, participated directly in the efforts to build a better world in countries from which she did not originate, because, as an internationalist, for her humanity was one.

And she did it out of love. For the poor, for those who suffer from all kinds of deprivation.

For her comrades, for her children and her grandchildren.

For her friends.

Norman

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How sad... We have shared so much, for almost half a century, hopes and disappointments. The Latina cell of the League was you, the Cercle José Carlos Mariategui was you. Helena *querida*, you will be sorely missed...

You left us when Chile had just got rid of Pinochetism, you would have liked to celebrate that with us. You were the living soul of La Brèche and the summer universities, and you always remained faithful to the dreams of your revolutionary socialist youth in Santiago.

Hasta siempre, Helena! Venceremos!

Michael (Löwy)

# Tribute to Marc Bourhis, shot as a hostage at Châteaubriant on 22 October 1941, militant of the Fourth International

22 October 2021, by **Collective**

Born in 1907 in Lézardrieux, in what is now Côtes d'Armor, Marc Bourhis was 34 years old. He and his wife Alice were both teachers in Trégunc, a commune of Finistère located about ten kilometres south of Concarneau. As soon as he graduated from the Ecole Normale de Quimper in 1926, Marc Bourhis became involved in the Unitary Federation of Education. It was in this union that he met another teacher who was shot at Châteaubriant, Pierre Guéguin.

An active militant of the Communist Party and a neighbour in Concarneau of Marc Bourhis' parents, Pierre Guéguin soon became close to the young teacher whom he convinced to join the Communist Party in 1930. Disagreeing with the political evolution of the Soviet Union and with the course followed by the PCF, Marc Bourhis left this party in 1933, the year Hitler became Chancellor of the Reich and opened the first concentration camps. Marc Bourhis then subscribed to the Trotskyist newspaper *La Vérité* and, at the trade union level, became the spokesperson of "l'Ecole Emancipée", the organ of the Unitary Federation of Education.



## *Marc Bourhis*

From 1935, his links with Trotskyist militants became closer, especially on the return to Finistère of Alain Le Dem, with whom, in 1936, he joined the Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste (POI - Internationalist Workers' Party). On 29 December 1937, he chaired an important meeting of the POI in Concarneau, which was reported on by *Lutte Ouvrière*, the party's weekly, on 6 January 1938. Interesting to read

that Pierre Guéguin, elected mayor of Concarneau in 1935, attended on behalf of the PCF to challenge Yvan Craipeau, who was the main speaker for the POI at this meeting.

After the expulsion of the Revolutionary Left current within the SFIO, its leader Marceau Pivert formed a new party, the Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan (PSOP - Socialist Workers' and Peasants' Party). Along with most of the French Trotskyist militants, Marc Bourhis joined it and actively campaigned for it.

Mobilized as soon as war was declared in September 1939, Marc Bourhis was sent to the barracks called "Le Bagne" in Brest, before being transferred in May 1940 as a suspicious element to the 137th Infantry Regiment of Quimper. A few weeks later, in June, this unit was blocked in its barracks by the German army. Quickly released to resume his class in Trégunc, Marc Bourhis reconnected with Pierre Guéguin who had publicly broken with the Communist Party at the signing, in August 1939, of the non-aggression pact between Stalin and Ribbentrop.

Throughout Finistère, Marc Bourhis and Pierre Guéguin - who had been stripped of all his mandates like all elected Communists - acted in hiding against the Nazi occupation. In June 1941, Hitler invaded the USSR. On 23 June 1941, Pierre and Marc improvised a meeting in a café on Trévignon point and publicly expressed their opinions and satisfaction at seeing the USSR in the camp of the Allies.

On 2 July 1941, following a denunciation, Marc Bourhis - whom the Commissioner of General

Intelligence presented as "the soul of the revolutionary party in his commune" - and Pierre Guéguin were arrested as agitators by the gendarmerie on an arrest warrant from the Prefect of Finistère and interned in the Choisel camp in Châteaubriant.

In this camp, where important cadres of the Communist Party were also detained, the Trotskyist Bourhis and the "renegade" Guéguin were slandered and quarantined by Stalin's French supporters, to the point that the Trotskyist historian Rodolphe Prager wrote about Pierre Guéguin: "the hatred of his former comrades condemned him to a difficult existence 'even more painful than his own', according to Bourhis, who was also not spared."

Designated as hostages, Marc Bourhis, Pierre Guéguin and their 25 comrades fell under Nazi bullets on the afternoon of 22 October at the Sablière quarry in Châteaubriant.

To the 27 of Châteaubriant, to the 48 hostages designated by the French authorities and shot in retaliation by the Nazis, we owe the same tribute. But this tribute requires that each of them be recognized in their political identity.

Marc Bourhis was a militant of the Fourth International, a Trotskyist militant. In 1945, his family had "Militant of the Internationalist Communist Party" engraved on his grave. On 19 October 1945, more than a thousand people attended a meeting of the PCI in Concarneau at the rostrum where Marc Bourhis' father and Pierre Gueguin's widow took their place, which did not prevent Communist militants from attacking

the platform. In October 1946, Alice Bourhis, Marc's widow, had the following point published in the PCI newspaper *La Vérité*:

Dear comrades, on the eve of this 22 October, when the PCF is preparing with a lot of propaganda, to commemorate the anniversary of the massacre of the twenty-seven hostages of Châteaubriant, I believe that "La Vérité" must make the following clarification.

At the "Sablière" where the twenty-seven hostages were executed, a monument was erected. Various commemorative plaques are placed there. In August 1945, the PCI had a plaque affixed to Marc's memory. A fortnight later, while we went to the exhumation of the bodies of Marc and Pierre Guéguen, we notice the disappearance of the PCI plaque. Of course, no other is missing. That of the PCI alone has disappeared.

Who committed the sacrilege? Who was annoyed by this plaque to the point of desecrating this monument? Obviously, it contradicted the plaque that says: "In memory of the twenty-seven members of the PCF." We must not know that Marc Bourhis, who fell under the Nazi bullets, was a Trotskyist. Scruples do not bother them much! Has not the Stalinist Carriou just declared publicly in a meeting in Brest that, if Marc was taken hostage, it was because there was a "mistake".

Today no serious historian disputes Marc Bourhis's the membership of the Fourth international. But too often we still "forget" to mention that he was a Trotskyist and that his friend and comrade Pierre Guéguen had come closer to the Trotskyists. This dark page in the history of the workers' movement where Trotskyist militants were hunted down as "Hitler-Trotskyists" cannot be forgotten even if it must be turned forever.

**By unveiling this plaque recalling**

**that the remains of Jules Auffret, Guy Mocquet and Marc Bourhis were buried in this cemetery of Petit-Auverné, it is indeed the militant of the Communist Party, the militant of the Communist Youth and the militant of the Fourth International, to whom we pay tribute. And on their behalf to the 48 hostages of Châteaubriant, Nantes and Mont-Valérien.**

***Jean-Noël Badaud, David Blanchard, Jean Brunacci, Sandra Cormier, Robert Hirsch, Henri Le Dem, François Preneau, Eric Thouzeau, Catherine Touchefeu***

Historians, political activists and trade unionists, the signatories of this tribute have shared, for decades, the same interest in this tragic and heroic period of our history, convinced that the memory of the 48 hostages will forever accompany our common struggle for a society finally free from all evil, oppression and violence.

*Nantes 12 October 2021*

\*The bulletin (in French)



## **Reda Ibrahim Farag - Egyptian revolutionary Marxist**

**17 September 2021, by Hoda Ahmed, Chedid Khairy**

Born in 1948 to a middle class Egyptian family in Tanta, the main city of the Nile Delta, he was politicized in the context of Nasserism, the June 1967 war that accelerated the crisis of the Nasserite regime and the right-wing turn led by Sadat in the 1970s. From 1968, significant student and worker mobilizations took place. A strong political and social turmoil favoured, among other things, the revival of Marxist left organizations such as the Egyptian Communist

Party, the Egyptian Workers' Communist Party, the Revolutionary Current, the Communist Party-8 January or the Communist Party-Congress.

In the early 1970s, Reda Farag was one of the driving forces behind a small secret circle that gradually formed, discovering revolutionary Marxism and adhering to the analyses of the Fourth International, notably with the English-language literature of

the US Socialist Workers Party and that produced in Arabic of the GCR (Revolutionary Communist Group) of Lebanon. Contacts were established with Trotskyists from Lebanon and Iraq.

In the authoritarian context of the Sadat regime, a small militant network began to produce analyses, to structure itself and to intervene among educated youth and trade union circles. A militant and

clandestine organization, the Revolutionary Communist League, was founded in a situation marked by repression, surveillance, and even police infiltration that affected the entire Egyptian left.

Reda co-led the League which became a small and very dynamic group offering rich revolutionary Marxist analyses on the stakes of the situation in Egypt and the Middle East (nature of the Egyptian regime, economic reform, workers' question and trade unionism, student movement, Palestine, fundamentalism and so on). Important texts of the Fourth International were translated into Arabic. With very few resources, the Egyptian LCR produced several periodicals, the result of an enormous amount of work in view of the modest forces and limited resources available to these militants. Despite the great difficulties in publishing, they produced the fortnightly newspaper *Ma al-'amal* ("What is to be done?"), the monthly *Al-thawra al-da'ima* ("Permanent revolution") and a series of notebooks.

Their activist interventions mainly concerned student youth with activities in the capital but also in the governorates, especially in Alexandria where there was an effervescence in both working class and student environments and in the cities of Minieh and Assiut, in Middle and Upper Egypt. In this central and southern region of the country, the Marxist left had some influence among educated youth before the rise and hegemony of fundamentalism in its radical variant of *al-Gama'at al-Islamiya* in the late 1970s. The RCL also conducted some limited trade union work.

If this anti-Stalinist Marxist voice remained modest, it managed to gain a certain influence in the movements of the radical left of the time, among critical youth and combative trade unionists. On three occasions, this current suffered repression: in 1975, 1980 and 1985. Each time, Reda Farag was arrested with several of his comrades and detained for several months.

In the early 1980s, the political and economic situation in the country

deteriorated severely. In addition to splits and departures, there was a real exhaustion, not to mention severe social and professional difficulties. The organization gradually withered away, especially after the last repression in 1985. Some activists from the RCL continued to defend a propagandist orientation of self-assertion. The central core that was maintained proposed refocusing on working to preserve militant achievements in what appeared as a crossing of the desert, including educational work. At the end of the 1980s, what remained of the radical left (Egyptian Workers' Communist Party, CP-8 January, CP-Congress, the *al-Matraqa* group) regrouped within the United Workers' Party. With a handful of comrades from the RCL, Reda Farag planned to regroup around a publishing house, but without any help or support, this idea did not succeed.

In the early 1990s, young activists launched the Revolutionary Socialists current, adhering to the variant of Trotskyism represented by the SWP of Great Britain led by Tony Cliff, with a state capitalist analysis of the USSR. Contacts and exchanges with former members of the RCL went rather badly and did not lead to anything. The latter, including Reda, continued to be active in different frameworks and mobilizations.

From the end of the 1990s, with rare effective support, Reda undertook long and patient work recovering the archives of his organization. For him, it was a question of preserving this rich experience, unknown and/or too often caricatured. This documentary research was very complicated. Recovery was difficult. Documents printed with very basic equipment in the 1970s and 1980s were of poor quality or now very difficult to read. He digitized them and devoted enormous efforts to make them readable with a slow and tireless proofreading work. This task turned out to be very thankless, but he persevered. Having come into contact with the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam (IISG), he negotiated the deposit of the recovered archives, obtaining their direct access to the institute's [website](#).

A cultured man, he read a lot and was interested in the literature and visual arts of the Arab world, particularly the Egyptian branch of the Surrealist movement. In the 1980s, he embarked on professional retraining as a dental technician, to obtain a decent income. Later he worked as a tourist guide. He was thus able to put his great knowledge of Egyptology as well as botany and ethnography to good use. Known and highly appreciated for his immense human qualities, his kindness, his generosity, he showed impressive modesty and humility. He had a real affection for Upper Egypt, a region he discovered in the late 1960s through a job in Aswan. He would continue to visit regularly as part of his new professional activities.

The cessation of militant activity around 1986-87 did not mean a change of ideas, quite the contrary. Present at the heart of the militant left, Reda followed political and social developments with interest and precision. A keen observer, he continued to defend positions in line with his commitment, until his last breath.

In the early 1990s, Reda met Josiane Bellochovique, a French worker turned educator. A former activist of the French LCR in the Lyon region, in Grenoble and then in Bourgnon-en-Bresse, this personality with a strong character came to visit Cairo during a simple holiday. From this meeting was born a very strong passion for Reda, based on love at first sight and deep political and human affinities. After a period of exchanges from a distance, she joined him and settled in Cairo. Their love story lasted two decades. Unfortunately, it ended in early 2012 with the death of Josiane following surgery. Passionate about photography, she had an ability to establish a link with the people she wants to take pictures of. She thus took pictures of great beauty, especially in working-class neighbourhoods in Cairo but also in Alexandria or Luxor.

If the revolution of 25 January 2011 surprised Reda like all activists, despite the warning signs, he was passionate about the occupation of Tahrir Square in which he participated, finding his former



comrades there also. There, he made the link with young people whom he directed towards reading the founding texts of revolutionary Marxism. In the heated discussions in the cafes, he criticized the positions of the Revolutionary Socialists, especially towards the Muslim Brotherhood.

Despite a deep and sincere modesty, Reda always maintained a positive spirit. Following the death in 2019 of Bechir al Siba'i (the Arabic translator of Henry Laurens' work on Palestine among others), another former co-founder and leader of the RCL who

became a renowned critical intellectual without having renounced his ideas, the last representative of the Egyptian Trotskyist group of the 1970s has left us. We hope future generations can benefit from its contribution, made accessible through Reda's efforts.

## Bill Onasch: The life of a Marxist in the American workers movement

14 August 2021, by **Adam Shils**

Bill lived in the intersection of these three circles. This led to an extraordinary life. Bill was probably the only South Dakota full time union organizer to present reports on the Leninist approach to armed struggle in Latin America. He was probably the only diehard Kansas City Royals fan to have a debate with Pierre Rousset on the revolutionary approach to the 1986 Filipino election. Perhaps, the only early morning shift Missouri bus driver to give educationals on economic changes in Eastern Europe.

### Bill and the labor movement

A teenage reading of *Arch of Triumph* by Erich Maria Remarque had awakened Bill's interest in social issues. Watching socialist candidates appear on TV during the 1956 and 1960 election campaigns created a sense of class struggle. Therefore, the union was a natural home when Bill went to work. Bill's most sustained union work was at the Litton Microwave plant in Minneapolis. In the 1970s and 80 she was both Shop Chairman and President of United Electrical Local 1139. I think that Bill saw this as the happiest and most successful of his many projects. It led to a long involvement with the UE. He participated in many regional and national UE meetings. He "followed the work" as the UE attempted to organize a runaway Litton's plant in

South Dakota. It was completely fitting for Bill to link up again with UE stalwarts such as Bob Kingsley, Frank and Carl Rosen, and Ed Bruno in the Labor Party twenty years later.

Bill moved to Kansas City in the late 1980s. He found work as a bus driver and became Vice-President of ATU Local 1287. One of his tasks was organizing a broad public campaign against transit cutbacks.

In 1996 OCAW leader Tony Mazzocchi formed the Labor Party. Bill was involved in this process from the beginning. He organized a local chapter in Kansas City and became a prominent member nationally. Bill supported Mazzocchi and Mark Dudzic's approach of prioritizing winning support inside of unions over a rapid turn to election campaigns. The Labor Party was not able to overcome the unfavorable balance of class forces and lasted little more than a decade. Bill was a loyal member to the end.

It was during this time that Bill started his KCLabor website. It was originally conceived as the site of the Kansas City Labor Party. However, it quickly morphed into something much more ambitious. Very early each morning Bill would collect all the stories on unions and strikes from the newspapers on the internet. These would be posted along with at least weekly articles by Bill. The "Week in Review" would be Bill's insightful

commentary on the news of the past week, in essence a substantial editorial.

Bill was early in recognizing the centrality of environmental issues for the labor and socialist movements. He wrote extensively on the need for "class and climate justice" and developed Tony Mazzocchi's concept of a just transition for workers whose jobs would have to be changed for environmental reasons.

### Bill and Revolutionary Marxism

Early in the 1960s, Bill first joined the Young Socialist Alliance and then moved to Chicago to join the adult Socialist Workers Party. On a humorous footnote, the SWP was not the only party that Bill reached out to for information. One of the other parties he wrote to was the DeLeonist Socialist Labor Party. This was the only group that actually had a member in Kansas City at the time. The local comrade duly went to visit Bill. However, Mrs. Onasch was not about to let a strange man visit with her teenage son. A compromise was eventually reached in which the SLP recruiter was allowed to explain the role of "socialist industrial unions" from outside a locked screen door!

Bill spent the next twenty years as a working member of the SWP in the Midwest. This obviously involved activity in the movement against the Vietnam war and the myriad aspects of building a socialist organization. He took to the theory and outlook of the SWP and devoured the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg. He felt confident enough in his ideas to even challenge Farrell Dobbs on Teamster perspectives at one point.

Bill was to need this theoretical compass and independent perspective in the 1980s. The SWP central leadership went through a political volte-face at this time. They decided that the Cuban Communist Party and its allies were the potential leadership of the world revolution. Therefore, our task was to get as close as possible to this current. Anything that obstructed this rapprochement, such as Trotskyism and the Fourth International, had to be jettisoned. Bill joined the opposition inside the SWP to this course. The leadership rapidly decided that this opposition was also on the jettisoning list. So, Bill and the rest of us were expelled in January 1984.

This began one of the most politically eventful periods in his life. The opposition was unable to agree on a post-SWP course and quickly splintered. Bill supported the Fourth Internationalist Tendency of George Breitman and Frank Lovell. He quickly rose to national leadership. In 1986, he moved to New York where he worked as the full time national organizer of the FIT. This was new terrain to him. It was quite different than work in the union movement or a local SWP branch. However, I think that Bill politically flourished during this period.

Bill began to write during this time. He was a frequent contributor to the FIT's *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*. His articles ranged from analyses of bourgeois politics in this country to debates in the revolutionary movement. They are online now and deserve a re-reading. This was also the time when Bill played an active role in the life of the Fourth International, travelling to Mexico and Europe. In particular, he spent several

months in 1988 in Amsterdam at the cadre school of the Fourth International.

Bill did well in New York as a Marxist writer and leader of the FIT. However, New York City was not Bill's kind of town and he was happy to return to Kansas City in 1990. Here, Bill focused on the trade union movement. He continued to try to build branches of the different wings of the Trotskyist diaspora: the FIT, Solidarity and finally Socialist Action. However, none of his efforts were able to conquer the difficulties of the period and overcome the general crisis of the revolutionary left.

## Bill and daily life

Bill glorified in his persona of an American worker of the 1950s and 60s. Always wearing a cap, smoking Lucky Strikes or Camels, an avid baseball fan, a lover of Kansas City barbecue, a regular watcher of Star Trek, Major Crimes, and NCIS, a systematic reader of the local paper, Bill was about as far away from the stereotype of a far left activist as one could be. I think he relished this aspect of his personality. For decades, he would answer the simple question, "How are you" with the refrain, "As well as can be expected for a man of my age and condition."

Behind all the pretending not to know the difference between a hash tag and a hash brown, I think Bill was sending comrades the message not to be pretentious and pretend to be more than you are. I also think that he was stressing the need to breakout of ingrown left circles and pay attention to the real workers movement.

## Conclusion

Since 1984, I have spent literally thousands of hours discussing politics with Bill Onasch. I learned many things in those conversations. Four of them may be particularly relevant for revolutionary socialists today.

One, always keep your eyes on the real workers movement. The working class is the force that is going to change society. If we're going to make

a contribution, we have to understand the labor movement, warts and all. Understanding the class struggle accurately is one of our main tasks.

Two, we have to work on really analyzing the US political scene. No one will, or should, take us seriously unless we have a serious understanding of the economic situation, the state of bourgeois politics, and the overall social situation.

Three, understanding Marxist theory is an indispensable first step. But the real challenge is to intelligently apply it in new and unforeseen situations. Repetition and analogy are no substitutes for concrete analysis.

Four, revolutionary socialists are in tiny organizations facing a vast task of changing the world. We are obviously in for a very long haul. A calm patient approach is the only way to survive. Bill lived Trotsky's adage that all revolutionaries need a sense of proportion and a sense of humor.

In conclusion, here are some of the plans that Bill's wife Mary and his friends have made.

\*Condolence letters should be sent to Mary Erio at [billonasch@yahoo.com](mailto:billonasch@yahoo.com)

\*Donations in Bill's honor should be made to the United Electrical workers union.

The UE's address is:

4 Smithfield Street, Floor 9,  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222-2226

Checks should be made payable to :  
UER&MWA

\*There will be an online memorial meeting in the fall. Jeff Mackler of Socialist Action has kindly agreed to help organize this.

Many socialist obituaries end with the words of the great labor anthem Joe Hill.

From San Diego up to Maine,  
In every mine and mill -  
Where working men defend their rights  
It's there you'll find Joe Hill.  
It's there you'll find Joe Hill.

It's there you'll find Bill Onasch. You might also find him wherever people drink cans of Pepsi, eat Bryant's

barbecue, and smoke Lucky Strikes.

July 20, 2021

Source: [Internationalsocialism.net](https://internationalsocialism.net)

## **“One of the liberators of our country”**

**14 August 2021, by [Esquerda.net](https://esquerda.net)**

Born in 1936, in Maputo (then Lourenço Marques), Mozambique, Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho was an ensign and captain in Angola, from 1961 to 1963, and from 1965 to 1967, respectively. He was also a captain in Guinea from 1970 to 1973.

He was an active participant in the protest movement against Decree Law No. 353/73, which was intended to address the shortage of captains as permanent staff, and which played the role of a real catalyst for the Captains' Movement and the Armed Forces Movement.

Otelo was responsible for the operational sector of the MFA Coordinating Commission, devising the military operations that ended with the siege of Largo do Carmo in

Lisbon. The operations were directed from the clandestine command post set up in the Quartel da Pontinha.

On 13 July 1975, he was appointed Commander of COPCON and Commander of the Lisbon military region. He was a member of the Conselho da Revolução, created on 14 March 1975. In May of the same year, together with Costa Gomes and Vasco Gonçalves, he was a member of the Directorio, a political leadership structure during the 4th and 5th Provisional Governments.

He was arrested after the counter-revolutionary coup of 25 November and released three months later.

He ran for the 1976 and 1980 presidential elections. In 1985 he was arrested in the framework of the

FP-25 Case. He was released five years later, awaiting trial on parole. In 1996, the detainees in the FP-25 Case were granted amnesty by the Assembly of the Republic.

Catarina Martins, national coordinator of the Bloco, evokes Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho as "one of the architects of the 25th of April, recognised strategist of the coup that gave us back our Freedom".

The Bloc leader stresses that Otelo deserves "to be remembered as one of the liberators of our country".

25 July 2021

More on [Esquerda.net](https://esquerda.net), with pictures and interviews with him in 1975, 1976 and 1980.

## **Michel Husson, critical Marxist economist**

**21 July 2021, by [Éric Toussaint](https://eric-toussaint.com)**

Michel always clearly identified with the economic theory developed by Marx, and he tried to make his contribution by studying the present. He was influenced by the work of Ernest Mandel (1923-1995), economist and leader of the Fourth International. Michel devoted several articles to him, the last written in 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic. [31]

Michel was an internationalist. In the 1980s, he had closely followed the social and political struggles in Latin

America in general and in Mexico in particular, where he had worked between 1985 and 1987. This was the time of the revolutionary upsurge in Central America (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and so on). A book emerged from his experience in Mexico: "La tourmente mexicaine", published in 1987. This book, available in free access on Michel's website is a good introduction to the political and economic history of Mexico from the beginning of the twentieth century. [32]

Michel was active in the Fourth International and its French section, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire. At that time, he was very interested in the question of the Third World and with his comrade and friend Thomas Coutrot he had in 1993 written a little educational book *Les destins du Tiers Monde* as a good introduction to understanding the economic and social situation of the countries of the "South" in their diversity. When the CADTM, Committee for the Cancellation of

Third World Debt, created in 1990 in Belgium, began to develop activities, Michel Husson immediately collaborated actively by participating in international meetings and providing articles for its publications. He regularly sent documents that could be useful to the work and activity of the CADTM.

Michel gave many educational presentations and participated in Marxist economic seminars, notably at the [International Institute for Research and Education based in Amsterdam](#). From the second half of the 1990s, Michel published several books in which he analysed the evolution of the international capitalist system: *Misère du Capital, une crise du néolibéralisme* (1996); *Six milliards sur la planète: sommes-nous trop?* (2000); *Le grand BLUFF capitaliste* (2001); *Un pur capitalisme* (2008). In 2012, he also published *Le capitalisme en 10 leçons. Petit cours illustré d'économie hétérodoxe*, illustrated by the cartoonist Charb.

He also supported the creation of ATTAC from the outset in 1998 and became one of the members of its scientific council. From 2001, he participated in the dynamics of the World Social Forum and the European Social Forum. He also participated in the activities of the Sociedad Latinoamericana de Economía Política y Pensamiento Crítico (Latin American Political Economy Society - SEPLA) created in 2005 in Mexico. He and I, as well as Gérard Duménil, were invited to the creation of SEPLA and regularly participated in conferences that it organized in different countries of the continent.

In March 2008, when Haiman El Troudi, the Minister of Economic Planning in Hugo Chavez's government, asked me to make recommendations on the economic policy to be followed, I organized a seminar in Caracas with Michael Lebowitz in which Michel agreed to participate. The seminar lasted 4 days during which we listened to a whole series of first-hand testimonies on the real state of the economy and from which we tried to develop proposals to bring about a turning point in the policy followed. There was a need for a shift that would have involved a

much greater participation of workers, in particular through the practice of workers' control. We would also have increased wages, improved housing, audited the debt, strengthened the public sector, made substantial improvements to agrarian policy and energy policy and speeded up the launch of the Bank of the South. In addition to Michel Husson, this seminar was attended by comrades such as Claudio Katz, Eduardo Lucita and Jorge Marchini from Argentina, Daniel Libreros from Colombia, Orlando Caputo from Chile and Marc Weisbrot from the United States. In the end, our recommendations were not taken into account.

Michel put his analytical and advocacy capacity at the service of major battles such as the fight against illegitimate debt (see below) or the general reduction of working hours to combat unemployment. On the issue of reducing working hours, he published several books, brochures, dozens of articles, and participated in multiple demonstrations in France and abroad, in the 1990s, he was active in international coalitions such as The European Marches Against Unemployment and in France he participated in the foundation of "Agir ensemble contre le chômage".

Michel participated from 1989 in the campaign for the cancellation of third world debt, in particular by being active in supporting the collective that had launched the Appel de la Bastille for the cancellation of third world debt and had organized a counter-summit against the G7 meeting in Paris by François Mitterrand during the bicentenary of the French revolution. It is in the wake of this that he was very active in the CADTM. After the crisis of 2008, Michel was involved in the citizen debt audit collectives launched in 2011 at the initiative of ATTAC and CADTM in France with the support of many organizations. He made a fundamental contribution to the drafting of the CAC study on France's public debt: "Que faire de la dette? Un audit de la dette publique de la France ». The report established that 59% of public debt was illegitimate.

In 2015, when the president of the Greek parliament set up the

Commission for the Truth about Debt, which I had the opportunity to lead as scientific coordinator, Michel Husson agreed to participate. Like the other 11 foreign experts and the dozen Greeks who were members of this committee, he did this on a completely voluntary basis. For three months between early April and late June 2015, he travelled regularly to Athens to participate in the work of the Commission. In fact, it had not been easy to convince him to be a member because he told me that he could perfectly well participate from the outside and from a distance. I told him that his active participation in the collective discussions would be a factor in their success and quality. Once he decided to agree to be a member, he became one of the most active. I am convinced that this was one of his best experiences of collective work at that time. He told me so later. While he had become rather disappointed by political developments in France, he regained real enthusiasm by participating in the work of the Commission in Greece.

His cheerfulness and humour could testify to this, especially when Zoe Kostantopoulou, the President of the Greek Parliament at the time, invited him to say a few words of presentation in the gallery of a meeting room of the Greek Parliament, he began his speech in English with a little smile, pointing out to the audience that his command of English was as odious as the Greek debt. Michel participated in drafting the committee's report which recommended that the Greek government put an end to the payment of all the debt claimed by the Troika (i.e., 85% of the Greek debt) because we considered it odious, illegal, illegitimate and unsustainable. He was present in the Greek parliament when I presented this report to it and the government on 17-18 June 2015. When the government finally capitulated to the Troika at the beginning of July 2015, the prime minister decided to end the work of the committee despite the opposition of the speaker of parliament. When we met again in Athens in September 2015 at the invitation of the president of the Greek parliament and despite the opposition of Alexis Tsipras, Michel wrote part of the report that the Commission



adopted, and he was one of the rapporteurs in parliament. If you watch the video of his speech, you will see that he begins with irony but quickly moves on to a very rigorous analysis.

In recent years, Michel continued his work of critique of political economy

by collaborating in particular with the site *A l'Encontre*. In many articles, we find hints of humour that reflect a part of his personality, including his desire to flush out the Tartuffes who hide behind "economic science". A final illustration of his rigor of thought is provided by the book co-written in 2020 with Alain Bihr, *Thomas Piketty*:

*Une critique illusoire du capital*, demonstrating the relevance and necessity of a radical critique of capitalism but also exposing pseudo-criticisms. In one of his last articles, "Biden: miracle ou mirage?" Michel questioned the real scope of Joe Biden's economic and social policy. A must read.

## Rayner O'Connor Lysaght Presente!

8 July 2021, by **John Meehan**, **Socialist Democracy**

### Rayner O'Connor Lysaght Presente!

Rayner Lysaght passed away today after a period of illness. His illness went largely unnoticed in the socialist milieu in which he spent his life. Yet he was a central figure in the foundation of the 60s "New Left" reimagining of a socialism in Ireland beyond the Communist Party.

In part this is because the movement that he helped to found, with its full throated commitment to rebellion and revolution, seen by the state as an existential threat, would be foreign to many of today's activists.

In a very short time he, and his comrade Peter Graham, helped build the Irish Workers Group and the British International Marxist Group as sections of the Fourth International, publish the iconic Red Mole journal, and was associated with the Saor Eire group.

That period in Rayner's life ended with the assassination of Peter Graham in 1971. FI leaders from across Europe rallied around his grave to sing the Internationale. No-one was ever charged with his killing.

Rayner went on to establish himself as a leading writer of Irish working class history, rediscovering and reapplying the analysis of James Connolly following a long period of counterrevolution with his 1971 book

The Republic of Ireland.

However he had one major fault. He was someone who lived in the mind and was totally unsuited to dealing with the business of publishing and of working with academia. As a result much of his work was stolen by academics and then refuted by them in a later wave of revisionism without him receiving the recognition that is usually extended in these fields.

How many remember D R O'Connor Lysaght and his early researches and writings on the Irish working class, the Irish Citizen Army and his rediscovery of the history of the Limerick Soviet? These issues live on, stripped of their revolutionary content by an elite that wants to remember the IRA and the Black and Tans as equality deserving of commemoration.

In later years he received some recognition through the Irish Labour History Society and through the trade unions for publications on the development of the trade union movement in Ireland and he republished privately theoretical socialist works from Ireland and Europe. A major achievement in anyone else's life, the publication of Trotsky's transitional programme As Gaeilge (An Tidirchlar), was a mere footnote in his.

As noted, much of Rayner's work has fallen out of favour. That's because the whole idea of working class independence, of a Worker's Republic, has fallen out of favour in a world

constrained by a pallid reformism.

Yet Rayner was right. His opponents were wrong. The promises of peace, justice and prosperity have come to naught. The reformist current is on the ebb. The tide of revolution will swell again.

*Socialist Democracy*

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### Rayner Lysaght has passed away - Limerick Soviet Historian, a parent of modern Irish Trotskyism

Most readers of this site probably know the sad news that Rayner Lysaght passed away on Friday 2 July 2021.

Here is a link to the [death notice](#).

People can add condolences, if they wish.

A wide range of people from the left and the workers' movement have written generous personal tributes. A number of them are [here](#).

People in Dublin may wish to join friends and comrades lining the route holding banners and tributes aloft. I will be bringing a Starry Plough and Fourth International banner. People might like to assist.

Rayner Lysaght was a long-standing supporter of the Fourth International, a founder-member of its Irish Section – the [Revolutionary Marxist Group, in 1971](#).

The cremation ceremony starts at 2.00pm, so try to get to Glasnevin Cemetery at least 15 minutes before that time.

### ***Anne Conway reports on Rayner's life and death.***

"I'm very sad to write that my dear friend and comrade Rayner Daniel Lysaght passed away today at Beaumont hospital. Rayner was a lifelong revolutionary Marxist, historian and author, a Trotskyist and member of the Fourth International. He will be sadly missed by friends, family and comrades from around the world. I visited his wife Aine today in hospital and she is coping bravely with the news. Rayner wrote under the name D. R O'Connor Lysaght and leaves behind a large literary legacy, beginning with The Republic of Ireland in 1971 and more recently a trade union history 100 Years of Liberty Hall.

He was always to be seen at political meetings and demonstrations. I first met Rayner in the late seventies and was in regular contact with him assisting him these last few months. Myself and Kate and Grainne will miss him dearly.

Funeral arrangements: leaving Stafford's Funeral Home Maypark @1.30pm Tuesday 6th arriving at Glasnevin crematorium for service at 2pm. It will be on rip and funeral can be viewed on webcam."

When Anne Conway gave me the news on Friday last I was outside Grogan's Pub in South William Street, a favourite haunt of many people from the left – including at that exact moment the Labour historian Donal Fallon sitting with the former political prisoner Nicky Kelly. I passed on the

sad news and Donal pointed out, straight away, that in the 1960's Rayner was a pioneer historian of the Irish workers' revolutionary story – especially the Limerick Soviet of 1919.

### ***Joe Harrington adds :***

So sorry to hear the sad news. Rayner seems to have been around forever. First met him in Dublin in 1972 when I stayed with him and Aine (and a few other notorious and not so notorious characters) in the place that I think was known as Parnell Road, in Harold's Cross. Much later in Limerick the link to Rayner was persistent. He looked to us in the Treaty City for sorting the practical aspects of producing the six or so editions of his 'The Story of the Limerick Soviet' – aspects such as typing out his handwritten and long revised tracts of the narrative – on the old fashioned typewriter, typex and all. Every edition had to be launched and to succeed in putting a time limit on Rayner speeches, on those occasions, was never easy. As Pat O'Connor could tell and as Mary O'Donnell tells, there was always a story to tell after Rayner returned home. I think Rayner saw the Limerick Soviet as extremely important as a clearcut example, in so many ways, of how workers can change society and the lessons from that particular effort – the strike weapon, the organisation of a society without bosses (if only for a short while), the impinging national question, the international aspect and the bureaucrats and the clerics sellout. Apart from his other work, Rayner Lysaght's labours on the Soviet has ensured that he has made a difference. But sure that's what legends of the socialist movement do.

### ***A Limerick Soviet Tribute.***

From the GPO to the Winter Palace – produced with assistance from the UNITE Trade Union and the Irish Labour History Society

Donal Fallon has written a highly recommended account of a famous Dublin event on 8 March 1966 (International Women's Day). "Notorious characters" from Rayner's milieu decided the city of Dublin housed too many monuments honouring British imperialists. Liam

Sutcliffe [blew up Nelson's Pillar](#)..

### **The life and afterlife of Nelson's Pillar**

The Dubliners celebrated with this [mocking ballad](#) – a rebellious spirit is captured beautifully by [Ronnie Drew's deadpan voice](#).

For a hundred and fifty-seven years it stood up there in state

Toora loora loora loora loo!

To mark old Nelson's victory o'er the French and Spanish fleet,

Toora loora loora loora loo!

But one-thirty in the morning,

Without a bit of warning,

Old Nelson took a powder and he blew!

Now at last the Irish nation

Has Parnell in higher station

Than poor old Admiral Nelson, toora loo!

Oh the Russians and the Yanks, with lunar probes they play,

Toora loora loora loora loo!

And I hear the French are trying hard to make up lost headway,

Toora loora loora loora loo!

But now the Irish join the race,

We have an astronaut in space,

Ireland, boys, is now a world power too!

So let's sing our celebration,

It's a service to the nation.

So poor old Admiral Nelson, toora loo!

Liam Sutcliffe, Rayner, the late Peter Graham and Máirín Keegan, and many others, were among the "notorious characters" who, in 1968-9, established a Defence Committee in the 26 County bit of Ireland. Some were also involved with Saor Éire. The North had erupted, following the famous Derry Civil Rights March of

October 1968. Rayner once remarked that events like these were created by the parents of modern Irish Trotskyism – even though its children today might be embarrassed by some of the older generation’s antics!

PS This is a good irreverent source [Splintered Sunrise](#).

PPS A good account of [Rayner Lysaght's funeral](#).

*John Meehan 5 July 2021*

*Jim Monaghan wrote:*

A polymath. (I remember many pleasant conversations on obscure footnotes in history, where he knew really interesting bits and pieces.) Born in South Wales. Was in the Irish Workers Group in the mid to late

sixties with Gery Lawless, Paddy Healy, Eamonn McCann and Sean Matgamna. Very erudite. He was in the Irish section of the Fourth International from the earliest days to the end. Made a big contribution to Irish Left history. He explored, the first to do so, the Irish soviets during the War of Independence. He had a broad range of interests. I recall a lecture he gave in the Pearse Institute on James Joyce and Ulysses. he had trawled the daily Freeman’s journal to check each and every contemporary reference. He contributed to financially to the defence of Northern ghettos and went bail for people in political charges. He had his weaknesses, a tendency to get lost in footnotes. But always worth bearing with for the insights he had. I remember Paddy Healy telling me that

while many of us would fall by the wayside, Rayner would hold to the path, selling a leftwing paper outside meetings. Rayner never lost the faith in a revolution in Ireland and across the world.

### Works

D.R. O’Connor Lysaght speaks about his life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iDStnCDBco>

*The Story of the Limerick Soviet, April 1919*

Limerick: Peoples Democracy, 1981

*The Republic of Ireland*

Cork: Mercier Press 1970

*Work is underway to make this available on the Marxist Internet Archive.*

## An exceptional militant life

24 May 2021, by **Ensemble!**, Penelope Duggan

Our friend and comrade Gérard Chaouat has just left us. He was a friend that many of us knew. But he was also an exceptional activist.

Born in 1944, he made the struggle against the extreme right-wing pro-French Algeria in the Latin Quarter his first fight within the University Anti-Fascist Front (FUA). He was thus part of the militant generation which, steeped in the stories of the horrors of the Second World War, rejected the behaviour of the French army in Algeria. These activists were at the origin of the radicalization that led to May 1968. A radicalization which, for Gérard and his comrades, went from Algeria to Vietnam, the emblematic struggle of those years. Having turned to medical studies, he actively supported the fight for the right to abortion by performing illegal abortions before the vote on the Veil law.

Gérard joined the JCR, the League and the Fourth International. He was also a trade union activist in the Scientific

Researchers’ Union of the FEN, then of the FSU (he was until recently a member of its stewarding service). He never hesitated to undertake a militant task, as his comrades in the 20th arrondissement of Paris know.

Of Jewish origin, he made it a point of honour to be determined in his support for the struggle of the Palestinian people. In this capacity, he was the head of the Palestine commission of Ensemble and had visited Palestine with a delegation from our movement.

A researcher in immunology, director of research emeritus at the CNRS, passionate about his work (he was still going to the lab to the end), he always made the link between his scientific concerns and the political aspects of research and medicine, so essential in these times.

ENSEMBLE! pays tribute to his militant career, a career made up of loyalty to our ideals, whatever the ups and downs of militancy in the years

following 1968. His story is ours, his departure is our sadness.

National Steering Committee of Ensemble!

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## An Internationalist all his life

Gérard’s internationalist commitment marks his whole life and this comes from his family history, born in Algeria to a Jewish family.

Like many of his generation and culture, his first commitment was to the question of Algeria, and in particular the Charonne demonstration in 1962 at the age of 17.

It was in 1966 that he joined the JCR and thus entered the circles of the

Fourth International. He wrote many articles for his newspaper L'Avant-Garde Jeunesse. In November-December 1967 he wrote an article on the insufficiency of Soviet aid to Vietnamese fighters. In a scientific way - we can recognize Gérard - he details the armaments offered but also of course the political reason for this insufficiency - no question for the leaders of the USSR of risking calling into question the peaceful coexistence with the United States.

He attended the founding congress of the Ligue Communiste, the French section of the Fourth International, in 1969 and was a committed activist on many fronts related to his profession and his internationalist commitment - including in the British section when

he was there in 1974-75.

It was a thoughtful and critical engagement. In 1980 Gerard disagreed with the position taken on the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, although this position was reversed the following year. He also had critical positions on the questions of Cambodia, Cuba, Iran... So for a few years Gérard was no longer formally a militant of the Fourth International - he became one again with great satisfaction in a new period.

On his internationalist commitments my comrade Christian Varin recalls "I was systematically with him in international solidarity, in rallies and meetings in solidarity with the peoples of Africa and the Middle East - including, of course, the Palestinian

people, and again quite recently in the unitary collective and rallies to defend the repressed Catalan activists. Always discreet but so visible, smiling and determined!"

In May we commemorate the Paris Commune with the traditional march to the Mur des Fédérés. Then we do our own commemoration for our comrades of the International, Pierre Frank, Ernest Mandel, Daniel Bensaïd. Gérard was always part of the small group that put flowers on their graves. From now on we will also place a red carnation in the garden of memories for Gérard, on behalf of all his comrades of the Fourth International.

Penelope Duggan, for the Fourth International

## **"One of the indispensable ones "**

**24 May 2021, by Penelope Duggan**

Mick (James) Gosling grew up in Stevenage, in a left-leaning working-class family - his father had been involved in Michael Foot's 1945 election campaign in Plymouth. Mick himself joined the LPYS at fourteen.

In 1970 he went to Kent University in the heady days of student radicalization when Kent was one of the hotspots, "Oxford, Essex, Kent unite, one struggle, one fight" is a fondly-remembered slogan. He soon joined the International Marxist Group. Friend and comrade Dave Wimbhurst remembers "he was completely tireless in his efforts to support the battles of the day. This was the era of Apartheid, Troops Out of Ireland, the National Front, the Vietnam War, Pinochet's dictatorship, the Miners' Strikes, along with the eternal struggles against Racism, for Women's Rights, Gay Liberation, and, locally, a couple of University occupations to help organize and maintain." Tony Graham adds: "I can see him now spontaneously responding to the day's events, tapping away on a roneoed sheet for

mass distribution late at night cultivating an active way forward in simple, crisp, clear language."

For Jean-Claude Bibi from Mauritius, "Mick was one of those who convinced me to join the International Marxist Group at Kent University in early 1972. His [...] support for the independence of Angola, Mozambique, Namibia were part of his permanent commitment to struggle against social injustice and imperialism."

Mick was particularly committed to supporting workers' struggles and building the "workers-students alliance" as we called it. This meant not only the 1972 sit-in in support of striking catering workers at the university but the local miners. Davy Jones recalls "While some of us curled up in our beds, Mick was up at the crack of dawn in a minibus headed for the picket line at Betteshanger Colliery. His consistency and dedication were second to none."

In 1972 he took out a year out of university and went to the North-East

as an IMG organizer. There too he threw himself into local struggles. One was in defence of an IMG member, a lecturer at a local college who was victimized for supporting a students' occupation over grants. Liz Lawrence reminds us "He kept his job as a result of a successful student and trade union mobilization." [33] Just before returning to Kent, Dave Carter remembers, Mick organized a picket at Wallsend shipyard following the coup in Chile as two Chilean warships were being refitted there. He wrote a front page article for the IMG paper under the name Chris Balfour. (Red Weekly 21 September 1973)

Mick continued with his frenetic level of activity in his final year. Tony Graham remembers "Just before his finals, we were in occupation over the university's badly-handled dismissal of a CP student. The CP hadn't wanted to defend him (!) but we did anyway and won. Immediately after our short victorious campaign, a day or so before his finals, Mick disappeared into his study to plough through his revision for a few days and nights. He



won a First which, given his profound commitment to the struggle, seemed to come from nowhere." A probably apocryphal story went the rounds that Mick should have had a viva (oral exam) to confirm his First, but that David McLellan (the well-known academic Marxist) did not want to face Mick, known for keeping up cogent and informed arguments for hours, and gave it to him anyway.

The possibilities opened up by that degree – using it to make a career or achieving bourgeois honour – did not matter to Mick. Instead, he used his brilliance and talents for the causes he believed in.

For several years after leaving Kent he put his one of his talents to good use on the IMG paper *Red Weekly* (replaced by *Socialist Challenge* in June 1977). His colleagues and comrades on the paper remember him as "an excellent writer, and a great member of the team at a time when we were often working late into the night to get everything pasted up ready to go to the printers (talk about old technology!)," (Martin Meteyard). Geoff Bell continues, "Those were good, optimistic days and sharing them with Mick helped make them more so. He was both a good person and a fine writer, and that ability should not be forgotten, nor that he used it for the greater good."

One of his major articles as the campaign for the referendum on Common Market membership hotted up was the centre spread "A Most Uncommon Market" in the 30 January 1975 issue. Another was a detailed briefing on the car industry in the wake of the Ryder report in 1975. (*Red Weekly*, 18 September 1975). In October 1977 he co-authored the *Socialist Challenge* pamphlet "The Battle for Grunwick" with Geoff Bell, Tessa van Gelderen and Jonathan Silberman. [34]

Of course, Mick did more than write, he was also a talented organizer. In 1977 he worked with Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Grant and Phil Marfleet to build the Stop the NF demonstration in Wood Green. Jeremy Corbyn recalls "Mick was a fantastic anti-racist campaigner. He spent his life opposing racism in any form!"

In the 1978 council elections with Mick Sullivan, he stood as a Socialist Unity candidate in North Islington to defend the rights of the local council tenants who were being ignored by the then right-wing local Labour Party.

However, Mick wanted, as he would have said, to "get stuck in" directly to the class struggle. So it was by political choice that he got a job at the Fords factory in Dagenham in 1978. He was an active union member, shop steward and finally chair of the TGWU Ford, Paint Trim and Assembly Branch I/1107, the largest union branch in Ford and one of the largest TGWU branches in Britain.

Ten years later, with neoliberalism in full force and restructuring underway, Ford made a determined effort to get rid of him. They charged that he had chaired a branch meeting with Bernadette McAliskey during work time, despite attestations he was at work either side of the lunch break during which it was held, and that he had sanctioned unconstitutional stoppages and walk outs at times he was not even present on the factory floor. So determined was management to get rid of him that they mailed a four page document to all the workers in the plant repeating their disproved allegations – and that he had hidden the fact he had a university degree – and threatening that the strike action in defence of Mick proposed by the union would lose workers money and put the future of the factory in danger. Thus, despite international solidarity from Ford workers as far afield as Spain and Brazil, Mick's sacking was confirmed in 1989. [35]

For the next couple of years Mick put his writing and organizing skills to good use for the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, building up the trade-union contacts that were essential to its work.

Kathy Lowe remembers him as "one of the first national organizers of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (CPBF)." At the height of the 1984-85 miners' strike the *Daily Mirror* claimed NUM president Arthur Scargill had paid for his mortgage with money donated by Libya. This report was also to go out on the "Cook

Report" on Central TV, synchronized to go out with the *Mirror* "exclusive".

The CPBF representative told Mick's funeral, "Mick was CPBF national organizer at the time and Granville [Williams] remembers at that year's TUC in Blackpool Mick organized a petition in support of Arthur Scargill. It wasn't all that popular with some trade unionists – it was the sort of dirt they wanted to believe – but he remembers a packed fringe meeting which Mick organized." Another major issue for CPBF in Mick's time as organizer was gagging orders on the British press over the North of Ireland, for which Mick was warmly welcomed by Sinn Féin during a visit to Ireland some years later.

Although Mick moved on to work for Hackney Council, he remained an active member of the CPBF National Council and was its treasurer from 2007 to 2012.

As Hackney Press Officer throughout the 1990s he is remembered by colleagues as having dynamized the whole left-leaning communications operation – starting the magazine *Hackney Today* – before being victimized again when the council was taken over by the right wing: "Because, with a rabid slash and burn chief executive running out of control as the politicians fell apart, they couldn't have 'lefties in the press office'." [36] One of the things he did while there was to produce a dossier to expose the racist witch-hunt of workers from West African backgrounds at Hackney Council and how hundreds were targeted by the Home Office immigration department.

While at Hackney he still followed what was happening with Ford. The NUJ obituary remembers that much later "Mick was incensed by the treatment of workers at manufacturing plants divested by Ford. More than 560 jobs were lost at Visteon's plants in Enfield, Belfast and Basildon in Essex, with staff being given less than an hour's notice. Mick joined Visteon workers when they were protesting outside Ford's plants, handing out leaflets to Ford workers on their way to work and asking them for their support."

In 2009 he met a delegation of Ford workers from France fighting to keep their jobs, led by Philippe Poutou, later to become nationally known as a presidential candidate and national spokesperson for the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste.

After his victimization at Hackney Mick stayed in local government press and communications work for several years, working for the London Borough of Southwark.

The experience gained as a trade-union organizer in Fords were put to good use throughout the rest of Mick's life. As CPBF former secretary Jonathon Hardy put it "Mick was brilliant at radiating energy and encouraging everyone to keep going with the same political passion he always showed. He carried all this with an immense amount of humour, generosity and friendship. Something in that experience of organizing Ford workers in Dagenham, encouraging, persuading, never posturing or puritanical, was a fantastic model for campaigning and political activism and was there in all his work in the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, in Hackney Press Office, in the National Union of Journalists and beyond."

As a local council press officer Mick was a member of both the NUJ and Unison and was active in both. His NUJ branch was London Press and PR - he was branch chair for many years and delegate to NUJ conference a number of times.

In 2007 he proposed a motion to NUJ conference calling on it to "condemn the savage, pre-planned attack on Lebanon" [in 2006] and the "slaughter of civilians in Gaza" over the last few years to boycott Israel. This was adopted after two recounts before being shelved by the national

leadership after protests led notably by BBC journalists. [37]

Although Mick ceased membership in a revolutionary organization he never stopped fighting injustice and racism in all their forms, even in his last years when he suffered from debilitating ill health brought on by his unfortunately life-long alcoholism.

Living in Hackney since 1983 he was involved in many local movements, such as Hackney Stand Up to Racism and Fascism and Hackney People's Assembly Against Austerity as well as different attempts to build a left-wing unitary alternatives such as Respect or the Socialist Alliance, rejecting sectarianism.

In 2011 at the founding of the Hackney Alliance to Defend Public Services he was elected treasurer, as he was when, with others, he reformed Hackney Trades Council in that same period. This was a frequent role as Mick was in the words of his wife Kathryn Johnson "excellent with money" or of Alan Gibson "magnificently trustworthy and great at getting money in".

In 2015, like many other longtime socialist activists, he joined the Labour Party. As Dave Kellaway writes: "While having no illusions in the Corbyn project he was fully behind it from the beginning, seeing it as a big opportunity for socialists. Happily, he lived to see the left consolidate its leadership of his local Labour Party.

"More recently I remember him in his wheelchair, supported by his wife Kathryn Johnson, at Hackney Stand Up to Racism and Fascism meetings or making sure he still had his say at the Hackney North and Stoke Newington General Committee."

His final years were spent as an

officer - treasurer again - of Hackney Trades Council and as a leading member of the Hackney North and Stoke Newington Labour Party. In the February 2020 meeting he stepped down as auditor for the Hackney Unison branch, of which he had remained a retired member.

In the last period of his life, Mick's severe ill-health restricted his life more and more, but his ever active intelligence pushed him to maintain his interest and involvement as far as possible, alongside Kathryn and with her unfailing support. As Dave Kellaway noted "The last time I saw him I could still see his brain working at a hundred miles an hour despite his weakened body preventing him from expressing himself with the old fluency. He was as interested as ever in news of the movement here and internationally."

The many, many tributes to Mick all underline the way in which he encouraged and enthused others by his own dynamism, his sharp intelligence, his eloquence in speech and writing. His interests were wide-ranging: history, literature, politics .... and football - he was a Spurs fan. He could, and often did, talk about each of them for many hours. He was a fascinating, entertaining companion. Yet, as Kathryn underlined at his funeral, his alcoholism was obviously a way of dealing with an inner pain and suffering; but the other way he expressed it was in that lifelong fight for social justice in all its forms.

Mick was, to use the words of Bertolt Brecht, one of the indispensable ones because he struggled all his life. [38]

*People cited from Facebook comments, tributes at Mick's funeral or personal correspondence with the author who knew Mick since they were both students at Kent.*

## The last escape - Theologos Psaradellis (1943-2021)

## 22 April 2021, by Catherine Samary, Eleni Varikas, Hubert Krivine, Michael Löwy

Following the 1967 coup, he unhesitatingly joined the resistance to the military junta. First arrested in 1969 - for stealing a batch of dynamite for future action - he was tortured by the atrocious "falanga" method and then placed in solitary confinement. With patience and stubbornness - reminiscent of the hero of the famous Bresson film, "Un condamné à mort s'est évadé" ("A man escaped") - he succeeded in unpicking the lock with the help of a spoon and, taking advantage of a moment of inattention by the guards, escaped.

After an adventurous sea journey in a rowing boat, Theo arrived in Turkey, and, after a brief stay in this country, tried to take refuge in Bulgaria. However, he was imprisoned by the Bulgarian authorities - that is to say the Stalinist bureaucracy - who without qualms handed this dangerous Trotskyist over to the Greek police. During his trial in Greece, the military judge joked about the "Bulgarian Communist brothers" who betrayed him, attracting this scathing response from Psaradellis: "This affair does not concern you. One day the Bulgarian workers will settle their accounts with the Stalinists in their country".

Sentenced by the courts of the junta and imprisoned, Theo escaped a second time! After having crossed through the Balkans (avoiding Bulgaria ...) and Italy - where he was supported by our comrade Livio Maitan - he went into exile in France in 1971. In Paris, he was active among the Greek exiles against the dictatorship and worked as a lithographer at the newspaper *Rouge*. He also participated in the activities of the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire, the French section of the Fourth

International, where he met a Greek-speaking Yugoslav comrade Nadia - who became his wife and the mother of his two children.

Returning to Greece in 1974, after the fall of the colonels, Theo was again active in the OKDE (Internationalist Communist Organization of Greece, Fourth International) until the end of the 1990s, when, after a serious heart operation, he abandoned active militancy. However, on 18 July 2002, during the police campaign to hunt the "17 November Movement", Theo was arrested and denounced as a member of this group by "repentants" - who later ended up publicly retracting. He was imprisoned until his new (last) trial began on 3 March 2003, which had considerable international repercussions.

In his testimony, Theo refuted the police accusations and denied any participation in a group whose nationalist orientation he did not share, let alone its methods - the execution of deputies, industrialists, right-wing journalists, Turkish diplomats and so on. On the other hand, he admitted having taken part in the attack on a bank in 1986 - an offence which was already prescribed - and which fortunately caused no injuries or deaths. But why embark on such an action, twelve years after the end of the colonels' regime? Psaradellis explained that his goal had been to collect money to finance the publication - which had been pending for years - of the works of Pandelis Pouliopolos, the founder of Greek Trotskyism ... without notifying the section. But he received no money and - realizing the role of 17 November in this operation - severed all ties with it.

Those who know Theo and

campaigned alongside him will recognize in this mixture of credulity and political honesty this lithographer who, like other Greek workers of his generation and his political tradition, had a real veneration of culture in general, and the political legacy of revolutionary Marxism in particular. A veneration all the greater since he had to stop studying at primary school. Of course, we can consider that he showed imprudence, naivety, and an erroneous political judgment ... Let us recall, as an attenuating circumstance, the famous phrase of Brecht in *The Threepenny Opera*: "robbing a bank is nothing compared to... starting a bank". "My ideology", he declared, "does not forbid me expropriating banks, but it condemns, politically and morally, the assassination of political opponents".

We were among the many defence witnesses, Greek and French, who came to his trial to explain Psaradellis's actions, and to show the incompatibility between his political culture and murderous practices. Many political figures, in Greece and around the world, signed an appeal for his release. It was a great moment of human warmth. Finally, the court recognized his innocence, and he was released.

Dear Theo, dear friend and comrade, you have once again succeeded in your escape ... But this time we will no longer be able to welcome you and laugh with you and those close to you who have supported and loved you so much. But we will not forget you and we are wholeheartedly with Nadia, Marianna and Stratis.

Catherine (Samary), Eleni (Varikas),  
Hubert (Krivine) et Michael (Löwy)

# A tribute to Ernie Tate

8 February 2021, by **Phil Hearse**

Ernie was born in 1934 in the Shankill Road, heart of Protestant Belfast. In 1955 at the age of 21 he migrated to Canada and within a year had become a member of the Canadian Trotskyist organisation, the Socialist Educational League.

In 1966 Ernie met Jess Mackenzie, an immigrant from Scotland, and from then on, they formed an unbreakable personal and political partnership. Ernie had been asked to move to Britain as the part of the international aid being provided by North American Trotskyists to establish a British section of the Fourth International and Jess moved to join him.

Jess and Ernie worked at the newly-established political headquarters of the IMG, a few rooms above a Polish butcher in Toynbee Street, near Brick Lane. From there they ran the Pioneer Book Service, which was financed by the American Socialist Workers Party and which provided Marxist books at a time when writings by Trotsky, Mandel or Lenin could not be found in mainstream bookshops, and the Internet did not exist. They also worked on the IMG's political projects and Jess was for a time organiser of the IMG's small London branch.

At the 1965 World Congress of the Fourth International asked its sections to turn towards solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle, the IMG was instrumental in forming the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC), in which Ernie was a leading light. Through this Ernie became known to wider sections of the Left, and the campaign enabled him to put his engaging personality to good political use. He and Jess embodied some of the best features of the North American Trotskyist tradition at that time - calm and reasoned judgement, together with organisational seriousness. Ernie combined that with boundless good humour, a dry wit and a winning smile. He was the opposite of the

caricatured hard-bitten Trotskyist fanatic, a caricature that political isolation made all-too-often a reality.

To build the VSC meant working with some of the well-known left wingers who supported the campaign, like engineering union executive member Ernie Roberts, Marxist academic Ralph Miliband, members of the New Left Review team like Quintin Hoare and Perry Anderson— and crucially Tariq Ali, former President of the Oxford University student union, a highly effective speaker and VSC's best known figure. At this time the IMG's best known public figure was Ken Coates, a Nottingham University lecturer, a prolific writer on workers controls and an effective speaker. But Coates was moving to the right and publicly broke with the VSC just as it was about to take off, attacked the organisation's critical stance towards the transport workers union over a London dock strike, and was out of the IMG by April 1967.

The formation of the VSC was a brilliant political move by the IMG, and once it got going it was quickly supported by the International Socialists (now SWP). The near genocidal bombing of Vietnamese peasants and the air assault on North Vietnam caused mass outrage and helped fuel the growing student rebellion in Britain and around the world. Growing militancy among the student youth did not sit well with the moderation of the Communist party-backed British Council for Peace in Vietnam, which called only for negotiations. VSC revived the idea of solidarity, unconditional support for the oppressed in struggle, resuming in some ways the mood of the Left during the Spanish Civil War.

Ernie, Jess and Pat Jordan were all involved in organising the VSC's first major demonstration in October 1967, which finished with clashes outside the old American Embassy in

Grosvenor Square. The National Liberation Front's spectacular Tet Offensive at the end of January 1968 fuelled the next major demonstration in March of that year, which finished with even more violent clashes with the police defending the embassy - and the giant demonstration that followed in October.

Ernie became centrally involved in a linked major initiative, the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal, which mobilised well-known figures to consider the evidence, of which there was ample quantities, of American war crimes in Vietnam. Ernie worked with Ralph Schoenman, Bertrand Russell's key assistant, and his work on the Tribunal brought him into contact with such figures as Jean-Paul Sartre, French writer KS Karol, Simone de Beauvoir, Scottish miners leader Lawrence Daly and Isaac Deutscher, author of the majestic three-volume biography of Trotsky. Ernie got on well with Deutscher and visited his house several times. In turn Isaac Deutscher defended Ernie after he was beaten up selling pamphlets outside a rally of the Healyite SLL in Camden Town Hall. Deutscher stopped writing for the SLL's Labour Review, which he had done under a pseudonym, and summoned the SLL leadership to his house for a dressing down.

Ernie was a member of the Fourth International's executive committee, and frequently attended its meetings in Brussels; he and Jess went to the November 1967 meeting in Belgium preparing the upcoming West Berlin international conference and demonstration. They were astonished by the political sophistication and organisational capacities of the new generation of young revolutionaries. In later years Ernie, of course, located himself in the tradition of the Fourth International, but—in retrospect—was critical of what he thought in the 1960s and later had been a huge over-



estimation of the strength of 'world revolution', and what he thought was sometimes the use of Fourth International affiliation as an artificial barrier between revolutionaries.

Through the VSC, in 1968 and 1969 the IMG started to grow among students, especially after the coup of recruiting Tariq Ali, but also more generally, because of the impact of the French 'events' of May 1968 and the intellectual prestige of Fourth International leader Ernest Mandel. But the personal financial situation of Jess and Ernie started to cause serious problems. They had important family commitments to meet, but were scraping by on a pittance, Ernie at the Toynbee Street centre and Jess as distribution manager for the new left-wing paper Black Dwarf. Deciding that the situation was unsustainable, they decided to go back to Canada, where they could get well-paid jobs, meet their commitments and prepare for the future.

The early IMG, in which Ernie and Jess were key, had a profound impact in the future of the revolutionary left in Britain. It was boosted to a new level of influence through the VSC. There was a lot of building material lying around in the mid-and late 1960s, but it needed a framework, a national campaign, to sustain it. And the fact that the IMG played such a crucial role had a lasting impact, not only on the revolutionary left, but on the militant left in general.

There are things which are taken as socialist common sense here today—for example the importance of women's oppression and the struggle against racism and for Black liberation—were pioneered by the IMG in the late '60s and early '70s; likewise the importance of international solidarity and anti-imperialism (the British left is today littered with 'solidarity' campaigns and committees). These things weren't at all common sense on much of the revolutionary left—the IMG had to fight for them. It was through comrades like Ernie that the far left was able to raise its sights to a new conception of internationalism, and a deeper understanding of gender and racial oppression.

Back in Toronto, Ernie got a job with the electricity utility Toronto Hydro and Jess with phone company Bell Canada. Ernie was the long-term vice-president and leading steward of the union local and played a major role in the 1989 Toronto Hydro strike. But things became difficult for them in the League for Socialist Action (LSA), the FI's Canadian section which was closely allied with the US SWP. There were differences with LSA leader Ross Dowson on a number of international issues, and Ernie was not given the full-time post he had been promised. By the end of the 1970s they felt that the organisation, under the influence of US SWP leader Jack Barnes, was headed in an irreversible sectarian direction and they decided to leave. But Ernie and Jess never gave up politics. Outside of LSA Jess and Ernie were involved with a series of socialist initiatives and union activism, and later the Socialist Project regroupment in which Toronto-based writers like Leo Panitch, Sam Gindin and Greg Albo played an important role. They were also regular visitors to the annual US 'Marxism' conferences, and also came to conferences of Socialist Resistance and the Socialist Alliance in London and the Scottish Socialist Party in Glasgow.

I was able to reconnect with Ernie and Jess, for the first time in 31 years, when they came to London in 2000. With my partner Kathy Lowe I was able to visit them in Toronto on two occasions subsequently, and they also entertained us at the cottage they had built on the Bruce Peninsula, on the shores of Lake Huron. As their contribution to defending the environment, they had bought 100 acres on the peninsula, which they were allowing to go back to nature. Deer and brown bears visited their back garden, and beavers returned to the lake on their property.

Jessie and Ernie after retirement were able to travel a lot, going south to escape the Toronto winters. They loved the London theatre and eating in good restaurants. Ernie was always a genial companion, as was Jess, full of amusing anecdotes and sparkling conversation. We met up with them on the Bruce a few days after 9/11 attacks. "This is going to have awful political consequences" I said. "And

it's terrible that so many people should lose their lives in that way" Ernie replied. That was Ernie all over, seeing the human tragedy as well as the analytical consequences.

Beginning in the early 1980s Ernie and Jess developed their knowledge of Latin American politics and culture during visits to Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, visits where they also pursued their new passion for bird watching. In 2018 they were very pleased to go back to Cuba to speak at a conference on the legacy of Trotsky.

In 2014 Resistance Books published Ernie's two-volume book on revolutionary activism in Canada and Britain. The next year he spoke at a conference on 1960s politics at the University of East Anglia and at several other conferences and meetings on the same topic. The book is an invaluable historical record of the revolutionary left in that era and will be a political resource for years to come. As IMG old-timer Julian Atkinson says, "His memoirs are wonderfully balanced and objective. They rise above any trace of the factional."

Ernie was pleased to be able to provide evidence for the Undercover Policing Enquiry about the infiltration of VSC from 1968. Unable to attend the event in person, his evidence was read into the record by a QC. Ernie used the enquiry as a platform to explain the role of the VSC and expose the role of the state's role in using infiltration to spy on, and destabilise, the campaign and the left in general.

It is terribly hard to say goodbye to such a wonderful friend and comrade as Ernie, a real working class intellectual who combined amazing political and human qualities. It is of course a huge loss for Jess to whom we send our love and solidarity.

*Volume 2 of Ernie Tate's book on Revolutionary Activism in the 1960s in Britain can be ordered [here](#). Volume 1 on Canada in the 1950s and 1960s can be ordered [here](#).*

8 February 2021

For other appreciations see also **Spring** "*Fare thee well, comrade: A tribute to Ernie Tate*", and **SP The**

**Bullet** "*In Memory of Ernie Tate (1934-2021): A Life of Revolutionary*

**Activism**", **Canadian Dimension** "*The fortunate Marxist: Ernie Tate (1934-2021)*".

## "He was internationalist to the core"

8 February 2021

### Enthusiasm in the struggles

Lotfi quickly became a pillar of the group of young revolutionaries active in all struggles, whether trade union, political or internationalist. An excellent debater and already very cultivated, he often hosted student parties. Through the youth camps of the Fourth International he became known and appreciated far beyond Grenoble.

In Grenoble, he was already involved in all the struggles. He knew how to conceive the right movement at the right time. He was internationalist to the core but inserted himself into all campaigns with the same energy. Then he went back to Morocco for a while, where he was a leader of the movement of unemployed graduates. He also participated in the creation of Attac in Morocco.

Back in Grenoble, he resumed activity in the LCR (Ligue communiste révolutionnaire, then the French section of the Fourth International) with the same enthusiasm for the struggles of the moment with particular attention to youth mobilizations, but also the LCR campaign for the European parliament elections 1999 or for a "No" vote in

the referendum on the European treaty [in 2005].

In the early 2000s, active in the global justice movement, Lotfi had made a major contribution to building a mobilization against imperialist interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. He was curious about everything, wanted everything, launched himself into all the campaigns with an infectious lucidity and enthusiasm. And he supported his Moroccan comrades in all their struggles through the Arab Spring and the 20 February movement. He leaves us about fifty articles and press releases. And two books.

At the national level, he made a strong contribution to the structuring of a collective intervention on international issues, generously sharing his contacts, his always concrete experience, his reflections and his writings on Morocco.

### Analytical skills, simplicity and pedagogy

He was everywhere, but he remained concentrated. He had an ability to analyse situations that he knew how to summarize with simplicity and pedagogy. He firmly believed in the

emancipation of our class, under certain conditions: the perspective of socialism, the break with the state apparatus, the strategy of mass self-organization. These three conditions had to hold together for revolutionary transformation to take place.

Finally, Lotfi made us understand concretely what it meant to be a foreigner in this "country of the declaration of human rights". Fear in the stomach in demonstrations or crossing borders in the bus when we were going to demonstrate. We will never forget, during a rally in front of the ARC in Lyon, the look of hatred from one of the cops who said to Lotfi: "You, I saw you and I will remember". Because he was going through all this and many other humiliations too, he understood very quickly and supported the revolts in the suburbs.

Lotfi happily loved life and everything in it, friends, children, wine, partying! And he loved his children Taori, Camil, Maya and Mathis madly. And Valérie, whom we loved before meeting her, so much had he spoken to us about her with tenderness and admiration. And who supported him so much in his final months.

As your Moroccan friends say: "May the earth be soft for you" Lotfi!

His comrades (from NPA, Grenoble)

## "What does Rossana say?"

## 25 October 2020, by **Salvatore Cannavò**

For many generations, Rossana Rossanda was a good teacher, someone you always learned from, even when you didn't agree with her. Because it is obvious that she always defended her ideas in a serious way, with restraint, intelligence and a broad outlook. This look so incisive and severe, made so dense by the life spent in the long upward curve that Italian society experienced after the Second World War and subsequently bruised by the downward curve and the defeat, both personal and collective, accumulated during the last decades of the past century..

*La ragazza del secolo scorso* - title of her memoirs published in 2005 (by Einaudi Editions) - going up to in 1969, year of the birth of *Il Manifesto*, her most precious legacy, and her expulsion from the Italian Communist Party (PCI) - was long awaited, but identified with her personal defeat. And Rossana Rossanda's life is fully part of the history of the century that she lived through from 1924, the year of her birth in Pola (Croatia, previously in Yugoslavia, afterwards in Italy). From there to Venice, after the earthquake of 1929, and subsequently to Milan, where she studied literature, but encountered the Marxism of Antoni Banfi, a very important teacher for her, who certainly "did not learn Communism at home. "Banfi" was the opposite of the determinism to which Marx is reduced, the opposite of a theology". He transmitted to Rossana Rossanda a critical and unossified thinking and it is with this thinking that after her apprenticeship in the Resistance - as a courier between Milan and Como, where she had been evacuated, and from where she could circulate packages and clandestine messages - she joined the PCI, in those branches "where one went to describe the other history, this victorious outcome of the Resistance that did not conquer". The Communist Party that Rossana knew was the "heavy" party, which would weaken in the 1970s and 1980s, but was then populated by men and women for whom "their own lives ceased to appear unforeseen or

hopeless and took on real meaning. in a global framework of advances and setbacks".

Then there were the leading groups, the elected officials, of which she would also be a part, but she belonged to "those in the basement, who went from house to house to collect the membership forms and formed another society within society." "The country within the country", about which Pier Paolo Pasolini spoke in the 1970s, which marked a history difficult to understand with the eyes of today, but which left its mark in the imagination and in the lives of those people who, like Rossana, were preparing to carry out their direct intervention in the world. Confident in the future, like all her generation, whether communist or socialist.

From then on, in 1947 she began "political work", firstly taking charge of the Association for Cultural Relations between Italy and the Soviet Union (a sarcastic destiny, if we take into consideration what happened afterwards next), subsequently a little bit of intervention in the working class, at the gates of the Autobianchi company (Milan), and finally the natural destiny for those who had enrolled at the University at 17 thanks to an average of eight and their intellectual gifts: "I had to bring the House of Culture out of the ruins of 1948," she wrote in her memoirs.

With the defeat of the forces of the left and the decisive victory of Christian Democracy, the year 1948 constituted a very hard blow for those who thought they could lead the country after the debacles of the war and the need for reconstruction. The PCI succeeded in overcoming this defeat and, in Milan, the basements of the popular branches and the work in the factories nourished an ambitious and undoubtedly decisive path. Also, because the framework chosen by the PCI with Rossana was that of unity with all the left and with the secular forces.

In this House of Culture, you read

everything, Brecht along with Enrico Rame, Franca's brother. Vittorio Gasman came by and "Strehler was from the house". We can therefore draw the political and cultural profile already sketched out by Banfi and by the art critic Marangoni at the university. Immersed in the broth of communist culture marked by Zhdanovism, which came from Moscow, and by socialist realism, with a direct intervention of the Party in culture and in art, Rossana, on the other hand, developed an autonomous, free, thinking that was always respectful of the common house in which she was active and which she respected. A duplication which marked her biography, and which constituted, at bottom, the fabric of an anxious soul in search of a recomposition of the interior divergence.

The thread was cut in 1956 with the Khrushchev report on the crimes of Stalin, an already belated attempt by the Soviet regime to take a path of innovation and reform. And later the Soviet occupation of Budapest and the bloody repression of the Hungarian uprising. At that moment, Rossana herself wrote: "The age of innocence was over." "Franco Fortini telegraphed me: 'I hope the workers will smash your face'". Faithful to the party, she kept the House of Culture always open, she did not flee from confrontation, "but in the party nothing was as before". "Communists who make themselves hated are always wrong". It was at this time, at the age of 32, that her first white hair arrived, a distinctive feature of an existence, a sign of wisdom immortalized in a face, the product of a sharp, personal and political grief.

Something broke, but political life continued, as did cultural work. In those years, they discussed with Sartre and Adorno, Feltrinelli published his *Doctor Zhivago*, also to "make the USSR pay". The most interesting decade was about to begin, habits and ideas were changing, a new political generation was breaking

powerfully onto the scene. Rossana realized this, the PCI - immersed in its bureaucratic rituals and in the deaf confrontations within its apparatus - much less. But it was still the great party of the workers and the people, which made a great political leap in 1963 and again in 1968. Rossana was elected member of the legislature, which saw the formation of the centre-left government led by Aldo Moro. She became responsible for culture on the national level, she was entrusted with relations with intellectuals. She moved to Rome, she knew the leading group, she had an unusual relationship with Palmiro Togliatti.

They tacitly got rid of the USSR and faced the decade of transformations with a rich debate, although in the last instance they were unable to really mark this period: "At the end, in the 1960s, it happened to me and to many comrades the same as the lizard whose tail the cat bit off: it started to grow again."

Within the PCI, Rossana was a leader, but she was hardly considered as such, the "youngest among the men of the PCI". The condition of a woman in a male environment was heavy, but she was appointed a member of the mythical Central Committee. She worked with a few young people, whose names were destined to occupy leading positions: Achille Occhetto, Sandro Curzi, Lucio Magri, "the resplendent Luciana Castellina", but also Alfredo Reichlin and Sergio Garavini. Some of them would mark the history of the 1980s and 1990s, often sharply criticized by Rossana. Thus, she opposed Occhetto's decision to change the name of the PCI and was never enthusiastic about Rifondazione Comunista, initially led by Garavini.

Cultural work excited her, she tried to recover relations with the party, by trying to close the "station of proletarian art". She moved between Cesare Luporini and Galvano Della Volpe, between Lucio Colletti - when he was still a Marxist - and Louis Althusser, "a robust sportsman in tweed", the only voice of the PCF which proved interesting.

But the frequent conversations with Togliatti, who had "a long tail from the

past," confirmed that the PCI was not Rossana's party. Certainly, "The Best" (Palmiro Togliatti's nickname at that time) allowed her to publish in *Rinascita* the famous letter written in 1926 by Antonio Gramsci, in which the secretary of the PCI criticized the CPSU for the way in which it had treated Trotsky, accompanied by a response from Togliatti: "I also have the note that Gramsci left me as an answer. Let's publish everything". And everything was published, even though there was no trace of this debate in the history of the PCI; nothing happened.

It is necessary to proceed by cross-checking. After Togliatti's death in 1964, an internal war broke out, not so much for the succession - which, after Luigi Longo's transition, everyone imagined should be entrusted to Enrico Berlinguer - but rather for the political line. On the one hand, there was the proposal by Gianfranco Amendola and Giorgio Napolitano in favour of unification with the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), a way of saying that it was necessary to be part of the political framework of the centre-left; on the other hand, the idea of the "new model of development", defended by Pietro Ingrao, more attentive to new movements and workers' combativity. With Magri, Pintor, Aldo Natoli and others, Rossana chose Ingrao, who nevertheless "never functioned as the leader of a current, did not calculate his movements, did not move his infantry, and did not defend them when they were attacked." And Ingrao lost the game, with all his supporters who were marginalized, without any prospect in the party, "excluded from any function in the central or peripheral apparatus".

The PCI appeared to be a stunned elephant: it did not take advantage of the period 1967-1969, it was immobile and, during the second invasion, that of Czechoslovakia, while condemning the USSR, it confined itself to speaking of a "tragic error.". During the 1968 congress, Rossana intervened, among the very few delegates opposed to the majority of the party: "We are gathered here, while the army of a country which claims to be socialist occupies another socialist country". The Soviet

delegation, with others - including the Vietnamese - left the room. Berlinguer said to Rossana behind the rostrum: "You did wrong, you don't know what they are like. They are bandits." And that "they" was the Soviets. But the rupture was made and, when Pintor, Castellina, Magri, Parlato, Eliseo Milani and others decided to relaunch, to do what every intellectual wants to do, that is, create a review... the party decided that the red line had been crossed. The expulsion of the dissidents was voted, they had to look for another place, because it had been decided that no internal debate could be tolerated. Even Pietro Ingrao voted for the expulsion of the dissidents, supported by Beppe Chiarante, Cesare Luporini, Achille Occhetto and Sergio Garavini. "We were no longer of theirs, of ours". *Il Manifesto* was born, with the title of the first issue of the review "Prague is alone". Rossana was also alone, but animated at that moment by a strong confidence in a future which will always be marked by what had happened before. because it was decided that no internal debate can be tolerated. Even Pietro Ingrao votes for the expulsion of the dissidents, supported by Beppe Chiarante, Cesare Luporini, Achille Occhetto or Sergio Garavini. "We were no longer of theirs, of ours". *Il Manifesto* was born, with the title of the first issue of the review "Prague is alone". Rossana was also alone' but animated at that moment by a strong confidence in a future which would always be marked by what had happened before.

Within *Il Manifesto*, life unfolded with greater clarity, looking towards this previous life. "What does Rossana say? ", This question takes us back to the intellectual value of women, to the clarity of coordinates, to respect for an ideology which lies precisely in mainstream history, but corrects it, retouches it, asks for a distinct outcome, capable of being renovated and made green again.

The history of *Il Manifesto* directed by Rossana and that of the members of her generation is, indeed, this history. It was the attempt of the political party *Il Manifesto*, as one of the various groups of the new left. This was later the alliance with the PDUP (Partito de Unità Proletaria per il



Comunismo ], whose leader was Luigi Magri. But all this happened with the gaze always turned towards the common house, towards the history of what used to be, attentive to any sign of movement which could indicate a change of trajectory, a rectification.

Precisely, by the intensity of this relation with this world and this thought, Rossana developed her other great contribution to the understanding of contemporary history, when she inserted the avatars of the *Brigate Rosse* (BR, Red Brigades) in the "family album" of the communist left.

The BR were not like ETA or the Irish Republican Army (IRA), nor the German *Rote Armée Fraktion* (RAF) or the Latin American guerrillas. They were, on the other hand - writes Rossana in the preface to the interview with Mario Moretti (principal leader of this armed organization) conducted along with Carla Mosca - "a product of the cultures and moods of an industrially advanced country and clearly from the left". They were the expression of the industrial North, convinced that the Communist Party was "the whole of a 'communist people', distinct from the line of the secretariat, of the leadership, of its central committee".

It would not be so, although during a phase the forces touched and adulated each other. With this idea that the PCI would be something distinct, depending on whether one looked at it from the head or from the base, basically the experiments of the new left also failed. For something new to happen, they had to wait for Occhetto's initiative, to which *Il Manifesto* and Rossana in particular were strongly opposed, but without committing to the adventure of Rifondazione Comunista. Just like Ingrao, whose intention to stay "in the whirlwind" (an expression he used to justify his membership in Occhetto's PDS, after the latter's liquidation of the old PCI) would become famous. But this history was that of a whirlwind, which carried them all up in it- the orthodox and the critics -, a movement of dissolution of the whole, which fed on errors, illusions, errors of judgment, arrogances, inadequacies... About all this Rossana

always wrote throughout the years in articles, reflections and interventions. But always with the look of someone who had already known defeat and knew that nothing could be done about it, with more disenchantment when, with the comrades of always and with the *Rivista del Manifesto*, directed by Lucio Magri, she tried to give life, by turning to Rifondazione Comunista and other souls of the left, to a wider and unitary alternative left alongside the Left Democrats, who were already then sailing full team towards Blairism. We were in the early 2000s and this new attempt also failed.

Seen from the end, it seems a very sad story, like the death by assisted suicide of Lucio Magri, whom she accompanied to Switzerland, friend and in solidarity until the end. When in 2010 she presented the book *El sastre de Ulm* (El Viejo Topo, 2009) during a debate held in the Chamber of Deputies, a sort of meeting with Alfredo Reichlin and Mario Tronti in particular, she recognized Magri's merit: having reaffirmed the importance of 1917 as a dividing line that could not be reduced to a disaster. But she reproached him for having made too many concessions in his book to the USSR and numerous concessions to Togliattism, including the line advocated by Berlinguer of historic compromise. Something she always opposed: "It was a big mistake," said Rossana, seeing that at that time in Europe not only did the risk of a dictatorship not exist, but that one could see phenomena of the crumbling of existing dictatorships, as in the cases of Portugal and Spain.

During this session, she again proposed what we have tried to summarize in the previous lines: the decline of the PCI did not start with the historic compromise or with the phase that followed, between the kidnapping of Moro and the defeat of FIAT ; it began in the mid-1960s - "the decisive years of post-war Italian history" - when, faced with the thaw in society, the PCI "showed itself to be undecided"; it did not know how to help the students in 1968 , it came to accept its decline in the working-class, up to the defeat of the 1970s.

From 1971, date of the birth of the

newspaper *Il Manifesto*, until the break with this periodical - never really explained or recounted in an understandable way - Rossana sought to recover from defeat, to align a cultural and human journey that had finished. *Il Manifesto* was a decisive companion for the politicization and political participation of entire generations, including in its errors and misunderstandings. From this periodical, beyond maintaining a rigorous point of view on issues relating to the working class, the role of the left, the avatars of communism and socialism and the international debate - the special edition of *Il Manifesto* published after the Polish coup against Solidarnosc was memorable - Rossana always also maintained a consistent vision of constitutional guarantees, committing to the front line against the mounting of the April 7 trial, defending Toni Negri and remaining disillusioned by his flight (as Toni Negri himself recalls in his autobiography). And she became fully engaged in the defense of Enzo Tortora (unjustly condemned by the Italian justice, without legal guarantees), by publicly giving, in 1984, her vote to the former television presenter, candidate on the list of the radicals (Partito Radical), defender of many causes ignored by the traditional left, and more particularly civil rights, for the European elections that year.

It is impossible to reconstruct the quantity of interventions and positions taken by Rossana Rossanda. There remains only the memory of a piece of the twentieth century that she has left us after having lived the choice of an exclusive and decisive camp. "A choice of reason. It may be that the fact of having suffered in my own childhood, being torn from my parents by the earthquake of 1929, determined an intolerance to lead a life ruled by others, an intolerance that has not abandoned me. It's not a theory, it's a part of me. How can one bear the reality that the majority of those who are born do not even have the possibility to think about who they are, what they will do with themselves, the burning human adventure abandoned."

Rossana Rossanda will be missed so much.

# Gisèle Halimi: A courageous anti-colonialist and feminist lawyer

17 August 2020, by **Josette Trat**

## In revolt against her “destiny” as a woman

Gisèle Halimi was born in 1927, in Tunisia, into a Jewish family of very modest means. [39] Her father was a courier in a law firm before becoming a clerk after many years, and her mother looked after her four children. Her mother, a rabbi's daughter, was very pious. For her, “Everything was sin”. For her mother and father alike, the birth of a daughter was “a curse”. Her father waited three weeks before announcing to his family and neighbours that his wife had just given birth to a girl. A girl was considered a “burden” for whom a husband had to be found as quickly as possible. Thus, at 16, Gisèle was introduced to a suitor twenty years her senior. But Gisèle did not want to get married and wished to continue her studies to satisfy her thirst for knowledge, obtain qualifications and earn a living to be economically independent and thus escape the fate reserved for her mother and all other women.

Gisèle Halimi won her freedom as a girl and woman through great struggle. She kept recalling that she went on a hunger strike when she was 10-11 years old, refusing to serve her brothers at the table or to do the dishes when they themselves were exempt. It seemed all the more unfair to her since her older brother was a real “dunce” at school and she was a fine student. All her parents' hopes were for their eldest son's future, while she was “inessential”, but she forced them to back down: “I won my first piece of freedom” she said. At 19,

she underwent an abortion “performed by a sadistic young doctor”: “I cried a lot that night, feeling like I had been tortured, to sanction my freedom as a woman and to remind myself that I depended on men. But I was not sorry. Biology had set a trap for me. I had foiled it. I wanted to live in harmony with my body, not under its dictate”. [40] For her, the right to abortion was a “basic” freedom. Simone de Beauvoir had said that “the first freedom is that of the belly”.

## Support for pro-independence activists

She left for Paris with her two baccalaureates in her pocket in 1945 to continue her studies in law and philosophy. After graduating, she returned to Tunis and was sworn in at the Tunis bar in 1949. Her father was finally very proud. At first she defended Tunisian trade unionists and pro-independence activists. She successfully demanded a pardon from President Coty for one of her clients who had been sentenced to death. She reproduced this type of approach with De Gaulle, to save Algerian activists arrested in their homes, tortured and sentenced to death without proof, after the trial of Algerians arrested following the massacre of around thirty Europeans in the village of El Halia. Halimi's two clients were pardoned, but this “success” did not prevent her from denouncing this arbitrary practice.

But even more, her work as a lawyer and as a “committed witness”

defending the Algerian people's right to independence, led her to draw a catastrophic balance sheet of so-called French justice: “From 1956 to the Evian Accords of 1962, I kept going back and forth between Algiers and Paris, where I was now based to ensure the defence of Algerians who had been arrested, insurgents, pro-independence activists. It was obvious to me. But the special powers voted through in 1956 had taken the law hostage. Justice was often a sham. I discovered, horrified, the extent of the abuses committed by the French army, torture established as a system, the systematic rapes of arrested female activists, the convictions on extorted confessions, not to mention the disappearances and summary executions. I was stunned”.

Halimi was one of the few lawyers to participate in the defence of Algerian activists. This earned her multiple threats, from the military in particular, as she explained to Annick Cojean: “For a long time I saw only posturing, attempted intimidation, until the assassination in Algiers, of two very close colleagues, then the receipt, in 1961, of a paper from the OAS which announced my death sentence”. She was never afraid, she said “except for one night when I was thrown in the torture centre of the Casino de la Corniche, in Algiers, where I thought guiltily of my 3 and 6 year old sons, waiting for me to be executed.”

Her commitment had brought her closer to all those who denounced torture, primarily the Sartre-de Beauvoir duo and many others. With Simone de Beauvoir she organized support for Djamilia Boupacha, a young Algerian active in the FLN suspected of having planted a bomb in

a cafe in Algiers in September 1959. The bomb had not exploded. It was defused but Djamila was arrested in February 1960 with her father and her brother-in-law and remained in the hands of the military for five weeks. She underwent multiple tortures. In particular, her breasts were burned with cigarettes and she was raped with a bottle neck pushed into her vagina. Finally she confessed, incurring a possible sentence of death. It was Djamila's brother who, from Morocco, wrote to Halimi asking her to defend his sister, which she agreed to do. Halimi wanted to indict the highest army officials and convinced Djamila to file a complaint against the army minister, P. Messmer and General Ailleret, senior commander of the Armed Forces in Algeria. Simone de Beauvoir signed a column in *Le Monde* on 3 June, 1960 "For Djamila Boupacha" and this had an international impact helping to set up a very broad support committee with prestigious and very diverse personalities from the literary, artistic, political and associative worlds. The trial took place in June 1961 and Boupacha was sentenced to death but nevertheless released from prison in April 1962, following the Evian Accords.

Attached to the right of peoples to self-determination, Halimi then went to Vietnam in 1967 for the Russell Tribunal against the crimes of the US army in Vietnam, created on the initiative of the philosopher Bertrand Russell and chaired by Jean Paul Sartre. In all these trials, Halimi had experienced the weight of public opinion: "In a political trial, she declared in 2005... we must speak above the heads of the judges, to public opinion as a whole, obliging the public authorities to assume their responsibilities". Which she did brilliantly during the Bobigny trial in 1972 or that of Aix in 1978.

## **"Women, never resign yourselves"**

Halimi's "feminist" commitment went back a long way, as we have seen. But the signing of the "Manifesto of 343 Women" having had an abortion in April 1971, was the start of a new

phase of her engagement. This manifesto, published in the *Nouvel Observateur* of 5 April, 1971, signed by 343 women including figures such as Simone de Beauvoir, Catherine Deneuve, Françoise Sagan and Delphine Seyrig, was a major political event. In a few lines, it put on trial the law passed in 1920 criminalising abortion which condemned hundreds of thousands of women to clandestine abortion, endangering their health and their lives. These hundreds of women simply demanded the freedom to have an abortion, following that of contraception. The signatories thus challenged the government and public opinion and took risks under the law. Gisèle Halimi was the only lawyer among the signatories. De Beauvoir advised her not to sign but she did and immediately helped create "Association Choisir" to defend the signatories and the right in general for women to choose whether or not to have children.

Halimi was then approached by Michèle Chevalier to defend her daughter, Marie-Claire, who had an abortion after being raped. Four women faced jail for helping Marie Claire, 17 at the time of trial. Michèle Chevalier, a trade unionist and Communist Party activist, was raising her three daughters alone. Halimi agreed to take on the case and made the trial in October-November 1972 an "exemplary" one. During the trial, the four accused did not apologize for their actions and at the opening of her plea dared to speak of her own abortion, undergone at 19, to the chagrin of the court president. Three women including Marie-Claire were acquitted, with a fourth receiving a suspended sentence. A victory that paved the way for new legislation introduced by Simone Veil in the National Assembly. Nevertheless, we must not forget that another association was born in 1973, the MLAC (Mouvement pour la liberté de l'avortement et de la contraception), a mixed and unitary movement which for two years, thanks to a network of collectives throughout the country, would openly carry out illegal abortions under the noses of the police to create a relationship of forces and obtain the decriminalization of abortion, by supporting women abroad, by

organizing massive demonstrations or showings of the film "Histoire d'A". As Halimi herself says, if it had not been for this "formidable force" of women who "shifted public opinion", nothing would have changed in the governmental sphere, nor in the National Assembly, despite the "courage" of her friend Simone Veil.

The second major trial that marked these years was that of the three rapists of Anne Tonglet and Aracelli Castellano. In 1974, these two young Belgian lesbians who were camping in the creeks of Marseille had repelled the advances of a "gang of thugs" who had harassed them during the day and were the victims of a punitive expedition at night: "a night of horror", according to their lawyer, Halimi. But whereas the usual procedure tended to treat the crime of rape as a simple misdemeanour within the framework of a criminal court, Halimi fought to obtain a trial in the Court of Assizes. It finally took place in Aix in 1978, in a highly charged atmosphere, with Halimi and her clients being insulted and threatened. She invited personalities of all stripes to testify to "change the law and society", including Arlette Laguiller, leader of Lutte Ouvrière and Gisèle Moreau, a member of the PCF political bureau. This trial was a triple success. It gave a voice to women who were victims of rape before a jury. It resulted in the conviction of the rapists, questioning, in this case at least, the impunity of rapists, and paved the way for new rape legislation in 1980 that provided a broader definition of rape. However, as we can see today, the issue of violence against women and rape has still not been resolved and cannot be resolved on a purely legal level. This requires upheavals in social relations between the sexes which affect all spheres of society and in particular the question of education.

After May 1968 and years of mass mobilization of feminists, François Mitterrand was elected as France's President in 1981. The left became the majority in the National Assembly and Halimi was elected as a deputy supporting the Socialist Party. In this context, she was far from inactive: she voted for the reimbursement of abortion despite the opposition of

Mitterrand and Pierre Bérégovoy, who claimed to "respect all the spiritual families of France". In 1982, she also defended the law decriminalizing homosexuality before the National Assembly. From all the evidence, she did not have fond memories of those

years as a deputy supporting the PS. And we understand this. As for us, we will keep the memory of Gisèle Halimi, as a courageous and tireless fighter against colonialism and for the emancipation of women. Let us not

forget either that she was also one of the co-founders of Attac in 1998, aware of the dangers posed by capitalist globalization. Halimi's commitment was admirable in more ways than one. She deserves all our respect.

# Maurice Rajsfus, the last of the righteous

19 June 2020, by **Jean-Paul Salles**

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.

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## 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 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

# **Remembrance of Kevin Keating**

**5 June 2020, by Anne Conway**

I was asked to write a tribute about Kevin, my dear partner who died in May from a deadly Glioblastoma brain tumour. I found writing it difficult with the sadness of him being gone and I missed his editing skills.

Kevin was interested and informed about anything one could care to mention; the world, science, politics, music, books, films the natural world, films, comedy, sport. He was a traditional Irish music enthusiast and

was either playing tunes on his tin whistle or listening to music. He dabbled in a bit of painting and was an avid reader. I miss not having to tidy away the stuff he left lying around - books, kindle, music notes, etc. Prior to his illness he had a busy life, playing music a few nights weekly at traditional music sessions and swimming a mile as regularly as 3 times each week and involvement in political activity. Attending music schools and festival in Ireland every

summer was part of his calendar of activities and after his retirement he travelled in Asia and trekked in Nepal in 2017.

Kevin faced his diagnosis in March 2019 bravely, his life of campaigning and struggle gave him an inner strength to cope and live as normal a life as possible. The day following his discharge from hospital we went to the national football stadium Croke Park to see his team Dublin playing.

Not breaking with tradition, we also went to the St Patrick's Day parade.

He joked about his chemotherapy referring to it as chemo torture, saying therapy implied relaxation, massage and candles. My sister recounts her reading an expiry date on an item and him saying wryly "I also have an expiry date". Whilst his treatment in the public health care service was generally good he also experienced first-hand its stark inadequacies, waiting on one occasion 2 hours for an ambulance to respond to an emergency 999 call - a result of decades of cuts, austerity and outsourcing. Very often it was not safe to go to Accident and Emergency due to overcrowding and infection risk but Kevin was philosophical about this, he was glad to be able to stay at home when in reality he needed to be assessed for the increased incidence of seizures he was experiencing.

Reading the many tributes since his passing show the high esteem he was held in - it was lovely to read how well regarded and liked he was, a man with a quiet unassuming manner, thoughtful towards other people, kind and considerate with a good sense of humour. [41] He was a devoted father to his two daughters who cared for him with myself and other family members at our home during the last month of his life.

He was not a career person or interested in status. He devoted his time outside work to doing what he enjoyed - his paid work as a fitter/plumber in a local authority was a means to live. A message on the condolences page of his death notice says, "Great memories of Kevin working in the boiler house in Ballymun, and his main job highlighting the plight of others on marches down O'Connell St and handing out leaflets."

Kevin started work as an apprentice at a young age and soon became interested in left wing politics. At this time, as he states in his interview [here](#) tens of millions of workers across Europe were engaged in strikes, while Ireland topped the table for the number of strike days lost to unofficial strikes. This political climate radicalized him. He was a great

admirer of James Connolly and fittingly Kevin's coffin was draped with the Starry Plough, the flag of the Irish Citizen Army representing Connolly's Workers Republic.

In the 1980s myself and Kevin met through our involvement in the H Block campaign, republican political prisoners were on hunger strike for political status. We were both members of People's Democracy and were involved in an election campaign to elect Bernadette McAliskey who was standing during the hunger strike campaign as a candidate in the constituency of the then Fianna Fail leader. The election headquarters was a caravan which required guarding at night, one evening myself and Kevin were assigned as minders and from then on, we became more than comrades in struggle. Bernadette received a respectable vote but during the election campaign she was targeted by the prolife movement. During this tense period of heightened struggle Kevin visited workplaces and campaigned to get support from workers and trade unions for the prisoners demands.

The repeal of the 8th Amendment in 2018 was a great victory, Kevin was involved in the campaign and was hugely impressed by the energy of the youth who were central in winning the landslide vote. [42] This gave him optimism, he believed this energy could be harnessed to win other victories. Later that year, with support and inspiration from Kevin, I helped, with others, set up the Campaign Against Church Ownership of Women's Healthcare with the objective of making the proposed new publicly funded National Maternity Hospital public and free of control and ownership by the nuns. He was enraged by the duplicitous role being played by government as they colluded with the church on the handover despite the repeal victory and the exposure of horrendous clerical abuse of children and adults in their care over decades. Kevin's speaking at the campaign launch focussed on the inspiring role of the youth and how they could defeat the manoeuvres of the state and catholic church regarding ownership of the new maternity hospital.

Kevin was active in the struggles against deregulation of utility services - refuse collection, property and water charges, he saw from the outset the introduction of charges would lead to these services being privatized. He was proved correct on this. He had many a sharp argument at campaign meetings on the role of the union leaderships in easing the way for the state to implement the neoliberal changes dictated by the TROIKA policies which continue under the fiscal treaty agreed by unions leaders. Kevin campaigned against social partnership deals between government, employers, and trade unions, seeing clearly that all the deals sold out workers and eroded public services. He saw through the deception and corruption of language used by the social partners whereby the buzz word reform was but another word for austerity instead of improvement in services. He got wired up and angry at how workers were made to pay for the crisis.

He was a thoughtful reflective person and a fervent advocate of the necessity for democracy in politics and campaigns, seeing its absence as a block on the ability of the working class to be centrally involved and have ownership of their struggle. Democracy was an important concept in Kevin's lexicon. He was bemused that left candidates' platforms in the recent local government elections failed to address the undemocratic nature of the councils whereby unelected city managers had control. He cited the democracy in Athens centuries ago as more advanced than today.

He cared about what was going on not just in Ireland but internationally. We were both involved in setting up the Ireland Bosnia Solidarity campaign in the early 1990s which supported a multi-ethnic united Bosnia Herzegovina and opposed the UN imposed arms embargo which left the Bosnians defenceless against armed Serb nationalists, the campaign supported the Workers Aid convoys to Bosnia. Our daughters could be forgiven for thinking they lived in Sarajevo as we campaigned relentlessly. In 2005 Kevin went to Colombia as an international observer with a delegation of students and

trade unionists from Ireland. Students unions in Ireland were boycotting coca cola products. In Colombia he met with the coca cola workers who were then campaigning for an international boycott of Coca Cola products due to the repression and murder of trade union activists in their plants in Colombia. I could see on his return that the brutality of the state and the death squads that he learned about affected him deeply.

In more recent years, he met with and befriended people seeking refugee status in Ireland from whom he gained loving support during his illness.

Kevin cared deeply about the downtrodden and marginalized and victims of abuse of power and worked tirelessly to get rid of the capitalist system whose injustices and inequality he so despised. He never lost hope or belief despite setbacks and defeats. His strong belief that there was a socialist alternative made him optimistic about the future.

It was fitting that his own rendition of Phil Ochs' song, When I'm Gone was played at his funeral service "I can't say who to praise and who to blame when I'm gone, so I guess I'll have to

do it while I'm here."

He leaves behind an impressive legacy of kindness and political activism. For me as his partner and comrade his inspiration and determination will hopefully help myself and our daughters through his loss and that we will have the strength to continue to fight for what he believed in.

The photo below shows Kevin canvassing during repeal in 2018 with his partner Anne and daughter Kate. The [video clip](#) is of his funeral.



# Carlos Ferra, Historic Pillar of the Socialist, Anti-capitalist Struggle, Has Died

**23 May 2020, by Coordinadora Socialista Revolucionaria**

Carlos was always noted for his sharp intelligence and organizing capabilities, as a trainer of new cadre, and for his deep-rooted humanism, which earned him respect and love by those of us lucky enough to have known him.

He began his activism in 1962 in the ranks of the Party of the Revolutionary Worker (T) (POR-t). He joined the International Communist Group (GCI) in 1973, and in 1976, participated in the foundation of Mexico's Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT). Since the beginning of this century, he participated in the process that led to what is today the Revolutionary Socialist Coordinating Group.

In addition to being a political leader, he participated in the largest campesino land take-over in the state of Sonora in 1976, shoulder to shoulder with his life-long partner Ana Mar­­a L­opez Rodr­­guez. He was also a union leader at the Autonomous University of Chapingo.

We extend our most heartfelt condolences and solidarity to his partner Anita and their daughters Eunice and Ana Luc­­a.

*Mexico City*

May 19, 2020

Revolutionary Socialist Coordinating Group

## Biography

Carlos Rub­­en Ferra Mart­­a­nez was born in Hermosillo, the capital of the Mexican state of Sonora, in 1942. He studied primary and middle school in the town of Navojoa, Sonora, and moved back to Hermosillo to study at the University of Sonora High School in the 1950s.

In the early 1960s, he enrolled in the School of Economics at Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM) in Mexico City, where he participated in several student

mobilizations, such as the movement demanding the abolition of the campus police.

From 1963 to 1967, he was a member of the Revolutionary Workers Party (Trotskyist), but was unable to conclude his studies in economics because Mexico's Ministry of the Interior erased his school records in 1967. A couple of years later, he received his bachelor's in sociology at the Ibero-american University. In 1968, during the huge university movement that shook the country, he participated in brigades supporting it in poor Mexico City neighborhoods.

In 1969, he became a professor at the University of Sonora, where he was a leader of the 1973 university movement against the imposition of an antidemocratic charter for that institution by the state legislature. That same year, he joined the International Communist Group (GCI), the Mexican section of the Fourth International, and later, in 1976, he helped co-found the Revolutionary

Workers Party, of which he was a leading member.

From 1975 to 1979, Carlos was a leader, together with his partner in life and in struggle, Anita López, of peasant mobilizations demanding the dismantling of the latifundia and the distribution of land in the Yaqui and Mayo Valleys, which ended in the distribution of 100,000 hectares of land, the largest since Mexico's

agrarian reform in the 1930s. In 1979, he ran as an unregistered candidate for governor of the state of Sonora, supported by the PRT and the Independent Peasant Front. In late 1979, he took a post at Mexico's most important agricultural school, the Autonomous University of Chapingo, where he taught for 40 years continually, also participating as a union activist and as the union's

general secretary for one term.

In the early 21st century, he became part of the collective that eventually gave rise to the current sympathizing section of the Fourth International, the Revolutionary Socialist Coordinating Group (CSR), in which he played a leading role in both political orientation and cadre training. He was a member of the CSR until his death on May 19, 2020.

## An Appreciation of Neil Davidson (1957-2020)

**11 May 2020, by George Kerevan**

The death of historian Neil Davidson, at the tragically early age of 62, has robbed Scotland, academia, the international socialist movement, and believers everywhere in a fairer, less alienated society, of a towering intellect and (above all) a truly warm, unassuming, generous human being. But for Scotland's petty, market-driven university establishment, Davidson would have been a professor with his own chair, as a pale but deserving signal of his intellectual contribution to Scottish historiography and intellectual life. Alas, the prophet is rarely appreciated in his own country.

Neil Davidson was a true polymath with a polymath's interest in everything from hydraulic societies, rural Scottish history, and seventeenth-century intellectual thought. This was not aimless eclecticism. Neil thought in terms of social systems, their evolution and revolutionary transformation. This approach sprang from his lifelong Marxism. He was a Marxist not only in the activist sense – though he was politically committed all his life, and a founder member of the Radical Independence Campaign. Neil exemplified a creative, non-dogmatic Marxism; one he deployed when analysing complex historical questions, principally how capitalism

emerged in Scotland. Yet he wrote in a pleasingly accessible style, without sacrificing rigour or complexity. His uncannily wide reading (to quote the late Angus Calder) and ability to absorb epic amounts of source material were legendary. Rumour has it that he had two lockups to house his ever-expanding book collection – one that included the collected works of Marx and Engels in Hungarian!

### Background and writing

Neil's family roots (on both sides) lay in the poor farming communities of rural Aberdeenshire – a society given voice by Lewis Grassie Gibbon in his iconic novel *Sunset Song*. Agricultural mechanisation and the concentration of land ownership swept his grandparents into Aberdeen itself, and Neil remained a proud Aberdonian with an Aberdonian's thick Doric twang. Neil was born in 1957 shortly after the Tories won an outright majority of Scottish votes at the 1955 general election. His father Dougie was a radiographer – a respected profession during the mass TB campaigns of the time – and his mother Margaret a secretary. They and Neil, together with sister Shona, lived in a house with an outside toilet

– quite normal for working class Scots in the 1950s.

Neil attended Aberdeen Grammar, the city's premier council school for bright boys (no girls then) which was housed in an austere granite edifice built in true Victorian baronial style. But by the time Neil attended in the 1970s, the student revolt, the Vietnam War, and rock music had penetrated the grey granite walls. Neil turned Punk, embraced the Anti-Nazi League, and became a Marxist.

However, even Punks need to earn a living. Neil became a civil servant, a career that would last more than two decades. He also became a trades union activist and later chair of the Scottish Office PCS. None of this stopped him rising before dawn to read ferociously and systematically. Neil was a latter-day example of the traditional Scottish autodidact. Eventually, he worked for an Open University degree in social science. It took him five years. Only in 2008, did Neil finally escape civil service confinement for academia, becoming a senior research fellow at Strathclyde University, where he stayed five years. In 2013, he became a lecturer in the sociology department of Glasgow University, where he remained till his death.



Starting in early 1993, Neil Davidson's questing mind turned to the origins of a distinctive Scottish capitalism and of the continuing relevance of Scottish nationhood. Despite his heavy workload and trades union commitments, and despite his lack of an academic base, Neil was to write two seminal texts that transformed thinking on this topic. First came *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood* in 2000, for which he was awarded the prestigious Deutscher Memorial Prize, followed by *Discovering the Scottish Revolution 1692-1746*, three years later.

I have a small, walk-on part in Neil's intellectual revolution, as he explained - with characteristic generosity- in the preface to *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood*. This book he described as an "homage" to an article of my own, bearing the same title, which first appeared in the short-lived *Bulletin of Scottish Politics*, way back in 1981. The *Bulletin* was edited by Tom Nairn and I was a member of the rather amorphous editorial board. Sometime in the early 1990s, Neil found a dog-eared copy of the second (and last!) issue of the *Bulletin*, in the remainder box of Clyde Books in Glasgow. My piece - an experimental Marxist analysis of the rise of Scottish capitalism, cast as a reply to John Foster, the Communist Party historian - caught Neil's attention.

Neil credits me with asking "the right questions" but then failing to answer them - indeed to my having become a Marxist apostate. I freely admit to a Millennial political depression as neoliberalism seemed triumphant everywhere. Fortunately, Neil Davidson was made of sterner stuff. After an intellectual hiatus of nearly two decades, in which dull empiricism had dominated thinking on the trajectory of Scottish history, Neil reopened the debate regarding the economic and political forces that created modern Scotland. One very minor result of the publication of his *Origins of Scottish Nationhood* was that Neil got in touch (through a mutual friend, Ian Wall) to invite me to the book's public launch.

In essence, Davidson argues that while a Scottish state existed prior to 1707, Scottish mass national

consciousness did not. Modern Scottish national consciousness arose (or was constructed) after the Union, for only then were the material obstacles to bourgeois nationhood - most importantly the Highland/Lowland divide - overcome. Indeed, Neil maintains that even the Union in itself did not transform Scottish society, because its initial *raison d'être* locally was to protect feudal relations north of the Border. The decisive shift came only after the defeat of the last Jacobite revolt in 1746, when the British state (and lowland bourgeoisie) suppressed the remnants of Scottish feudalism - a bourgeois revolution from above. Thus, a *capitalist* Scotland was constructed *simultaneously* with (and as part of) the consolidation of a new British nation state and British identity. Result: the majority of Scots entered the Industrial Revolution with a dual national consciousness, but only one political nationalism, which was "British".

If so, there is a political sting in the tail: the later, separatist nationalism of the SNP, which arose in Scotland during the 20th century, is not a simple revival of a pre-Union sentiment but an entirely new (and potentially anti-system) ideological construct. Though he did not know it at the time, Neil Davidson was laying the intellectual foundations for a progressive movement for self-determination that has come to dominate the Scottish left in the early 21st century, eclipsing the once hegemonic Labour Party.

Another result of Neil's path-defining work on Scottish development was that it facilitated his belated entry to academia. He put the new platform to good use, pouring out an impressive number of books, anthologies, and hundreds of articles on an extraordinary range subjects - more than most academics would produce in a normal career. These works fall into three broad categories. First, an intellectual engagement with two dominant figures in modern Scottish political philosophy, Alisdair MacIntyre and Tom Nairn. Second, a single-handed assault on American academic views on the advent of capitalist modernity, particularly those of Robert Brenner. And third, Neil's

magnum opus in the form of a massive reimagining of the concept of "bourgeois revolutions" as necessary waystations on the path to modernity. This was an agenda to fill three academic lifetimes.

## Challenging the philosophers: MacIntyre and Nairn

Marx famously quipped that philosophers have only describe the world, the point is to change it. But how do you change it? Neil Davidson set himself the task (Gramsci-like) of engaging with two prominent Scottish public intellectuals whose political philosophy has had a major ideological impact - Alasdair MacIntyre on the conservative right, and Tom Nairn on the nationalist left. In a fury of books and articles, Neil forensically deconstructed their evolving positions, offered biting (yet fair) criticism; and through this process evolved a fresh political architecture to change the world.

Glasgow-born Alasdair MacIntyre is an internationally renowned philosopher, based in the United States since 1970. His book *After Virtue* (1981) is recognised as one of the most important works of moral philosophy written in the 20th century. MacIntyre may lack visibility in his native land but his global impact on conservative thinking is profound. Curiously, MacIntyre started out as a Trotskyist-Marxist in the 1950s (and later was leading member of the early version of Neil Davidson's own SWP) before embracing Catholicism and shifting ever rightwards.

The particular significance of Alasdair MacIntyre is that he abandoned Marxism to lead the ideological counter-revolution against the liberal 1960s. This coincided exactly with the rise of Reaganism and Thatcherism and the defeat of the Western industrial working class - a development with induced in MacIntyre a profound pessimism. But unlike many apostate Trotskyists who transmogrified into free-market

libertarians, MacIntyre went on to champion an anti-individualist, anti-liberal, quasi-religious form of reaction. MacIntyre produced the most sophisticated contemporary attack on the Marxist project, by attacking its philosophical and moral under-pinning. But by reconstructing MacIntyre's early Marxism, Neil recovers the promise that Marxism holds as a critique of capitalism and a revolutionary tool for the emancipation of humankind. Davidson's debate with MacIntyre was a Gramsci-like moment when the international left (in the shape of Neil) took on America's most prominent philosopher-ideologue in single intellectual combat – and won.

Neil also devoted considerable time to an ongoing debate with Tom Nairn, perhaps the central figure on the Marxist left to the study the material nature of nationalism and (practically) to champion the break-up of the British state. In the early 1960s, Nairn and Perry Anderson (in the pages of *New Left Review*) pioneered a critique of British capitalism. This argued that a thwarted bourgeois revolution had subordinated the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie to those of the aristocracy, and left the UK imprisoned in an archaic state structure that was unable to compete with later competitors such as Germany and America. Nairn concluded that one way of destroying this archaic state was to break up Britain using Scottish independence as a battering ram. In later years, Nairn extended his analysis, viewing the nation state (and nationalism as an ideology) as material constructs necessary to all capitalist "modernisation". Ultimately, Nairn seems to suggest that national revolutions are historically more important than unfulfilled Marxian proletarian ones.

Characteristically, Neil Davidson tears into Nairn's analysis. First, he rejects the Nairn-Anderson theory of an archaic British state as a ruse to avoid confronting capitalism. Personally, I think Neil is too crude in his characterisation of the Nairn and Anderson thesis, which had the merit – at the time – of forcing the left to engage in a more serious study of how British capitalism maintained its

ideological stranglehold. Besides, the issue is now moot because British capitalism used Thatcherism to demolish much of the archaic structure (state, economic and ideological) that Nairn and Anderson were criticising. Where Neil is correct, I think, is in criticising Nairn for seeming to argue that the break-up of Britain is automatically progressive, or that small states are automatically more democratic and progressive than larger ones. Nairn's perennial weakness, as Neil suggests, is to displace his analysis into the ideological and state superstructures and ignore the clash of real class forces and its outcome.

Nevertheless, Neil Davidson can be credited with offering the most cogent and serious reply to Nairn anywhere – rather than the usual crude, pseudo-internationalist diatribes. I think this is possible because both Nairn and Davidson discern (correctly) that nations and nationalism are real material things embedded in the structure of the capitalist mode of production, and not some epiphenomena. Nairn, of course, was a seminal figure in re-discovering and promoting to the Anglophone world the writings of Antonio Gramsci, who well understood the material role of national consciousness. One of Neil's most interesting articles describes Nairn's discovery of Gramsci and the dissemination of Gramscian thought in Scotland. (As an aside: I note that Neil's obituary published on the [New Left Review/Verso website](#) singularly fails to mention Tom Nairn or Neil's engagement with him.)

## Transatlantic time wars

Amazingly, Neil also found time to take on the Marxist academic establishment in America, particularly the historian Robert Brenner, of UCLA. With the demise of the Soviet Union in 1989, there was a flowering of Marxian studies in American universities. This university Marxism was vastly creative in terms of ideas (laying part of the foundations for the recent rise of Democratic Socialists of America) but inevitably cut off from working class political activity. As a

result, it has a tendency towards a scholastic revisionism that excludes messy class struggle from history.

In particular, Brenner (and co-thinkers such as Ellen Meiksins Wood) have implied that capitalism emerged without the necessary agency of a bourgeoisie or violent bourgeois revolution. Instead, they argue, capitalism was the result of a relatively passive process in which feudalism was replaced by tenant farmers creating a consumer market for their produce in nearby towns, eventually prompting industrial mass production. This might sound a mind-numbingly obscure debate but at its heart lies an attempt to undermine the Marxist notion that socio-economic change is the result of conscious human agency, not accidental economic advantage.

To polymath and old-school left-wing activist Neil Davidson, this was the proverbial red rag to the bull. He set about challenging Brenner's reworking of the demise of feudalism and rise of capitalism, while at the same time reviving and deepening the Marxist notion of bourgeois revolutions as necessary events to clear the path to modernity. The final result was Neil's magnum opus (literally) entitled *How Revolutionary were the Bourgeois Revolutions?* – a massive 812 pages published in 2012. But Neil added a new twist.

He argued that the earliest bourgeois revolutions (e.g. in Britain and France) clearly represented the "removal of backward-looking threats" to the expansion of nascent capitalism. However, later revolutions – mostly after the creation of a world market – were "revolutions from above". This is where a particular fraction of an existing ruling class (sometimes bourgeois, sometimes aspirant feudal magnates, sometimes both in alliance) seeks re-fashion the state to facilitate new ways of capital accumulation. Here we return to the Scottish example, where Neil argues that the destruction of feudal rights after the 1745 Rising was the very first example of this "imposed" bourgeois revolution – aided and abetted by the Lowland bourgeoisie.

## Political activist

Neil's intellectual immense intellectual production was a function of his political activism. He joined the Socialist Workers Party in 1984 and remained an active member till 2013, when he left with a group of comrades to form a new group called rs21 (Revolutionary Socialism for the 21st Century). The split had many roots, but the detonator was a nasty internal case of sexual abuse. Rarely have I seen the gentle Neil Davidson be so angry. Some might think that three decades inside a tiny revolutionary group - one that exploded as is so often the case - was a waste. Neil would not have agreed. First, because his engagement with working class politics was the very thing that animated and drove his intellectual work. And second, because Neil Davidson's activism was actually far from sterile.

Neil's most significant contribution was helping to establish the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) in 2012, as a mobiliser for the 2014 referendum. Within a year, RIC had thousands of animated supporters knocking on doors in Scotland's housing schemes. In my opinion, it was RIC's intervention to transform the referendum into a plebiscite on austerity - and so make it relevant to ordinary working class folk - that brought the campaign to within an ace of victory.

The last time I saw Neil was in September 2019, on the first day of a conference he had organised on Uneven and Combined Development - a Marxist theory of how nations and revolutions develop. He had asked me to read a paper - hopefully proof I was no longer an apostate. More importantly, Neil had also invited his

American intellectual nemesis, Robert Brenner, to come across to Glasgow from California, to engage in the ongoing debate on the origins and (hopefully) demise of capitalism as an economic system. As always, Neil preferred open, unsectarian debate to a rigid orthodoxy. Alas, unexpectedly, Neil fell ill overnight and was unable to attend the rest of the conference. He was diagnosed with brain cancer. Neil Davidson has left us too early. Arguably, he was the most gifted Scottish Marxist of his generation. Fortunately, his books and intellect live on. Haymarket Books will, in due course, publish two new works that Neil had been preparing before his untimely passing. Condolences to his partner Cathy Watkins.

*This article was originally published on 7 May by [Bella Caledonia](#).*

*For a selection of articles by Neil Davidson see ESSF [Neil Davidson](#).*

## Remembering George Shriver

10 May 2020, by **Paul Le Blanc**

I knew about George Shriver (who used the party name George Saunders) long before I got to know him. Since the early 1960s he had been part of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which I joined in 1973, and shortly after I joined a very important book was published that he edited and which I hungrily devoured, *Samizdat: Voices of the Soviet Opposition*. This was an eye-opening and inspiring collection of primary sources on resistance, inside the Soviet Union, to Stalinist and bureaucratic oppression, ranging from heroic and ill-fated struggles of Left Oppositionists in the 1930s to articles and documents from dissidents of the 1960s and 1970s.

Over time, I learned more about George from my own observations and from what comrades told me. Multilingual and fluent in Russian, he played an important role in monitoring

and writing about events in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In earlier years he had been to the USSR, talked with dissidents, interviewed the rebel poet Yevtushenko. In the 1960s he had been a part-time staff member for the *Militant*. Over time he wrote for the impressively sophisticated weekly, *Intercontinental Press*, edited by Joseph Hansen and associated with the Fourth International. More than this, he had been collaborating closely, over the years, with George Breitman, helping to oversee and produce translations for the 14-volume *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1929-1940*, three additional volumes of speeches and writings, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-1928*, and other works by Trotsky.

These have, of course, become a vital resource not only for scholars of Russian, Soviet, and Marxist history, but for theorists and activists laboring

to help build a working-class socialist movement that would be capable of replacing all capitalist and bureaucratic tyrannies with a genuine democracy (rule by the people) over our economic life, in which the free development of each would become the basis for the free development of all.

## Role in the Socialist Workers Party

George never seems to have aspired to be a leader in the SWP - he was intent on being part of a cohesive and democratic collective, to which he would offer his own considerable talents. Among his mentors and models were seasoned activist-intellectuals George Breitman, George Lavan Weissman (with Breitman a

mainstay of Pathfinder Press), Joseph Hansen (former secretary to Trotsky and editor of *Intercontinental Press*, who died in 1979), and Frank Lovell (whose extensive experience in the labor movement was reflected in his role, for a number of years, as the SWP's trade union director).

Each in their own way demonstrated a rock-hard commitment to revolutionary Marxist perspectives, considerable practical skills, organizational savvy, as well as immense personal and political integrity. George described Breitman in this way: "He had tremendous political acumen, a fierce honesty, a commitment to meticulous accuracy in dealing with documents, history, translation, plus a wonderful sense of humor and vast knowledge of radical history." These were qualities that George himself sought to emulate.

From his own account, in 1980 it was becoming clear to George and others that serious problems were developing in the SWP. Headed by Jack Barnes, a younger layer of comrades (of George's and my generation) had assumed SWP leadership in the mid-1970s. By 1981, the Barnes leadership was secretly engineering a fundamental political shift in the organization, away from Trotskyist perspectives, and away from the Fourth International that Trotsky had founded. This was being replaced with an orientation toward what Barnes perceived as a more revolutionary "new international" that would presumably be crystallizing around Fidel Castro and the Cuban Communist Party (as things turned out, something that never actually came to pass).

George was - like his mentors - a supporter of the Cuban Revolution, but he was convinced that the decision of the new SWP leadership to jettison Trotskyist perspectives, and to carry this out through undemocratic manipulation, would cause irreparable damage to the SWP and the revolutionary socialist movement. By this time, in order to push through its new orientation, the Barnes leadership was already carrying out a grotesque tightening of the organization (falsely claiming this as "Leninism") and preparing a wave of expulsions in

1983-1984, on trumped up charges, that swept hundreds of actual and potential oppositionists out of the SWP. George participated in an informal grouping known as "the Breitman caucus," and then joined Breitman and Naomi Allen (well-known for her work in helping translate and edit Trotsky's works), in declaring the formation, at the start of 1984, of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency (FIT).

## From Bulletin in Defense of Marxism to Labor Standard

The FIT was the smallest of the formations organized by those driven out of the SWP (its numerical highpoint was about 70 members). One short-lived current around Peter Camejo, the North Star Network, sought to build a broad left current without reference to or connection with Trotskyist perspectives. In contrast, Socialist Action (initiated under the leadership of Nat Weinstein, Lynn Henderson, and Jeff Mackler) launched a new Trotskyist organization, of about 200-300 members, with an orientation consistent with that of the pre-1979 SWP. A substantial break-away from Socialist Action merged with two other small socialist groups to form Solidarity (which would contain a rather passive caucus for those wishing to maintain ties with the Fourth International); with 200-300 members, Solidarity also saw itself as an alternative to the SWP.

The FIT, led by Breitman and Lovell, rejected the notion of building itself as an alternative to the SWP. Instead, it sought to do three things: (a) defend Trotskyist perspectives by using them - with critical creativity - to analyze and explain the evolving realities around us; (b) develop a documentation and explanation of how and why the SWP had degenerated, drawing lessons from that; and (c) bring together all Fourth Internationalist groups and individuals in the United States (including the SWP) in order to carry out a serious

political discussion and debate, and on the basis of such political clarification, reconstitute a unified section of the Fourth International.

George identified with the FIT and was formally a member of the editorial board of its monthly magazine *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*. In its initial years he was not a very active participant in either the FIT or the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*. This changed dramatically in 1989, and even more so in early 1990. By that time, George has explained, in a remembrance of Frank and Sarah Lovell, after the 1986 death of Breitman, "the burden of carrying on [the work of the FIT] was on Frank and Sarah more than ever." Noting that by 1990 the two aging Trotskyists had succeeded in getting him "to do my part," George concluded: "For me, working closely with Frank and Sarah, in the effort to keep alive the voice of revolutionary socialism, of Trotskyism in the United States, ... was a tremendously rewarding experience."

It was in New York City, in the Lower Manhattan apartment of Frank Lovell and Sarah Lovell, that I first got to know George. It may have been in 1990, and I recall George presented me with a copy of a recently-published volume he had translated, the revised and expanded edition of Roy Medvedev's remarkable, massive, well-documented account of the Stalin era, *Let History Judge*. Sometimes I could be clueless, and it took a nudge from Frank to get me to reciprocate by giving George a copy of my just-published *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*. Frank was a seasoned veteran of the Trotskyist movement. He was like a father-figure to both George and myself, and looking back on it, he clearly sought to nurture a bond between the two of us. In his own patient way, he was working to draw us both into a team that would help ensure the success of the FIT's monthly publication, *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*.

George noted: "In 1990-91 Frank and I were in agreement on trying to get the Fourth Internationalist groups together to reestablish a sympathizing section of the Fourth International (FI) after the Barnes-led SWP had formally withdrawn from the FI." Serious



efforts toward unification with Socialist Action were initiated but failed, at which point a majority of the FIT voted to dissolve the organization, in late 1992, to join Solidarity and its FI Caucus, while maintaining the magazine as an independent publication in order to continue working toward Trotskyist unity.

I served as managing editor of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* from late 1992 to late 1994, a period in which George was also playing a central role in the work of the publication. We labored closely and well together, with numerous email consultations, regular conference calls with the rest of the editorial board, and lengthy phone conversations. In late 1994 managing editorship shifted, shared by George and Tom Bias, a very fine and seasoned comrade from the printing trades. This arrangement continued as the magazine was transformed into *Labor Standard* in the autumn of 1998. George and Tom continued to function in these positions as *Labor Standard* transitioned to an online journal in the early twenty-first century. Increasingly intermittent, it ceased publication in 2019, as Tom was contending with terminal cancer.

The magazine had changed its name in 1998 because those of us gathered around it were excited about, and engaged with, developments among a significant left-wing current in the unions, gathered around longtime and influential labor militant Tony Mazzocchi. An educational Labor Party Advocates seemed on the verge of coming an actual Labor Party, a left-wing labor formation that might have tens of thousands or more adherents. In this context the socialist message of *Labor Standard* might have genuine traction. Mazzocchi's slogan was: "The Bosses Have Two Parties, We Need Our Own." Although that never stopped being true, by 2000 it became clear that the promising initiative had failed to crystallize.

*Labor Standard* supporters had been very active in Labor Party efforts throughout the country. This was certainly the case in Tucson, Arizona, where George now lived. The ongoing struggles of the multi-faceted working class against all forms of oppression –

against exploitation at the point of production, against racism, against anti-immigrant bigotry, against militarism and imperialism, against tyranny wherever it existed – continued to engage his attention, sympathies, and energies in committees and coalitions in Arizona no less than in the online pages of *Labor Standard*. As best he could, George remained true to the commitments that had given such meaning to his life, and he became part of Socialist Action, connecting with friends and comrades who shared such commitments.

## Reflections Personal and Political

If he had played things differently in his life, I suspect George could have had a successful career in academe or publishing. Having on one's resumé both Harvard University and the prestigious Russian and Eastern European studies program of University of Indiana in Bloomington would certainly not have hurt. In addition to his finely developed editorial skills, there was also his international reputation for translating numerous works – not only those of Trotsky, but major books by Mikhail Gorbachev, the three-volume memoir of Nikita Khrushchev, several volumes by Nikolai Bukharin, and most recently three volumes related to the Verso *Complete Works of Rosa Luxemburg* – a massive collection of Luxemburg's letters and big chunks of her economic writings making up the first two volumes of the *Complete Works*. [43]

A successful career, however, seemed to be the furthest thing from his mind. George truly loved helping make Trotsky and Luxemburg available to English-speaking readers. It was only the need to make money, however, that turned his talents to what he considered the political mediocrity of Gorbachev and Khrushchev. What money he made, however, was quite inadequate – he lived in relative poverty.

One could certainly say that his was a

selfless devotion to the revolutionary struggle for a society of the free and the equal. But there is a dark underside to the term "selfless" – for George, more often than not, didn't take proper care of himself and of making practical arrangements for his future. Those of his close friends who knew the score would sometimes provide long-term loans to help him get through a desperate situation. Sometimes it seemed that George may have been dealing with a debilitating depression that could block him from dealing with important personal matters, and certainly from leaving Tucson to attend a conference or be available for a speaking engagement, and at times from coming through with translations.

Yet there are other, more positive dimensions of George's selflessness. He seemed the very opposite of being in orbit around himself. The friend I came to know was unassuming, even shy, very thoughtful, very kind. A mutual friend summed it up most aptly: "A lovely, gentle, cultured man." And an essential aspect of the person he was involved a deep understanding of, and an incredibly firm commitment to, the revolutionary cause. This comes through in George's contributions to the memorial volume *Revolutionary Labor Socialist: The Life, Ideas and Comrades of Frank Lovell*, which Tom Bias and I edited in 2000.

George recalled that around 1960, as he was approaching the Trotskyist movement, he connected with "this unusual generation of worker Trotskyists," personified first of all in Boston, when he attended "a class on Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution led by a tough-minded working class veteran named Larry Trainor." He also recalled the Presidential campaign of that year, when he was able to hear SWP candidate "Farrell Dobbs speaking optimistically ... on the class consciousness of workers that remained beneath the surface of their then-current acquiescence" to the capitalist status quo. "Don't sell the workers short," George remembered Dobbs saying. He explained that the veteran Trotskyist strike leader was "speaking of their potential capacity for revolutionary action and

international solidarity" – even though such possibilities seemed far from the current realities.

"Around that same time," George continued, "I ran across an article by Irving Howe about the Trotskyists of the Socialist Workers Party." Howe was a former Trotskyist who had abandoned revolutionary Marxism and became editor of the moderate socialist magazine *Dissent*. "I remember Howe describing the Trotskyists of the James P. Cannon persuasion as rigid, unyielding, stubborn, determined, and committed to their ideas." According to George, Howe viewed them as impractical doctrinaires "who wouldn't play footsie with Democrats, wouldn't go along with imperialist war policies, wouldn't sell out the socialist program in exchange for bureaucratic privilege or the emoluments of bourgeois politics."

He noted that "Howe's article was a kind of grudging admission of the

unusually strong qualities to be found among the working class socialists and activists grouped around James P. Cannon." George concluded: "My admiration for these people who I was just getting to know rose higher from reading Howe's opinions, although I'm sure it wasn't his intention to praise them."

I am so sorry this good friend and comrade is gone.

A few years ago, I wanted him to speak about Leon Trotsky on a conference panel with another good friend and comrade, Tom Twiss (who had produced a fine study of Trotsky's evolving analysis of the Soviet bureaucracy), and myself. I secured money to make it happen. I was overjoyed when George said he would come – and then, as often happened, he couldn't.

Perhaps to make up for this, he generously sent me dozens of long and amazing poems – which he had

translated – about revolutionary history that Nikolai Bukharin had written in 1937, while awaiting execution. There were still email consultations and telephone conversations, the last ones dealing with the Rosa Luxemburg translations he was working on. Then communication ended. But I intended to travel to Tucson this summer, track him down, visit with him.

Now that cannot happen. To hear his voice and engage with the remarkable person that he was will be possible only in my memories. And also in the wonderful translations he helped make available to all of us, sharing vibrant contributions from comrades living in other times and places.

[There is a plan to scan *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* – over 140 issues – and make them available on-line in the Marxist Internet Archive, hopefully by the end of 2020.]

30 April 2020

## Pierre Granet has left us

### 9 May 2020

Our comrade Pierre Granet died on 2 May 2020 at his home. The sadness and the emptiness that his departure creates for us are immense. Pierre knew many people and was appreciated by everyone, far beyond the ranks of his party, the NPA. We want to pay tribute to him in recognition of the commitment that he maintained for a lifetime, but also to express the tenderness we have for him.

Pierre, alias Vimont, often spoke to us about his youth and about May 68. An activist while at high school in 1967 in Paris, he was at the origin of the foundation of the JCR in Marseille where he led the high school movement in 1968. Active in the High School Action Committees (CAL), he and his comrades occupied the Adolphe Thiers high school for several weeks and renamed it "Commune de

Paris" for the duration of the movement. Subsequently, Pierre led the student movement at the University of Aix until the mid-1970s. During his military service, like other activists from his political current, he set up a soldiers' committee.

Working as an educator with young people in difficulty, he was very active in the teachers' union SNPES-FSU and then in the CGT union of book correctors where he was active until his retirement, in difficult conditions due to the isolation of working at home. He was always convinced of the need to strengthen the implantation of the LCR and then the NPA in the workplaces and spent a lot of time helping comrades from the outside, as he did at Airbus in the last years of his life.

Pierre was also president of the FCPE

31 (parents' association) when his children were still in school. He took part in the theoretical development of the NPA on education, for a school that would be emancipatory and freed from inequalities.

A relentless internationalist fighter, he campaigned methodically for solidarity with the struggles of peoples around the world, with the awareness that the fight against capitalism only made sense if it spread across borders and nationalities.

From his youth, like the rest of his generation, he was involved in solidarity with Vietnam. In the autumn of 1980, he committed himself to Solidarnosc with the conviction that the democratic revolution could overthrow the Stalinist dictatorship without restoring capitalism.

He was a longtime activist in the struggle for the rights of the Palestinian people and every year he went to Lannemezan to demand the release of Georges Ibrahim Abdallah.

In 2011, he campaigned actively in solidarity with the Arab Spring, in particular alongside the Tunisian workers of Latelec. He visited Kurdistan several times and knew how to establish political and personal ties with the Kurdish community in Toulouse. For our Kurdish comrades, his disappearance is a source of great sadness. To his great despair, he never managed to speak Kurdish (beyond a few words).

He learned Catalan in two weeks in order to follow the events in Catalonia two years ago and so that he could translate the minutes of the Catalan parliament into French. He campaigned in solidarity with the Greek people after the 2008 crisis.

Following his long-standing commitment to the LCR, he devoted a great deal of energy to building the NPA. We remember, among a thousand other things, the campaigns of 2012 and 2017 where, by the dozen, he convinced mayors to sponsor Philippe Poitou.

In the last period, he was in all the

demonstrations of the Yellow Vests with the contingent of the NPA, under the unicorn. He was present at all the activities of the NPA, in particular in the framework of the movement on pensions and the last electoral campaign. Under confinement, he even converted to digital tools to continue participating in online committees and general meetings. He sent us a last selfie in solidarity with young people who had been repressed for having a banner "Macronvirus : when will it end ?", a play on words of which he was definitely the author, even before it appeared on the front page of *Charlie Hebdo*. He would have liked the NPA in Toulouse to call a street demonstration on 1 May feeling the dangers of confinement for our democratic freedoms.

It is impossible to summarize in a short text the entire militant trajectory of our comrade.

His political culture, the precision of his memory, the mastery of the debates that have traversed our current for decades make his death an immense loss. A piece of the history of the Marxist and revolutionary workers' movement goes with him. He was a rare intellectual, who also produced texts and analyses that would benefit from being more widely known.

We also think of his companion and his two daughters and send them our solidarity. He lost his son a few years ago, and that affected him a lot. His immediate reaction had been to denounce capitalism. He held it responsible for his death by failing to provide the necessary means to the essential services of medical research. Still true today...

Always attentive to others, upright and fair in his human and political relationships, he spent a lot of time debating - sometimes stubbornly but always with respect -, convincing, educating our young and old comrades. We can safely say that his enthusiasm was intact after an extraordinarily rich life as a political activist. Pierre, we will not forget you. You leave behind you a precious and living legacy for the anti-capitalists that we are. You also leave behind you the memory of your kindness and the example of warm and fraternal comrade, beyond the differences that can traverse the workers movement. Your fight, our fight, continues. Until victory!

*Toulouse 3 May 2020*

Two videos

[Pierre Granet : "Mai 68, tout changer"](#)

[Hommage À Pierre Granet](#)

# "It is the Henri Weber who sang the Internationale with Higelin that we mourn, not the one at the service of the political apparatus of the PS"

## 2 May 2020, by **Philippe Cyroulnik**

I knew Henri as a JCR activist in the years 1965-67. In the period after May 68, we were fairly close, since I was a student at the university of Vincennes where he was an assistant lecturer in the philosophy department. It was at this time that I had to coordinate the

student sector of what was to become the *Ligue Communiste*. At the end of the Mannheim congress, I became a member of the central committee of the League (1969-70) following a proposal which he initiated. But in the framework of the activities of the

defence service of the League, for which I was for a time responsible along with my brother Alain, Michel Récanatti and Romain Goupil, we worked a lot on projects of demonstrations and political events which made the League well known,

and it is for this double reason that I saw a lot of Henri.

Henri was one of the leading figures of the JCR, along with Daniel Bensaïd, Janette Habel, Alain Krivine, Pierre Rousset, and in a less public way Gérard de Verbizier. They were the embodiment of this organization which came from the fight against Stalinism, solidarity with the colonial revolution and systematic anti-capitalist and anti-fascist activities, which stood out by its sense of political initiative, its dynamism and its fighting spirit, without sectarianism. Henri and his comrades had anticipated, already in 1967, the role of "sensitive plate" that the student movements could play. They perceived the embers which were heating up under the leaden shell of Gaullism and the inertia of the union leaderships and the PCF. In the demonstrations, they pushed for the radicalization of struggles and supported strikes which escaped the shackles of the union bureaucracies. May 9, 1968, when the JCR opened up its meeting to the movement and where Bensaïd, Weber and Cohn-Bendit rubbed shoulders, illustrated this absence of sectarianism. Unlike the "maos" who two days later invited the students to put themselves at the "service of the people" rather than building barricades, the Lambertists of the OCI, who in their logic of pressure group on the trade union apparatuses counterposed the "general strike" to the battles of "petit-bourgeois students" and the activists of *Voix Ouvrière* (ancestor of LO) who learnedly explained that the battles in the Latin Quarter were only a "straw fire" with regard to the struggle of the proletariat, they understood that the straw fire was in fact "the spark that would set the plain on fire"! And when 1968 exploded, Henri and his comrades were ready, they were the ones who could be found on the barricades and in confrontations with the cops (alongside the anarchists). They knew that going to the barricades was in fact the way to the general strike. Henri was one of those who had the political intuition to understand that the events of 1968 opened a historic moment.

In 1968, he spent his days and nights

between barricades, demonstrations and a small flat in rue Monsieur-le-Prince. In 1969, it was in the apartment that Henri shared with Pascale that a small group of comrades from *Rouge*, among them Bensaïd, Nair, Scalabrino, my brother, myself and others, had signed a call to join the Fourth International on the occasion of the founding congress of the *Ligue Communiste*, in order to concretely assume the internationalism of our current. Henri was the soul of the newspaper *Rouge*, which formed the backbone of the organization. He also played a decisive role in the establishment and organisation of the review *Critique communiste*. He made it a space for meeting and confronting other currents and thinkers.

His great political and historical culture gave him an indisputable competence concerning "courses" of political education. His rhetorical art gave his writings a high quality by avoiding reducing the analysis to simple tactical or polemical recipes. His sense of synthesis made him an excellent political pedagogue in his editorial work in the field of Marxism; he based himself on the contributions of the main theorists of Marxism, which he rediscovered. One of his first publications in 1967 was a JCR pamphlet, *Mouvement ouvrier, stalinisme et bureaucratie*, which was based on texts of both Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg, but also on elements of analysis provided by Kautsky. It was reprinted in the *Cahiers Rouge* (Red Notebooks) series, n° 3 "De la bureaucratie" published in 1971.

Henri Weber had a knack for formulas and slogans, a sense of organization and efficiency in action which were accompanied by empathy for the comrades. Coming up with punchy slogans, the insolence of a flurry of public interventions, renewing our press with graphic designers and the assistance of artists, this is what was Henri's "trademark". He knew how to associate political and cultural activity, as with the camp at Prunete in Corsica, during the summer of 1970, which was the ancestor of the summer universities of the League. "Riton" was cheeky, he appreciated the mix of slogans and humour and sparked initiatives in this area. His

sense of initiative and action was at the origin of his initiating role in the organization of the defence service of the League. His sense of agitation and of brilliant actions in the field of militancy led him to stimulate the carrying out of spectacular and exemplary actions in our political campaigns. Eager to renew the language of our "Agitprop" and to invent new forms of demonstration, he shook up the routinism of political activity. It was the time when Higelin was seen taking part in anti-militarist actions and painters like Chambas were being asked to contribute to the newspaper. He impelled the dusting down of our posters and our press by soliciting the talent of comrades who were graphic designers (cf. the poster for one of the *Rouge* festivals which took up in a "pop" style the work of Lissitzki: The red triangle breaks open the white circle). Henri participated in and accompanied the theoretical reflections on the new questions posed to Marxism in this period of radicalization of political and social movements and the combined crises of Stalinism and social democracy; sometimes sharing some of the erroneous conclusions they produced ...

The extension from the student and high school milieu to working class layers and the massification of the student environment, analysed by Mandel, the integration of intellectual work into the work force and the proletarianization of new, broader layers than the "historical" proletariat were at the origin of the theorizations of Daniel Bensaïd and Camille Scalabrino on the student movement as a "sensitive plate". But they induced from the radicalization of the student movement the obsolete character of the need to work in a broad trade-union organization, in favour of a line of red unions almost synonymous with the League. Likewise, Henri also participated in the theorizing of the "inevitable disappearance" of social democracy. I remember a political school in the Paris region where, facing a stupefied Mandel, Henri and some others theorized this definitive collapse of social democracy, in spite of the contradictory demonstration, backed up by examples, that Mandel tried to introduce into the debate.



Henri had a real determination to conduct political debate and critical thinking. He did not allow himself to be impressed by the dictates of the local Maoist leaders at the University of Vincennes. When, armed with quotations from the Little Red Book, Gérard Miller, who had "invaded" his class with a few Maoists, dreamed of being a red guard in the service of a thought police force, some of us were there alongside Henri, to see him stay the course and refute without hesitation the voice of the "great helmsman" concerning the history and the tragedies of the Chinese revolution. In 1975, we were again with Henri and Fabienne, his partner, in the midst of thousands of workers in revolution at the Lisnay shipyards in Lisbon.

But towards the end of the 1970s, the time when "history snapped at our heels" slowed down with the periods of ebb. It was with the entry into the long term of "slow impatience" that things got worse. Doubts arose, which led some comrades to withdraw and then abandon the fight. Henri, who with some other comrades had

theorized a little too quickly the historical disappearance of social democracy, was in fact overtaken by it, to the point of losing his soul as a revolutionary militant. He left the League "on tiptoe", without a political battle, his convictions at half mast, for a lonely journey that would distance him from our current. The choice which he made of conducting research on the big French bosses' organisation, the CNPF, instead of opening up a work of critical Marxist sociology on the place and the function of big capital, was the road which led him, from renouncing revolution, to repudiate the combat that he had conducted from the 1960s until 1981. This political collapse was expressed in 1984 by his entry into a political team which would be one of the most determined actors of social-liberalism and of the increasingly close imbrication of the Socialist Party and big capital.

The loss of his convictions led to a withdrawal from militant political activity and a gradual bifurcation towards the paths of social respectability, then to an increasingly close proximity with social liberalism,

from Fabius to Hollande. Even though he maintained friendly personal relations with his former comrades, he put his talent and his rhetoric, which had become an empty shell, at the service of the political apparatus of the Socialist Party, which had long since taken on board the standards proper to the Bonapartist state. Once he had changed course, he went far down this route. The saddest thing was to see him sometimes summon the ghosts of revolutionary strategy to justify submission to those who led to the catastrophe that we know.

Today we will leave the eulogy of his renouncement to the chorus of defenders of these modern times. It is the Henri of the fight for emancipation that we mourn, the comrade, Tisserand and Samuel, the one with whom we trod the streets, *La Jeune Garde* in his shoulder bag, the one who sang the Internationale with Jacques Higelin, the one who was part of the youth that Liebknecht said was the flame of the revolution. [44]

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from *l'Anticapitaliste*.

## Luis Sepulveda, revolutionary activist and Chilean writer, has died from Covid-19

23 April 2020, by **Sylvain Chardon**

### The origins of his commitment

Luis Sepúlveda was born on October 4, 1949 in Ovalle (Chile). Grandson of an Andalusian anarchist (on the paternal side), who had been forced to flee Spain to go into exile in Ecuador and then in Chile, and of a Mapuche Indian chief from Chile (on his mother's side), he signed up from the age of 12 with the Communist Youth. While being an activist, he continued his studies and started to publish poetry texts from the age of 17.

Luis Sepulveda did not talk much about his student years. He is said to have been taken on by the Stasi (East German secret service) and to have undergone military training. In any case, when Popular Unity led by Salvador Allende took power in 1971, he was no longer a member of the CP (he had been expelled in 1968) but was active in the left tendency of the Socialist Party, "Ejército de Liberación Nacional" (National Liberation Army), which was close to the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left, led by Miguel Enriquez). He was part of the GAP, the corps of armed bodyguards of President Salvador

Allende (1908-1973) and went underground for almost two years to fight against the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet installed following the coup d'état of 11 September 1973. [45] Denounced to the authorities, he was sentenced to 28 years in prison for treason and conspiracy, then deprived of his nationality.

Thanks to a broad international campaign led by Amnesty International Germany, he was released in 1977 in exchange for exile in Sweden. He found a way out of this exile and became a vagabond in Latin

America. He stayed for more than a year with the Shuar Indians in Ecuador [46] before going to Colombia where there was a big campaign in support of the struggle of the Sandinistas to liberate Nicaragua. In 1979, he was a member of the Simon Bolivar Brigade of Internationalist Volunteers (BSB). After the joy of victory, the members of the brigade were asked to behave themselves and not to be involved in the ongoing revolution. He was therefore imprisoned in Managua before being expelled to Europe. He was extremely bitter at this but it did not shake his commitment to be on the side of the oppressed.

## The armed activist

The political trajectory of Luis Sepulveda who, to my knowledge, was never a "Trotskyist" crisscrossed the history of our movement. The experience of Popular Unity in Chile (1971-1973) impressed us directly by its achievements and the popular mobilization it aroused. The reformist parties in France (the Socialists and Communists) took it as an example for the peaceful implementation of their "Common Programme" by keeping quiet about the popular mobilization, the self-organization of the masses and the threats of a military coup in Chile. For our part, we insisted on a total takeover of the economy and the arming of militias to protect the process. The Popular Unity government was deeply divided and did not take the necessary measures so as not to break with the Chilean Christian Democracy and not to frighten imperialism. Moscow and its minions did not want the revolution while Allende was more sensitive to the movements of the masses and the pressures on his left. It was in this context that the GAP, the armed protection militia of Allende, was formed.

Luis Sepulveda, because of his military training, was a member. These few hundred "soldiers" of the people understood that the democratic promises of the army were only a sham. Alas, courage cannot replace a strategy of confrontation and victory

against reactionary forces. These courageous activists paid for it with their lives, torture and imprisonment. [47]

Luis Sepulveda did not forget and when in 1979 he again found the possibility of a revolution; he took part in it with arms in hand alongside the FSLN in Nicaragua and he returned victorious to the liberated capital. Once the victory was won, he sided with the comrades of the BSB who wanted to continue the revolution, to take total control of the economy of the country and not to start a new Chile. Once again, he was not listened to and was expelled in rather sordid conditions with the other foreign members of the brigade. He then declared: Once again, a beautiful revolution ends in hell. Then he headed for Germany and Hamburg.

## A fantastic storyteller who continued to resist

In Germany, he met his new partner, a nurse, with whom he had three children. To put food on the table, he wrote for various German and French newspapers and eventually settled in Asturias, in the north of Spain. A region of which he praised the "tradition of political struggle established by the miners and the brotherhood which reigns there". A region that suited him perfectly, where he resumed his work as a writer.

From his first novel published in 1992, *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*, success was there. The story of Antonio José Bolívar, an old man who knows all the secrets of the Amazon rainforest and its inhabitants, the people of the Shuars, was translated into 60 languages and even adapted for the cinema. From then on, his work would be marked by the experience of exile and his struggles for human rights and for ecology.

In 1996, he published a travelogue, *Patagonia Express* which recounts a crossing from America to Andalusia. There followed *Desencuentros* (1997)

and *Historias marginales* (2001).

In 2009, true to his commitments and his battles against dictatorships, Sepulveda "returned" to Chile with *La sombra de lo que fuimos*. He recounts the reunion in Santiago of three former militants returning from exile thirty-five years after the coup d'état by Pinochet, determined to take part in a final revolutionary action. The writer then declared on the radio station France Culture: *Literature, sometimes, becomes the shadow of memory. Only what exists has a shadow and therefore in this sense, literature is the shadow of what is really happening. Literature serves as a reminder of what happened and we are not going to accept an easy solution, like amnesties, for example, or the fact of forgetting in order to move ahead.*

But the best tool in literature to continue the fight against imperialism, capitalism and its monsters and stand on the side of the losers, the anonymous and the forgotten in history, is obviously the thriller. Through the thriller and a romantic alter ego, Juan Belmonte, a former Chilean GAP and Nicaraguan BSB, the writer settles his accounts with his lifelong enemies and with his memories. In *The Name of a Bullfighter* (1994), then with *El Fin de la Historia*, (2017), Belmonte, retired from business, returns to Chile and finds former Stasi and former torturers of the Chilean junta as well as those who scorned the market economy "here, there and everywhere".

Finally, to be complete and because "To tell the story is to resist", Luis Sepulveda also wrote for young people with *The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Taught Her to Fly* (1996) and *Historia de un perro llamado Leal* (2016).

The tragedy of this Covid death is that the bookshops are closed. The bookshops that the Chilean cherished.

We'll get them, Luis!

*Only the titles for books published in English translation are given in English.*

# José Maria Galante “Chato” - the tenacity of the rebel

1 April 2020, by Manuel Garí

The news in the early morning of the death from the coronavirus of José Mar­Áa Galante Serrano, “Chato”, has deeply affected that huge minority that forms the ocean of resistance and dignity in the face of injustice and attacks on life. Chato, as we called him from our young age, and as he called himself all his life, was a fighter both in his political activity and in his fight against disease. Strong physically and intellectually, a good person from top to bottom, he lived life intensely without ever losing his half smile. And his life was not easy. Persecuted by the Franco regime, aneurysm, heart disease and cancer, he endured until the night of the 29th of this sad month of March that humanity is experiencing.

Chato was a political actor present throughout the history of the last five decades of our country. Throughout the history of those who organize the rebellion of the people below against oppression, exploitation and injustice. Along with his partner Justa Montero, activist and key feminist reference, he was the promoter of what became known as the new social movements since the late 1970s. In his case, both through the anti-war movement and because of his ties to Ecologists in Action. He never had institutional “positions”, but he set agendas. His militant commitment goes back a long way.

He was part of a generation of internationalist militants who in the late 1960s set out to drive the socialist revolution. He participated in the anti-

Franco student movement, went underground in the Frente de Liberación Popular (FLP) and was one of the founders of the Liga Comunista Revolucionaria (LCR), participating in its leadership until its dissolution. [48] Arrested and tortured on several occasions and a political prisoner of the dictatorship, he participated in the organization of one of the escape attempts from the Segovia prison.

The memory of the fear that those of us who were at liberty, albeit in hiding, had, that the most extreme rampages of the Francoist “patriots” would lead to a massacre in the prisons comes to my mind with emotion. Both prisoners and activists in the streets had the hope and the conviction that after overthrowing the dictatorship the possibility of profound social change would open up. So for us Liberty and Amnesty had a very different meaning from what was later given in the formula of “amnesty in exchange for amnesia” and the 1978 regime.

Things did not go as Chato had imagined, but he did not throw in the towel or let himself be carried away by “disenchantment”. He remained faithful to his commitments to the workers’ movement and expanded them through his participation in the struggles against NATO and in his connection with Ecologists in Action. He was a member of the Advisory Council of the *Viento Sur* magazine from its foundation. His last great cause was, as he himself declared, “to work against forgetfulness” and to vindicate the victims of the

dictatorship. He was one of the promoters of *La Comuna*, which brings together people from different political currents who suffered torture, prison or exile, and was a promoter, along with the deceased Carlos Slepoy and several of the people tortured by Antonio González Pacheco, the member of the Brigada Pol­Ático Social known as Billy the Kid, of the so-called “Argentine complaint”, whose objective is the purging of responsibilities for the crimes committed under the dictatorship. To this end, Chato undertook to break the overwhelming silence of the institutional world about these crimes and decisively contributed to making the documentary *The Silence of Others* possible. [49]

If I had to summarize Chato’s personality traits, I would highlight the way he created a comradely atmosphere in those circles in which he moved. He was a friend of his friends, as on more than one occasion we could hear from Miguel Romero, Moro, one of his best “colleagues” (a term that both used). And on a political level, I would say that he had a great nose for detecting important issues. And he immediately thought in terms of action, in which he showed indestructible tenacity. He has left us, but his cause is still pending. And new hands will join us to get out of the sanitary, economic, social and climatic impasse in which capitalism plunged us, in what is already a global civilizational crisis.

29 March 2020

# Death of a magnificent figure of the Greek antifascist left, Manolis Glezos

1 April 2020, by **Andreas Sartzekis**

The death of Manolis Glezos was expected. Since last autumn, the health of this formidable activist of all just causes had become fragile and his 98 years of resistance were no longer enough to cope with the exhaustion of the body.

## An anti-Nazi fighter

However, this death, coming at a time when the immense popular homage expected cannot be organized in the streets, is rather unjust. Manolis, the anti-Nazi resistance fighter who tore the Nazi flag off the Acropolis with his comrade Santos, was unable to see the entire clique of *Chryssi Avgi* (Golden Dawn) assassins sent to prison. The trial of these Nazis nostalgic for Hitler has been enormously delayed as the accused used every pretext to demand adjournments.

Nor will he be able to know the epilogue of a fight that was close to his heart: to see the war reparations due by Germany to Greece. Greece was one of the countries most ravaged by Nazi barbarism, causing hundreds of thousands of deaths in the winter of 1941, massacres of small towns and villages – the most terrible horrors being those of the Kalavryta and Distomo massacres –, and convoys of tens of thousands of Jews to the death camps. Faced with the relentlessness of the German Minister Schauble in wanting to reduce Greece to the depths of misery, Glezos at the time recalled the incredible gift offered by

capitalism to the German economy on its knees to rebuild itself at the expense of martyred Greece. The debt then represented a good part of the debt recently inflicted on Greece by the memoranda and the troika. Glezos never gave up this fight against German imperialism, which was supported by the entire European bourgeoisie, particularly French and Greek. [50]

## A fighter against social injustice

But the saddest thing is certainly that Manolis Glezos will not have been able to see what corresponded to his lifelong commitment, for which he had paid in terms of multiple arrests, exile and even death sentences – De Gaulle had intervened on behalf of Europe's "leading supporter". For Glezos' life was a constant battle for socialism, against all social injustices, for progress, which led him to militate in the KKE (Greek CP), alongside the Pasok (Greek PS), in Syriza, and each time to leave these parties when he felt that they were abandoning the socialist or even progressive ideal. However, far from having made him a spirit of sorrow, this trajectory strengthened the tireless Resistance fighter in an optimism without illusion, and especially in an open-mindedness that makes Glezos a very rare figure in Greece among the leaders of the left: a militant opposed to any sectarianism, who could discuss as well with his former comrades of

Pasok as with our comrade Yannis Felekis. In the current situation of the Greek left, which is seeking itself after the trauma of the Syriza experience and the inability of the anti-capitalist left to carry weight on the left, these are political traits of the first order, regardless of any disagreement one might have had with Manolis Glezos about his partisan commitments.

## An ecosocialist fighter

And what should also be remembered of this radiant figure of the left is also his almost ecosocialist will before the time to refuse the very polluting hyper-concentration of administrative and cultural life in Athens. For a long time mayor of the rocky village of Apeiranthos, isolated on the east coast of the island of Naxos, he had ensured that an associative (association of women producing and selling their handicrafts) and cultural life developed there, with among other achievements a geological museum and a natural history museum created in 1996 and whose message was already to do everything to preserve the fauna and flora against the barbarity of profit.

As the homage of the Synantisi (Meeting for an anti-capitalist and internationalist left) group proclaims to this old comrade who remained so simple and energetic after such an intense militant life: "Bon voyage, comrade Manolis, you leave us as you lived, upright! You will always be alive in our hearts and in our struggles!"



# The trade unionist Manuel Graça has died (1953-2020)

## 18 March 2020

Manuel Graça was born in 1953, in Oliveira de Azeméis, in the district of Aveiro, the son of glass industry workers. Faced with economic needs and the sacking of his father, he started work at the age of ten in a shoe factory. When he was about 17, he began to take part in cultural activities, especially in the ARCA association, dedicating himself to cinema and poetry; it was here that he came across literature related to the opposition to the fascist regime of the time. He got to know left-wing activists and became a member of the local branch of the Internationalist Communist League. He did his military service in 1974-75 in the Lisbon region and in the Soldiers United Will Win Movement. As a member of the Armed Forces Movement, he played an active role in the organization of soldiers, an experience that left a deep mark on his trade union activity. In 1976 he returned to work in the shoe industry and from the end of the 1970s became a member of the Shoeworkers' Union leadership in the district of Aveiro.

In the long and victorious struggle for the 40 working week in the sector, he faced one of the most backward employers in the country. He was even imprisoned, as part of series of serious aggressions, whose mastermind, a local industrialist, was eventually condemned in court. At a time of countless fraudulent bankruptcies, which left thousands of workers with unpaid back pay and no employers contributions to social security, he led occupations and pickets of companies, to prevent the removal of machinery and raw materials and ensure compliance with the rights of workers. In a highly feminised sector, the defence of women's conditions and wage equality have always been priorities for the Shoemakers' Union.

As a member of the National Council of the CGTP union confederation, Manuel Graça was the voice of a critical and combative trade unionism, and intervened in the debates on democracy in the workers' movement. In 1995, in the pages of *Combate* magazine, he intervened in the polemic between Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Álvaro Cunhal over renewal and unity in the union struggle. Manuel Graça wrote: "What is eating away at the unions is corruption [the great fraud in the UGT with European funds was still recent], the lack of combativity, the absence of internal democracy, the lack of social authority, the control exercised by parties, and even the struggles between cliques. The unions must either change or die. Either they represent the workers in all their diversity or they will shrivel."

A lifelong militant, Manuel Graça was an example of courage and sensitivity. Suffering from a degenerative illness, Manuel Graça had withdrawn from political activity for almost a decade.

Depending on the measures to combat Covid-19, the funeral ceremonies are reserved for Manuel Graça's family.

14 March, 2020

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**The sociologist, ElÁsio Estanque, author of the book *Entre a Fábrica e a Comunidade - subjectividades e práticas de classe no operariado do calçado* (Between Factory and Community - class practice and subjectivity among shoe workers), (Afrontamento, 2002), published in 2008 a long interview with Manuel Graça about his life, included in the book *As Vozes do***

***Mundo* (Voices of the World), (Afrontamento, 2008). Here is an excerpt:**

**Q - But, in spite of everything, isn't it a bit frustrating, for those who believe that it is possible to work and intervene in a systematic and continuous way to develop workers' awareness, only to find, after a number of years, that there are still few signs of that awareness? What are the current challenges and problems?**

Manuel Graça - For me it is not frustrating! I will explain: first of all because of the conception I have of developing trade unionism, the struggle in social movements, and finally the political struggle. When decisions are taken to fight, to go forward or to go backwards, often there is a decision to call a fight and then it doesn't even take place, right? For various reasons, either because the company has moved to give more money to one group and less to another, to divide and rule, right? I try to understand this in a critical way, so that the message can be passed on to other people. Because companies have their strategies, of bonuses, of promoting foremen, of brutal repression, of creating small businesses to benefit everyone, and people let themselves be convinced by that. So that is normal. And we are in a period of political retreat, but at the same time we are restarting a new period of debates, of projects for the workers' movement.

These problems are worldwide, not just of one region or one union. We do not live in an oasis, we are suffering the consequences of this new period. So how are we going to resist? This is the discussion, for those of us who took part in the period of 25 April, when there was a huge build up of

new forces, massive levels of popular participation with important social gains. All that wounded the lion, but it didn't kill the beast, right? Now, the people who lived through that, who had that experience, have to resist. We have to try to resist all this, don't we? There's repression, there are layoffs, there are enticements from the employers and those in power. So these are periods when we have to discuss new ways of resisting and reorganizing...

**Q - But what is your vision then, let's say, in the long term, of the alternatives to the system? What makes you believe that it's worth continuing to work, to fight, to have patience, as you said? How can you see, on the one hand, an alternative to the system, and, on the other hand, how can your role and the activity carried out by the trade union fit into that alternative, that strategy for an alternative to the social system?**

Manuel Graça - Well, this would not be the first experience we've had in

terms of revolutions. Nothing can be done without permanent work of discussion, organisation and action, whether at local or global level, to try to "put a spanner in the works...", to try to change things. I am not just talking about the trade union level, but about the political level, about NGOs linked to ecology, women's rights, minorities, the poor, the homeless, the landless. There has to be an articulation of all these movements, which doesn't exist now. Because these movements have been destroyed and broken up, both in Portugal and on a global level. In other words, nothing can happen unless there is a profound work of mobilisation, organisation and reflection, so that together we can put a "spanner in the works", and try to create stronger and more powerful movements, in Portugal and at the European and planetary levels. There are millions of people in the world who are acting now! They are acting, like that peasant leader [José Bovet] in France, who invaded McDonald's. That was not banditry, that was an action against this system of

standardization, of globalization, that excludes everyone, fires everyone, puts everyone out of work, and that favours the big economic groups, and the brutal accumulation of large fortunes, right? That action aroused the sympathy of millions of people. Now what is needed is to combine these forces in all areas.

**Q - But do you believe that from this kind of example it is possible for a worldwide anti-capitalist movement to emerge, is that it?**

Manuel Graça - Of course! Alternatives to this system must be created. If we take environmentalist measures to an extreme, it is clear that the movement must be anti-capitalist, in the strict sense of the capitalist system, which is only by accumulation, because they do not aim to serve the human being. Because today the human being, with the knowledge of technologies, as we know, is at a level that it was not necessary to have so much poverty... Only this system is made to create that poverty and that wealth.

## In honour of Comrade Lal Khan

3 March 2020, by **Fourth International Bureau**

His involvement, and that of The Struggle, with the Fourth International was recent and, for us, particularly precious. He helped to open up our movement even more than was already the case to rich, varied, revolutionary and unitary militant traditions, in cooperation with the LPP current.

A veteran of the revolutionary struggle in Pakistan, South Asia, and internationally, Lal Khan and his comrades of that generation embody for us a legacy of exhilarating struggles, such as those of the years

1968-1969, of resistance to the repression of military regimes, of exile, and of returning home in conditions that were always unpredictable and dangerous, to continue tenaciously the task of building a revolutionary movement and putting forward a clearly socialist and anti-capitalist perspective.

A veteran, Lal Khan is one of those who, like our comrade Farooq Tariq, have put their experience at the service of a new militant, radical generation, fighting against all discrimination and inequality in a

progressive perspective. Until his last breath, he kept his initial commitment alive.

We pay tribute to him.

We share the grief of his loved ones, his comrades of The Struggle, his fellow fighters.

Together we will continue his internationalist struggle.

*Executive Bureau of the Fourth International  
Paris, 2 March 2020*

# The Importance of Being Lal

1 March 2020, by **Farooq Tariq**

Marked by a fusion of religious, cultural and revolutionary traditions, his funeral became a great source of surprise for the Bhaun residents. Hundreds of Marxist activists from around the country managed to arrive Bhaun where Lal Khan penned most of his books and articles.

Bhaun is an old village where some remnant of British Raj can still be spotted, notably an abandoned Railway Station. Lal Khan's ancestral *haveli*, almost 150 years old, remains in good condition since his sister Batool spends half her time here. If not, she is settled in Stockholm.

From Kalar Kehar, a road snake sits way to Bhaun through hilly patches. Indeed scenic. One could imagine why would Lal Khan escape to his village while authoring his works. However, on February 22, Bhaun was shrouded in grief.

Borne by his comrades, when his bier started moving to Janazgah (funeral place), it turned into a revolutionary march with red flags. Teary eyed mourners were chanting slogans. "Forward to Socialist Revolution" was the most chanted slogan.

Funeral prayer as led by the local Imam who prayed for the the local hero. Over a thousand were in attendance. After the prayers, red flags were unfurled yet again. Many were chanting in unison. "Lal Khan! We will complete your mission of a Socialist Pakistan"; "Asia is red".

As he was laid to rest, Awais Qarni, Lal Khan's most favoured youth activist read out a revolutionary message, a completely unaccustomed tradition at the graveyard.

Next, Jawad Ahmad, Lal Khan's close ally and friend, was joined by hundreds in the "International".

Anthem of the First and Second

Marxist Internationals, "The International" was written by a transport worker after the Paris Commune was crushed by the French government in 1871. Later it became anthem of the Soviet Union and the Third International (until it was dissolved in 1944).

I had not slept the night earlier and drove few hours to attend the funeral of a comrade I had known since 1980.

When we first met in Amsterdam as exiles, we immediately became friends and comrades. Along a handful more comrades, we decided to build new revolutionary traditions and a party.

The Struggle was our semi-open group during the black days of the Zia dictatorship.

Our first major project was the publication of *The Struggle*, a bilingual journal in Urdu and English. It was one of the most successful exile publication.

We jointly organised demonstrations rallies, meetings and study circles during these years to organize diaspora across Europe.

Meantime, Lal Khan way more disciplined than myself, completed his medical studies at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam where we both had enrolled. I opted to leave my doctoral studies in mass communication in order to work full time for "The Struggle" group.

Our successful protest action against the Zia dictatorship during the Champions Trophy Hockey tournament at Amstelveen, Netherlands, in 1982 where Pakistan was playing the finals, was broadcast live on PTV for few minutes on state-controlled Pakistan television. This annoyed the dictatorship and a plan was hatched to bring us back to Pakistan.

The plot was to implicate the members of Struggle in a fake highjacking case. Eighteen of us were arrested from different towns across Netherlands including Lal Khan in August 1982. It was a sensational case for a while in the Dutch media. We were accused of plotting to highjack a PIA jet at Schiphol airport.

In fact, Dutch police were fooled by false information provided by an agent of Pakistani dictator. In short, we were released. The Dutch government formally apologised to our group after we took the government to the court.

The eight years as exiles were full of action. Our aim was to lay down the basis of a new political current. Our ideological guide was Leon Trotsky. We keenly read Karl Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and translated some of their works.

We established a lively political office of The Struggle, right next to Amsterdam's famous Dam Square. The years were full of optimism.

We returned to Pakistan when martial law was lifted on 1st January 1986. Our main tactic to build Struggle group in Pakistan was "entryism" inside the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), a short term entry in a mass party in order to recruit militants for a new current.

The tactic worked for a while but not for long. Lal Khan won an absolute majority at the National Committee of The Struggle during 1991 when some of us raised the demand to quit the PPP and build an open party of the working class. This led to the parting ways for some years.

Along with like-minded comrades, I became part of tendency that launched the Labour Party Pakistan while Lal Khan opted to work within the PPP and labour movement.

Lal Khan was a brilliant speaker and nobody could match his knowledge of Marxist history. He was like a political dictionary of Bolshevism, particularly Leon Trotsky. His charisma lied in his ability to motivate the youth.

He could speak hours, without any notes, to a spellbound audience. One of the main feature of building his organisation The Struggle was holding successful yearly congress at Aiwan Iqbal Lahore where delegates in hundreds would gather for two days to discuss Pakistan perspectives, a political document with organisational and political priorities for the months to come.

Lal Khan was very generous person and would not hesitate to spend his inherited wealth on his political activities. He was also adept at raising funds from his wealthy frinds.

The only son of a senior army officer,

with three loving sisters, Lal Khan was a unique character in Pakistan political history. He introduced new strategies and tactics in building a semi-open Marxist group.

Through his entryist tactics, one of his lieutenants, Choudry Manzoor Ahmad was elected as MNA in 2002 on the PPP's platform. Manzoor lost the general elections in 2008 and also the trust of Lal Khan, parting ways till his death on 21st February 2020. However, Manzoor was one of the mourners at Lal Khan's funeral.

Another close ally of Lal Khan is MNA Ali Wazeer, proud to be known as Marxist MP in a parliament dominated by elite. He was at the funeral with red eyes.

During the last four years in particular, I and Lal Khan became more close than ever. Our discussions led to the formation of Lahore Left Front and also holding of memorable

Mochi Gate public meeting where most of PTM leaders spoke. He was a regular speaker at Faiz Aman Mela. His last public appearance was at the historic Students Solidarity March held on 29th November 2019. He was not well but on my insistence, he came to speak to thousands of students.

During the last Struggle congress at Aiwan Iqbal Lahore in in 2019, he fell unconscious. A lung cancer was diagnosed at ANMOL hospital Lahore. I was regularly by his side during the painful chemotherapy sessions.

“I will fight till the end”, was his famous quote during our hours long discussions on future strategies during his year-long fight against cancer.

Fondly, he would always address me as “my chairman”. The “chairman” lost one of his most trusted comrade on February 21. But not the hope for a Socialist Pakistan.

## Farewell Comrade Lal Khan

23 February 2020, by **Awais Qarni**

He was one of the founders of “The Struggle”, a fortnightly Marxist magazine in Urdu language, chief editor of Asian Marxist Review and international secretary of Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign (PTUDC). Lal Khan started his lifelong revolutionary struggle as a student leader at Nishtar Medical College Multan in late 1970s and soon got interested in the ideas of Marxism and revolutionary socialism. During despotic Zia-Ul-Haq regime he endured floggings and incarceration and later went into exile for many years when martial law courts sentenced him to death for not

abandoning his political activities. For more than four decades he fought under the banner of revolutionary socialism for the historical interests of working class. In the dark period unfolding with the collapse of Soviet Union he not only laid the foundations of a Marxist organization in South Asia but ruthlessly defended, through dozens of his writings, the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky against the imperialist propaganda onslaught of so called failure of Socialism as a social system. His confidence and belief in the communist future of mankind didn't shake till his last breath.

The journey of his life may have come to an end but he will live long in the struggle for the emancipation of mankind from capitalist exploitation and tyranny in Pakistan, South Asia and whole world. His legacy would inspire many generations to come who have to keep the red flag flying high. We would like to pay tribute to him in the words of comrade Lenin:

What a torch of reason ceased to burn,  
What a heart has ceased to beat!

Farewell comrade Lal Khan... your memory would always be honored.



# Michel Lequenne (1921-2020): A very particular Trotskyist

16 February 2020, by **Michael Löwy**

I met Michel in 1962, as the leader of the Socialist Revolutionary tendency of the PSU. Catherine Samary, who also met him at that time, described him as follows: "he was impressive, with a funny laugh and a big poet's hat with wide brim". We were often together in the "tendency" debates of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as in the ... surrealist movement, and we remained friends, even though our analyses of certain events in the past - Kronstadt 1921! - had become contradictory...

Of humble origin, the young Michel Lequenne, born in Le Havre in 1921, started becoming politicized in the youth hostel movement. Unwilling to join the Vichy regime's Compulsory Work Service, in 1943, he joined the Trotskyist group Octobre led by Herni Molinier, which became one of the components of the Internationalist Communist Party (PCI, Parti Communiste International), the French section of the Fourth International. In 1946 he was elected to the Central Committee of the PCI, as part of the so-called "left-wing" tendency, along with Pierre Frank, Marcel Bleibtreu and Marcel Gibelin. In 1948-50 he was one of the main organizers of the solidarity brigades with Yugoslavia, initiated by the Fourth International.

Lequenne and Bleibtreu were among the first to oppose the orientation proposed in 1952 by Michel Pablo, the secretary of the Fourth International: a world war was imminent, two camps would clash, imperialism and the Soviet Union, and Trotskyists should practice entryism in the communist parties, especially in France. Refusing this "campist" line, he was expelled, with the majority of the PCI, from the Fourth International. As we know, this was the beginning of a disastrous process of international splits that

would lead, for a decade, to a marginalization of Trotskyism. Barely three years later, in 1955, opposed to the opportunistic course of Pierre Lambert, Lequenne and Bleibtreu were excluded from the PCI (future OCI). Participating in various attempts to regroup the socialist left, they contributed, in 1960, to the foundation of the PSU, where Lequenne organized a Socialist Revolutionary tendency. Finally, in 1961, Michel decided to return to the PCI (QI) and the Fourth International and was elected, in 1965, to its International Executive Committee.

His account of these years of crisis in *Le trotskysme, une histoire sans fard* (Paris, Syllepse, 2005) is a notable contribution, from a dissident point of view, to the history of the Fourth International and its French section. [51] My only reservation concerns its analysis of the Resistance (especially the communist sector) which seems too negative to me, reducing this often heroic struggle (think of Manouchian and his comrades of the *Affiche Rouge*) to the nationalist slogan launched in 1944, "To each his own Kraut" ...

During these difficult years, Michel, who earned his living as a sub-editor and proofreader, engaged in cultural activities: translating with his wife, Soledad Estorach (a former member of the CNT-FAI), the writings of Christopher Columbus - a passion throughout his life - and the convergence with surrealism. In 1966 he even proposed to André Breton and his friends of the surrealist group in Paris, in the name of the PCI, the reconstitution of the International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art (FIARI) - alas, without success. A few years later, he joined the surrealist group reconstituted in 1970, on the initiative

of Vincent Bounoure.

In 1968, Lequenne had a resolution adopted by the Syndicat des Correcteurs de la CGT in support of the student movement. During the 1970s he participated in the political life of the Communist League (LC - later LCR, French section of the FI), at the head of a dissident tendency, the "T3". Considering (based on the work of Ernest Mandel) that the working class includes manual and intellectual work, industry and services, he refused the "turn to industry" adopted by the majority of the Revolutionary Communist League. Also at this time - late 1970s - he also opposed the majority on several other issues: the (disastrous) proposal of "unification of the Trotskyists" (i.e. with the Lambertist OCI), the support for the USSR in the invasion of Afghanistan. On the other hand, once again in the minority, he supported the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, which saved this people from the continuation of the Polpotian genocide. Of course, Michel Lequenne was not infallible, but it must be acknowledged that on these issues, and many others, his only fault was to be right too soon...

"Hoffmann" (Lequenne) with his Argentinian friend exiled in Paris, "Heredia" (Angel Fanjul) proposed at the Fourth International Congresses of the 1980s that the old thesis of the degenerated workers state be abandoned and replaced by the "bureaucratic state" which no longer has anything worker-like about it. Finally, in 1988, during the crisis provoked by Pierre Juquin's presidential campaign, he decided to leave the LCR and the International. This was not, as he himself explains, a break with Trotskyism or with the militants of the movement, for whom he maintained esteem and friendship, but rather the fatigue of internal

debates and the desire to distance himself from them in order to be able to deal with his writings.

Indeed, from then on he wrote and published some of his most remarkable writings: in addition to the history of Trotskyism mentioned above, an astonishing autobiography in the form of a catalogue of the books he read (*Le Catalogue - pour*

*Memoires*, Syllepse, 2009), the first volume of the *Grandes Dames des Lettres: From Sappho to Ann Radcliffe* (Syllepse, 2011), as well as a reflection on the history of communism, *Counter-revolution in the revolution* (Eric Jamet Editeur, 2018). [52] One may not share the somewhat a-critical view of the "Leninist" years of the Russian Revolution (1917-23) proposed by this

work - which is, in a way, its political testament - but its analysis of the Stalinist counter-revolution is admirable.

We are going to miss this untiring iconoclast... To his daughter Delphine and to his companion Martine Roux, all our solidarity.

Michael Löwy

## Tribute to David Sanders (5 August 1945 - 30 August 2019), Revolutionary humanist and socialist

11 November 2019, by **Brian Ashley**

David was a mensch. He was a mensch in his personal relations and he was a mensch politically. Many of us know and admire David for his activism in the field of public health. We have heard and will continue to hear of his tremendous contribution to the struggle for the right to health for all, for equity and for a society that can guarantee a full and healthy life.

That contribution was shaped and guided by a politics I shall describe as revolutionary humanism. If there is one thing we can acknowledge about David was his care, his generosity, his love for life and for humanity. Justice and equity were principles that were embedded in his life being. This love and care had its greatest expression in his love and care for children and which would shape his personal life, his work, his academic work and the focus of his politics.

And I believe it is from this love, in spite of his privileged background he committed a kind of social suicide and joined the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, throwing his lot in with the oppressed and dispossessed. Similarly, it is from that profound sense of care and generosity, that while in exile in the UK, and in the hurly burly of revolutionary Europe - recall it was the period of post May 68, anti-

Vietnam struggles, the Portuguese revolution, mass strikes of industrial workers, the rise of the socialist feminist movement - he joined his revolutionary humanism with revolutionary socialism. You can get a sense of David's excitement with becoming part of the revolutionary left at that time from the following, text he wrote in December 2013.

Writing a short appreciation of the life of a comrade, Charlie Van Gelderen who became a father figure to many of us and to David himself, he writes:

"I first encountered Charlie in the UK winter of 1974 at a teach-in organised by the then International Marxist Group in North London. The hall was packed with socialist activists, all seemingly already comfortable with what, for me was new and exciting material on the dynamics of world revolution, being masterfully delivered by Ernest Mandel, in a sweeping integration of history, economics and political analysis. During one of the question sessions someone whom I could not see from where I was sitting made a lengthy intervention in the broadest 'Capie' accent I had heard for years. The atmosphere created by erudite, sharp and challenging ideas was intimidating for a newcomer to these debates, but was instantly

â€˜humanised' by the familiar accent which prompted a fit of uncontrollable giggling on my part at the unlikely presence of a Capie at this event."

David, was not just a socialist. He regarded himself as a Marxist. I mention this not to lay claim, to label but for us to understand his intellectual, philosophical and strategic commitment that David pursued throughout his life and help understand his unwavering persistence, his deep commitment to the struggle of the poor and downtrodden and his loyalty to building and supporting working class struggles and movements: his life-long anti-capitalism.

But for David, Marxism was not a dogma, a doctrine to be loyally recited. His Marxism had nothing to do with Stalinism where Marxism was appropriated for the purposes of crushing dissent and shoring up undemocratic and authoritarian rule. His Marxism had nothing in common with repetitious incantation of a few quotes from Marx or Engels in the style of a typical Buddhist prayer wheel. It consists of a method of critical thought about the social reality with the aim of its revolutionary change.

His Marxism was open not closed. In the words of someone whose writings had great influence on David, the eco-socialist Michael Lowy, wrote following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the idea that there was no alternative to capitalism "Marxism must once again become utopian by drawing its inspiration from the "principle of hope") that resides in the struggles, dreams and aspirations of millions of oppressed and exploited, "the defeated of history".

For David Socialism meant freedom, freedom from want as well as the freedom to give expression to all our creativities. It is a freedom predicated on the overcoming of all oppressions, racial, gender, sexuality, disability and the struggle to live in harmony with and part of nature.

Key to David's revolutionary praxis was an understanding that it is only through their own experience in the course of their own revolutionary praxis that the exploited and oppressed masses can overcome both the external circumstances that chain them (capital, the state) and their previous mystified consciousness.

In other words, the only genuine form of emancipation is self-emancipation. As Marx would later write in the founding declaration of the First International: "the emancipation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves".

Central to David's socialist politics was his internationalism. His international orientation came easy due to his own experience of making politics in several countries. The need to support struggles in other parts of the world, were the DNA of the politics of the 1970s when David came to revolutionary politics. We will hear how David gave expression to his internationalism via his support and involvement in the struggle for a free Palestine. However, at the centre of his active international solidarity whether on Palestine or through the global health movement, was his understanding that capitalism is an international system based on imperialist domination. Not in my name guided David's activism with relation to Zionism. But Palestine had

great strategic significance because he understood that the Middle East was at the centre of the geo-politics of US imperialism.

David's politics absorbed key foundations of the political legacy of Leon Trotsky and the Fourth International. Both in theory and from his experience of the transition in Zimbabwe, David understood that the objectives of national liberation, meaningful democracy, based on one person one vote, land reform and wider redistribution of wealth, could not be achieved within capitalism. Central to David's politics was the idea that the national liberation struggle would have to grow over into a revolution against colonial domination or national oppression into a far -reaching process of taking over the heights of the economy and putting the wealth of society under democratic control of the oppressed and exploited themselves. In other words, he strongly believed in the notion of the permanency of the revolution. That this did not occur in Zimbabwe nor SA did not require a review of theory and strategy on the contrary, the failure both in Zimbabwe and South Africa to fulfil the aspirations of the masses promised by the national liberation struggle confirmed its validity. The revolution in Southern Africa would have to be anti-capitalist and continuous if we were meaningfully going to change the lives of the poor.

It is this David, that I encountered shortly after he came to SA with Sue and his children in the early 1990. We had first met in Zimbabwe. I was taken to David and Sue's house by Carl Brecker and Kate Truscott, who were part of a left political group of Zimbabwean and South African exiles. So began a political collaboration between us that resulted in 1996 in the formation of the Alternative Information and Development Centre. AIDC. Kate Truscott, Carl's partner died in 1993 of breast cancer and left a legacy of books and a small amount of money. With this resource and the intention of creating a space where we could rebuild a socialist politics, post the collapse of "really existing socialism", under the new conditions created by the negotiated settlement and having to come to terms with the

phenomena of neoliberal globalisation - a particular phase of capitalism, we launched AIDC.

AIDC was never an end in itself. We saw it as a means to an end, i.e.. the idea behind AIDC was to contribute to the rebuilding of popular movements that could serve as a counter-power to capital and the state. The rebuilding of mass combative mass movement was the basis for the building a revolutionary working class party - something that David remained committed to for his entire life. To this end he joined us in 2008 in forming the Democratic Left Front and then later the United Front.

Like many of us he was excited by the Marikana moment, of course not by the massacre of workers, but the renewal of mass politics and the possibilities for a renewal of the left. So when visiting David for supper I would have to respond: "hey Brian what do you think of the NUMSA, the United Front, the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party?"

However, David was no myopic or romantic revolutionary. He had an acute sense of realism. In fact, I would sum up his disposition as a pessimistic optimist. Always cautious about what is possible in the present while certain that, in the long term we would win.

I think his pessimism of the day-to-day predisposed him to underestimate the importance of the Rhodes Must Fall / Fees must fall movement and somewhat dismissive of the decolonisation debate opened by the students. Partly, this was because of his strong commitment to non-racialism and his suspicion of race-based politics. He found it difficult to relate to the debate on intersectional politics and was dismissive of identity politics. Getting our politics right when it comes to the way race and class are inter-related especially in a country like SA is particularly difficult. Nevertheless, in his relationships with working class people his praxis would demonstrate his hatred of racism and sexism.

One of our last discussions we had politically was on the necessity to recognise that the momentum of Marikana, what some called the

NUMSA moment was over. Our discussion on the making sense of the political challenges we faced was formulated in an editorial of our magazine Amandla, of which David was a founding member of

"These initiatives (mass strikes of miners and farm workers, NUMSA special Congress, formation of EFF and tertiary student struggles) represented a huge opportunity for renewing radical politics in South Africa, especially as they were emerging within a context of intensifying social struggles and deepening class antagonisms. Each in their own way raised important questions of perspective, strategy and even tactics or methods of struggle. Most importantly, taken together, they represented something very significant, greater than the sum of their parts. They represented the emergence of an anti-capitalist moment with a real possibility of building a social-political movement that could fill the vacuum to the left of the ANC and the exhausted tradition of national liberation politics.

However, as we approach the end of the second decade of the 21st century we need to acknowledge "most of this energy has been dissipated and the left is more marginal than ever. "The anti-capitalist moment has gone." "

David's approach to the ending of a huge opportunity for socialist renewal can be summed up by one of the greatest and heroic revolutionaries of the socialist movement, Rosa Luxemburg, when she said "The road to socialism is paved with defeats... from which we draw historical experience, understanding, power and idealism."

Michael Lowy, similarly reminds us that "for two centuries, the history of socialism has been a constellation of tragic, and often bloody, defeats. The reminder is not to depress or make one pessimistic but rather, "by absorbing a failure without capitulating before the enemy, knowing that a new beginning could take unprecedented forms." This was David's point of departure as he ranted against the drift to state capture, corruption, cronyism, and dysfunctionality of large and vital

parts of the state. which has come to dominate politics in SA. Similarly, as he railed against BREXIT and the rise of the right, he would have seen flickers of possibility, of a new beginning of renewal.

He would have been excited by what is happening in Chile and the mass struggles against neoliberalism that has spread from Latin America all the way to Lebanon and beyond. From the ashes of the Arab Spring sustained protests in Sudan have led to the overthrow of the dictatorial presidency of Omar al-Bashir and a similar democratic revolution has ended the rule of the long-time Algerian President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Most inspiring, in the face of the collapse of the climate justice movement, has been the high school student mobilisations against the climate crisis in the Schools Strike for Climate and Fridays for Future where hundreds of thousands of students are not just inspiring student around the world but reinvigorating climate activism in many parts of the world.

David's view and injunction to us would be not to despair but rather to come to terms with our situation, to realise the need to review current strategies and tactics, with a profound sense of the need to rebuild and to rethink. David was of the view that it is in the course of struggle, mass action and movement building that we will find the most fruitful outcomes for our reflections and reorienting.

In concluding this tribute to David and sharing his political perspectives I end by quoting Daniel Bensaid, also from the same international political current - He writes in his memoir, an Impatient life

"Changing the world is more difficult, certainly, than Marx and our own earlier selves believed. But it is no less necessary than it ever was. From the International demonstrations of the World Social Forums, the impatient need for something new has once again begun to move. A shiver, still fragile and timid, like an uncertain convalescence. insufficient to reverse the regressive spiral of retreats and defeats. But just proclaiming that another world is needed already means shaking the yoke of the fait

accompli. So that this other world becomes possible, another left is needed. Not a left in denial or shame, not a "lite" or dehydrated left, but a left of struggle, up to the mark of challenges of the age."

As we pledge to take David's magnificent legacy forward let us recall the words of the Soviet novelist Nikolai Otrovsky when he wrote:

"Man's dearest possession is life, it is given unto him but once and he must live to it to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years....live so that in dying you must say, all my life and all my strength were given to the finest cause of this world... the fight for the liberation of mankind"

I truly believe this was the meaning and significance of David's Life.

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## David Sanders

David Sanders was a founding member of People's Health Movement (PHM) in 2000 in Savar, Bangladesh and has been the co-chair of PHM from past six years.

David Sanders was a Professor and founding Director of the School of Public Health at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa. He was a specialist paediatrician with postgraduate qualifications in Public Health, and had over 40 years experience in health policy and program development in Zimbabwe and South Africa. David had extensive experience in the areas of primary health care, child health and nutrition, and human resources for health as part of health systems development.

He had published extensively in these fields, as well as on the political economy of health, including on structural adjustment and development aid, having authored or co-authored three books: "The Struggle for Health: Medicine and the Politics of Underdevelopment", "Questioning the Solution: the Politics of Primary Health Care and Child Survival" and "Fatal Indifference: the G8, Africa and Global Health", in addition to many chapters and journal



articles.

He was on the Steering Committee of the United Nations Standing

Committee on Nutrition from 2002 – 2006, and a member of the Knowledge Network of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health. He was a founder member of the UK Politics

of Health Group, of the International People's Health Council and of PHM. He was a managing editor of Global Health Watch 2.

# Sergio, the irreplaceable comrade

25 September 2019, by **Gigi Malabarba**

Later, he joined the PCI (Italian Communist Party) and soon found himself in opposition to the Party in 1956, when the Russian tanks crushed the Hungarian Revolution. He was already an anti-Stalinist, not out of an ideological affinity to Trotskyism but because he did not support Soviet policies or Togliatti's approach. He encountered the Fourth International only after 1968 – an experience he lived to the full – and definitively broke from the PCI. A decisive moment was meeting a Trotskyist from Pisa expelled from the Party. Silvio Paolicchi, who worked at the Mondadori publishing firm, where Franca Cambiè worked (for many years she would be his life companion after Pina Sardella), and Davide Danti, organiser of the first Works Council at Mondadori.

Sergio was a teacher of Italian language and literature. School and more generally training and education were always central to his political activity. With Pina and sectors of the union left of the time he was among the founders of CGIL Scuola – initially opposed by the PCI who preferred an organisation not affiliated with this bit of the “middle layers”! – convinced of the role of education in raising working-class consciousness. At San Giuliano Milanese, where he taught, he was an advocate of self-managed people's schools to enable workers to gain the middle school diploma. This was a notable experience in terms of the number of worker-students involved, for the programme explained maths by reading pay envelopes, and history as the history of class struggles. And he later carried all this experience in the victorious national

metalworkers' negotiations in 1972-73 for the right to 150 hours within the work schedule enabling all workers to attain the middle school diploma “paid for by the boss”.

Along with Pina Sardella, he was among the founders of the Rousseau Centres, in 1968. These were summer recreational and educational centres for teen boys and girls, absolutely revolutionary for the time (boys and girls could sleep together and the monitors were slightly older youth).

Sergio joined the Gruppi comunisti rivoluzionari (GCR – Revolutionary Communist Groups) of the Fourth International during the Hot Autumn of 1969 along with a very small group around Silvio Paolicchi and the students in a base community from Volta scientific secondary school, and a few academics, later some employees of Mondadori and the Rizzoli – Corriere della sera group. He was the other “adult”, already over 30!

For the younger people, listening to the conversation between Sergio and Silvio, perhaps after a PCI central committee meeting or on the course of ongoing struggle, was a sort of permanent cadre school, alongside the possibility to meet and get to know during their meetings historic activists such as Livio Maitan and revolutionary leaders from many countries. Livio was the one who definitively won Sergio over to this new militant experience.

Sergio always took charge of political education, but was also very involved in organising teachers' unions. The attempt to normalise CGIL Scuola had

already been challenged at the second congress by the so-called Foggia motion, the first national organised tendency (it had never had been possible to organise one before within CGIL, in any sector). Sergio was the protagonist in Milan and Lombardy along with Pina, Maria Teresa Rossi and other comrades, including Giulietta Banzi, torn apart soon after by the fascist bomb in Piazza della Loggia, in Brescia. The current's bulletin in Milan was named, No longer servants of the State, as Sergio had proposed.

After Paolicchi's home and a Volta student's, and a brief period in a cellar near Corso Buenos Aires, the GCR opened their historic headquarters in Via Varchi alla Bovisa, which was already a meeting-place for the Milanese class-struggle left and also the headquarters of Christians for Socialism (near Pino Pinelli's Ponte della Ghiolfa anarchist circle).

The headquarters, which also went on to become the national headquarters of the GCR and later the LCR (Lega comunista rivoluzionaria – Revolutionary Communist League), with contributions from the Fourth International and its Belgian section in particular, was a very important place for Sergio. A decision was made to install a proper printing house to ensure the autonomous composition and printing of the historic journal *Bandiera rossa*. In the 1980s, he became its editor until the end of its publication in 2002, and of other revolutionary left publications. Sergio took charge of all the organisational and administrative aspects, founding a cooperative, as he took charge of

administration of via Varchi for decades, even after the printing house shut down.

Sergio's union activity in the educational field was always linked with union struggles among factory workers, from the early 1970s. For years, Sergio was among the driving forces of the Coordination of what was known as the "industrial left" in the Romana/SudMilano zone (with OM-FIAT, TIBB, Lagomarsino, etc). Finally, he became a teacher in the 150 hours of study programme, to Alfa Romeo workers in Arese, where the LCR had an important base.

Sergio had a clear foresight about a key political element; the environmental question. This is what spurred him in recent years to be among the protagonists of the movement for public water. But this began very long ago, from an undogmatic, attentive and curious approach, which led him to take sharp and clear positions on feminism, the ecological movement itself, and a great openness to a project undertaken by the Fourth International in the early 1980s, to build youth organisations and build the International Youth Camp. Among his lesser-known commitments was organising important international meetings with participation of revolutionary activists from different countries, mostly from the 1970s to the 1990s. Moreover, at the end of the 1980s he spent three months at the educational sessions at the newly founded IIRE, the Amsterdam international research institute, which is still fully active.

Under Sergio's leadership, Bandiera Rossa represented the Fourth International's voice even after the LCR entered Democrazia proletaria (Proletarian Democracy - he became a member of DP's national leadership) and later - alongside all of DP - Rifondazione comunista (Party of

Communist Refoundation), a process and change that he always supported without hesitation. He was a dedicated Rifondazione activist, participating and chairing debates and discussions in his regional circle (the Romana zone of Milan). He took part in the activities of Arci Belleza social club, the ANPI (Italian partisans' association) and militant anti-fascism, and later, building the political-cultural circle "Rosso si spera".

The love of books; reading them and publishing them, was an integral part of his activist commitment. He was very happy to publish through the editorial co-operative founded in the 1970s, the NEI (Nuove edizioni internazionali - New International Editions) books such as the story of Gaspere Bono, first a farm labourer and later a street sweeper for Campobello di Mazara, in Sicily, who later - after emigrating to Switzerland - became the mayor of his own city. This story is told in *La lista del gallo*, and Sergio was very proud to have contributed to getting this little-known story told. Indeed, he published a great many books, brochures and resources with NEI. Later, when Edizioni Alegre was born, he offered his skills as a consultant, an organiser of presentations, and supporter of projects such as the republication of *La mia guerra di Spagna* by Mika Etchebéhère, which his forler companion Pina Sardella dearly wanted (Pina has also died recently, only three months ago) and for which Sergio wrote the postface.

After Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) was founded, born of a split from Rifondazione comunista, Sergio decided to get involved in what appeared more akin to social work, but was actually extremely political. Along with the Communia national network, he supported and took part in the RiMaflow struggle. Soon after his involvement, and not by chance, he set up their first library (but he was

not above lending a hand to bottle tomato sauce if necessary). In Milan, he was an activist from the first in the Ri-Make social-political project. Although he had reached the age of 80, he was among those who were dragged off by the police when the second occupation was cleared out. Finally, he enthusiastically took part in the Fuorimercato national self-management and mutual aid network. With constant and relentless attention to the ecological question, which he saw as natural in a network in which many were to a great extent taking part in agroecology. With his Marxist background, and vivid curiosity, Sergio fully grasped that as the political left was drying up, rebuilding living forces disposed to class struggle meant building concrete experiences of solidarity, through social action with strong political undertones, and his contribution to this delicate passage was constant.

Sergio's comrades at Ri-Make did well to dust off Bertold Brecht for his 80th birthday with a quote that is more relevant than ever:

*There are men who struggle for a day and they are good. There are men who struggle for a year and they are better. There are men who struggle many years, and they are better still. But there are those who struggle all their lives: These are the indispensable ones.*

**Farewell Sergio.**

**Salutiamo Sergio tutt\* insieme**

Together, we will pay tribute to Sergio on Wednesday 25 September in Milano, at Ri-Make, via del Volga 4, from 6 p.m, with his family members, comrades and friends.

*Translated for **International Viewpoint** by Marie Lagatta from **Comunia Network** "Sergio, l'imprescindibile".*

## Maria José Belo Meca Maranhão

**11 June 2019, by Toupeira Vermelha**

Militant of the Communist Workers Party (POS - Partido Operário Comunista), she was persecuted by the military dictatorship in Brazil and went to Chile, where she lived during Pinochet's coup. While the fascist military hunted left wing militants on the streets, smoke escaped from her house's chimney in mid-September - she and other comrades burned VI International documents, including a complete Inprecor collection.

She barely avoided being arrested but managed to escape. Later, she was exiled in France until the end of the fascist dictatorship in Portugal, in April 1974, brought her to that country.. In Portugal, she was a militant of the LCI (International Communist League - Liga Comunista Internacionalista), and then a member of the PSR's (Socialist Revolutionary Party - Partido Socialista Revolucionário) leadership.

During the PREC (the Revolutionary Process In Course, the revolutionary period also known as "the hot summer", from 1975 to mid-80s), she was active in the popular struggles for access to housing, while in the 90s she was a municipal deputy for the PSR in Lisbon and also a teachers' union leadership member.

The collective Toupeira Vermelha shares condolences with all family member, comrades and friends.

## **Helena Lopes da Silva (1949-2018)**

**31 December 2018, by Mariana Carneiro**

She took part in the political life of both countries.

In Cape Verde, after independence, some of her comrades played an important role in the ranks of the government, before being expelled because of political differences. She was always part of the struggle for a socialist orientation, and her influence increased over time. In 2011 she supported the election of the current President of the Republic of Cape Verde, Jorge Carlos Fonseca, an independent, and she was a member of the Council of the Republic.

But it was in Portugal that she lived and campaigned the longest. She was a doctor at one of Lisbon's main public hospitals, where she headed the department of surgery for over twenty years. She was an active member of the LCI, then of the PSR, of whose Central Committee she was a member for a time, and she became the first black woman to be the head of an electoral list in the 1994 European elections.

In 1999 she was one of the founders of the Left Bloc, which brought together the majority of the independent

radical left in Portugal. From then, she remained an active member of this party.

Her death caused widespread grief and a large number of her party comrades and her friends, gathered to celebrate his memory, were surprised to hear the messages of condolence from two Presidents of the Republic, those of Portugal and Cape Verde.

We reproduce below the unpublished testimony of Helena Lopes da Silva, collected in June 2017 in the context of the project "Women of April", dedicated to women who were active participants during the revolution of April 1974, published by Esquerda.net on September 9, 2018.

### **April 1974 Women: Testimony of Helena Lopes da Silva (1949-2018)**

In June 2017 I had the privilege of meeting Helena at her home to collect her testimony for the project "Women of April". Our conversation of more

than three hours - with several breaks to look at photographs and flip through books - was recorded and transcribed and sent to Helena. We had agreed to meet again to continue. Having lived through militant anti-fascist activism, struggling so intensely for the liberation of the former Portuguese colonies, Helena thought she had much more to say. Time passed and, unfortunately, we postponed the continuation of this discussion.

In one of the last e-mails we exchanged, Helena wrote that "time flies " while emphasizing the importance of publishing such testimonies "concerning a domain where the archives of the recent past are rare". And even though Helena had much more to tell us about this period of her history and ours, here at least, as a tribute to her, is the testimony as I recorded it.

### **The awakening**

Helena Lopes da Silva was born in Cape Verde. After high school, she came to Portugal to go to university. Coming from a family of the Cape

Verdean lower middle class, the daughter of a writer, she had always had access to a range of books, which was one of her passions.

From an early age, Helena became aware of the poverty and inequalities that prevailed among the Cape Verdean population.

The clandestine reading of the book of the Cape Verdean writer Luís Romano, *Famintos, romance de um povo* ("Starving, novel of a people"), when she was only 12 years old, had an importance in her awakening: "I did not always understand it very well, but I began to wonder why there were people dying in the streets without help. It affected me."

Several other episodes marked Helena, such as the day when – at 13 years old – she was confronted with the existence of political prisoners.

"I lived behind the courthouse and I heard a hubbub. We went down the street and saw that the police were there, as well as Cape Verdean political prisoners, but we did not understand the reason for all this because we did not know about the liberation struggle. We started to wonder why some people were arrested and we heard that they were against the Portuguese government and that they wanted better conditions for Cape Verde and Cape Verdeans."

At the age of 15, the first forms of her resistance emerged: "At that time, we were all going to Praça, as we called the central garden, from 6 pm to 8 pm. When Radio Clube from Cape Verde, which was heard in the park, played the national anthem, everyone had to stop and stand up: children, adults, old people... I started to think that there was no reason to stand up. Today, when I think back about it, I realize that nobody told me to do it, nobody explained to me that it was a form of resistance – that's how I see it today, a form of resistance.

At the time, the PIDE already existed [53] and this fear of being seen, of being pointed at, but I did not stand up and I tried to make sure that my friends did not either. "

Helena was particularly marked by

another episode:

"One day I went to the dentist in Praia Hospital – Dr. Santa Rita – and while waiting to be treated, I was approached by a political prisoner, watched over by a policeman. He must have found me agreeable and he started talking to me. We established a very moving complicity. The policeman was also an accomplice, letting us talk freely and then agreeing to be our intermediary for exchanging letters and books. I sent this political prisoner the record with the song San Francisco ("Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair").

As the cover of this record was damaged, he made me a new one with his own drawings of flowers. Later I learned that he was Luandino Vieira, a writer, from Casa dos Estudantes do Império".

## First contact with "the continent "

Aged 15 or 16, Helena took a boat trip to Portugal, an excursion offered to the best students, mostly boys, by the Portuguese Youth (*Mocidade Portuguesa*). It was her first contact with what was then called "the continent".

On her return, she met a ship's commissioner whom she later learned was an activist of the clandestine Portuguese Communist Party. "He drew my attention to the issues of discrimination, exploitation ... He did not say good things about the colonies, but talked about what was wrong here and also in Cape Verde, Angola, Mozambique ... He aroused in me an interest in the liberation struggle, of which I had no knowledge.

He sent me several books, including *O Rio* by João Cabral de Melo e Neto. It was one of the episodes that helped to awaken my political consciousness, without me being aware of what was happening to me. This commissioner had gone to Cape Verde, he had even met my father. We corresponded. In one of his letters he told me about the Pink Ballet [54], ministers who abused young girls. He told me that the regime in Portugal was rotten."

## Beginning of political education

At the age of 18, Helena was sent by her father to Porto, having obtained a scholarship. She was first attracted by the University Catholic Youth (JUC), "a very politically advanced group". Then, in a cafe she frequented, the Piolho, she came into contact with a Trotskyist group, including Manuel Resende [55]. It was in this group that she began her political education. "We met at night, clandestinely, reading Capital, Rosa Luxemburg ... and discussing until very late. I studied *Capital* the way I studied anatomy. But of course, at the time a lot of things escaped me."

As her sister was studying in Coimbra, Helena went there every weekend. It was there that she was approached to attend meetings where the struggle for liberation was discussed and where the political education of students from the colonies was conducted. "We were talking about relations of production, the proletariat ... These meetings were camouflaged; we were having a dinner dance – *picapada* – and before it began some people got together for a meeting. It was a way of organizing meetings without being noticed. It was in this group that I began to be informed and educated about the national liberation struggle, within the framework of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), by reading the texts of Amílcar Cabral."

In Coimbra, Helena took part in the 1969 university movement, which "was largely influenced by May '68" [56].

## Double clandestinity

After spending two years in Porto and having gained autonomy, Helena asked to study in Lisbon, where the majority of her Cape Verdean friends were. As soon as she arrived in the city, she became part of the PAIGC's clandestine organization in Portugal.

"The structure of the PAIGC included



a committee, a subcommittee, and then cells that organized so-called core groups. I started being active in a cell. We held clandestine meetings, received information on how the struggle in the maquis in Guinea was progressing and instructions on what our structure should do. I was responsible for a core group. It included students and workers from the Lisnave shipyard, where we had a very strong group. I brought them together and tried to make them aware of the necessity of the liberation struggle. Then I was promoted to the subcommittee. "

Alongside her activity within the clandestine organization of the PAIGC, Helena was part of the group of Trotskyists linked with the Fourth International, which, in Lisbon, was mainly composed of medical students.

"At the time we were very few and we were not well regarded, because Trotsky was considered a "traitor". But we were stubborn and very enthusiastic. We were in all the struggles and we worked and studied at the same time. We were even good students. We ended up imposing ourselves and being recognized in our community. At the Faculty of Medicine in Lisbon, there was an organized Trotskyist structure: Alfredo Frade, Jose Manuel Boavida ... Then came João Cabral Fernandes, who was a prominent student leader of Coimbra. I became a member of the organization which would lead to the formation of the Internationalist Communist League (LCI, later PSR). Our meetings were held secretly, including in the home of Cavaco Manuel on Rome Avenue. We distributed propaganda among students and workers ... We also had meetings with leaders of the Fourth International, such as Michael Löwy, which could last a whole day."

Helena's political education and activity always followed these two currents: the LCI, linked to the Fourth International, and the liberation movements, concretely within the PAIGC, which fought for the independence of Cape Verde and Guinea. "At the time, we were strong supporters of the unity of Guinea and Cape Verde, as Amílcar Cabral advocated. In Lisbon, there were three

of us who, in the PAIGC, were also part of the LCI. If we were arrested, it would be a problem, because not only was the LCI involved, but also the clandestine structure of the PAIGC. But at the time, we had the courage to do everything and, fortunately, we avoided being arrested."

It was nevertheless a situation of double clandestinity, because the PAIGC could not know of her links with the Trotskyist group. "Even after April 25, 1974, no one could say that they belonged to the LCI. This dual activism gave me very important training, which was both theoretical, especially within the LCI, and practical - the awareness of the need for the liberation struggle, for independence and the fact that the liberation movements were the only representatives of the peoples of the colonies."

These activities were unfolding on many fronts. In the Faculty of Medicine, this also involved challenging the educational system and the method of evaluation, debating the issue of the colonial war, and linking the student struggle with the workers' struggle. "I was taking part in anti-colonial demonstrations, escaping from the riot police. At the Faculty we had created a Commission to Combat Repression. We produced documents and leaflets that we distributed, we tried to influence students, we took part in general assemblies."

The activities were unceasing and sometimes it was difficult to handle the fatigue. "But everything was done with enthusiasm. I remember an episode where I took the bus to go from the Spanish Steps to a meeting on the South Bank. I gave the money to pay for the ticket and fell asleep instantly, before receiving the change. I slept very little because I did not have time to sleep. But everything was done with enthusiasm."

I also remember that later, during a demonstration in support of Bobby Sands [57], we broke the window of a bank. To escape the police, we had to run. I was exhausted. We went to the Largo do Rato district to try to find a bus going to the medical school; at that time, the police did not pursue us

in the hospital, they had great respect for hospitals. Later, this limit disappeared ... When I reached the hospital, I vomited, I was so stressed and tense.

Because of her participation in the Law Enforcement Commission, Helena was denied access to the university restaurant because of her "inappropriate political behaviour". Prior to April 25, Helena also had contacts with progressive Catholics. "At that moment, I did not even know his name and I did not know why he (Luís Moita) [58] had contacted me. He brought me some documents, I believe from the Anti-colonial Commission, to let me know of the existence of his struggle."

In this way, I began to receive the information that he brought to me and I used it in my work with the PAIGC. Later, Luís explained to me that he had approached me because a Cape Verdean activist from the PAIGC, a member of the committee - a structure superior to mine - had told him that I was the person with whom he could make contact."

The publications that Luís Moita passed on to her were also the source of a great fear that she never forgot. "I lived with my sister, who had studied in Coimbra and was living in Lisbon, - she was working in the Overseas Ministry and already had a child, - and with another sister, who was there for her studies. In my room there was a picture of Che Guevara hanging on the wall. One day, very early in the morning, my sister came into my room, frightened, saying that the PIDE was there. Both agents went to my sister's room."

I ran into the scullery - which was always full of things, messy - and I threw the documents of Luís Moita and another book onto the highest shelf. Then, with my little sister, we went to the bathroom, tore up the rest of the material and threw it in the toilet. As for Che's photo, I hid it under the mattress and lay down. Fortunately, the PIDE were only interested in my sister, who had no political activity. She had probably been denounced by a ministry colleague who did not like her and who said she had political

connections. The PIDE found in my sister's things a calendar where there was a map of Africa and they wanted to know what this map meant.

I did not even see them, they did not care about me. My sister was taken to António Maria Cardo Street for interrogation, and until April 25 she was obliged to attend every week."

Such situations were very frightening because they could endanger the organization if we were tortured and could not stand it. "I was very afraid of being arrested. We thought that we would hold on and not talk, but I thought that anything could happen, that we did not know in advance. And anyone who spoke would have put the whole organization in danger."

## The House of Students from the Colonies (CEC)

After the 25 April, they began to call for the immediate independence of the colonies and to demand "not one more soldier for the colonies".

On May 3, Helena and two other classmates from the LCI and the PAIGC gathered as many African students as possible in the student room of Santa Maria Hospital, where student general assemblies and meetings of the Commission to Combat Repression were held. During this meeting, Helena's task was to get it to vote for the occupation of the Overseas Students Office (PEU). "The PEU was a structure of the regime whose function was to regiment African students, so that they were against independence and against liberation movements. A fascistic structure. Students were often encouraged to denounce those among them who did not follow the line of support for the fascist and colonial regime. There were rewards: trips to their countries of origin, books, concert tickets, among other things. With the support of the Portuguese students, especially the Trotskyists who were in the Faculty, we left for the Avenue of May 28 (today Armed Forces Avenue) and we occupied the PEU. And we transformed it into a

House of Students from the Colonies (CEC)."

Helena was elected president of the CEC, which was recognized by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA). The leadership was also composed of two comrades from Angola, one from Mozambique and one from São Tomé. "Our activity was really considerable. We had countless meetings where we discussed everything and more. We had strong support from the LCI. The majority of the students had never participated before in a general assembly, did not know what a meeting was, a motion, a point of order ... It was an incredible learning curve. As a leadership, we produced education material for students, especially on the liberation struggles. Starting from the CEC, the students participated in all the demonstrations, in an organized way, during which they carried placards saying: 'PAIGC, MPLA, MLSTP, FRELIMO ... the only representatives of the peoples of the colonies', 'Immediate independence!' and 'Not one more soldier for the colonies'."

The CEC students also took part in our first big meeting at the Voz do Operário. [59] "We defended the fact that the liberation movements were the only representatives of the peoples of the colonies and that negotiations should begin immediately, just as it was necessary immediately to stop sending soldiers to the colonies. When, shortly after April 25, the UN Secretary General came, students from the CEC joined thousands of protesters demanding independence for the colonies and wrote a letter with their demands."

The CEC was an important part of political education: "We mobilized a lot of people. Many of those who went through the CEC and had no previous political background subsequently joined the governments of their country. For this reason, many other far-left parties were attracted to the CEC; nevertheless, because of the direct links with the LCI, 'the Trotskyists had very great influence' in the organization. Ernest Mandel even gave a lecture.

The CEC was also threatened by

phone calls like "Blacks, we will kill you!" For this reason, the management of the House received a request for a meeting from the LUAR [60], at which Palma Inácio proposed sending armed activists to the headquarters of the CEC to ensure our security. However, this offer was refused.

Following the example of the CEC, other student houses were formed: that of Angola, Mozambique and also the Democratic Action Group of Cape Verde and Guinea. "The House of Cape Verde had been a structure linked to the regime, which was used mainly to organize social events for the Cape Verdean bourgeoisie. Shortly after April 25, we learned that they were going to a ball, at a time when independence had not yet been won. We went there and ended their party: "Now is not the time to dance, it's the time to fight!"

We occupied this house and transformed it into the Democratic Action Group of Cape Verde and Guinea (GADCG). The GADCG was our base to work in the neighbourhoods where Cape Verdeans lived: we organized literacy classes, we encouraged Cape Verdeans to participate in residents' committees to improve their neighbourhood, we discussed the question of the struggle for independence and for the recognition of the PAIGC. The GADCG played a key role in the process of affirming the PAIGC and representing the people of Cape Verde and Guinea."

Helena believed that "the group of Cape Verdean Trotskyists, who were not contaminated by Stalinism, was of great importance for the fact that there is a more advanced democratic regime in Cape Verde today than in the other former colonies."

"Already at that time, we had posed the question of the day after. We did not just want independence. We wanted independence also to be directed against exploitation, towards a more just, democratic, participatory society. We already had this idea before April 25. This stemmed from our internationalist political training. We were against the revolution by stages, we wanted the permanent revolution. All this had a great

influence on our way of seeing the world and greatly influenced the construction of the new Cape Verdean society. I think it is not by chance that Cape Verde today has a democratic regime. Insufficient, without a doubt, which must be deepened, but more advanced than in the other former colonies."

According to Helena, "in Cape Verde and the former colonies, the education - or rather the miseducation - of many Stalinist leaders who were educated in the Soviet Union resulted in a narrow way of seeing the world, a narrow horizon".

"It's as though they have blinkers. They cannot be democrats. They only know 'if you are not with us, you are against us'. They do not know how to listen to others, to allow the expression of other sensibilities. This is what happened in Cape Verde, for example, with the single party - 'the force, the light and the guide of the people' - in which all those who thought otherwise were treated as

counter-revolutionary. The Trotskyists were considered as counter-revolutionaries and expelled. That's why I did not go back to Cape Verde when I finished my studies. If I had, I would probably have been arrested. So I continued the work here (in Portugal)."

When the colonies gained independence, the CEC no longer had any reason to exist. "With the end of the CEC, we focused on the work of the GADCG, especially intervention in the neighbourhoods. Later, the GADCG evolved, giving birth to the Cape Verde Association, because Cape Verde and Guinea separated."

## **Mobilization of students and workers, fight for the right to abortion**

Shortly after April 25, the LCI developed activities to mobilize students and workers, because "it was important to make the connection between student struggles and the workers' struggle, to build a bridge. "

Feminist struggles, such as the right to voluntary termination of pregnancy, were also a priority. "We also had an autonomous women's organization, the group 'To be a woman', and we participated in the European network of women. I even went abroad to represent the Portuguese organization. Together with the women of the UDP [61] and the MDM [62] we organized various meetings on the issue of women's rights which, at this time, were mainly focused on the recognition of the right to voluntary termination of pregnancy. As the LCI, we participated in all the movements that took place for the recognition of this right. We are part of the Movement for the Decriminalization of Abortion."

## **A last farewell to Mick Woods**

**16 September 2018, by Lone Degn, Ulf B. Andersson**

For some of us a grey November day in 1993 was one of our happiest days. The message coming from Tuzla in Bosnia about the arrival of the first convoy from International Workers Aid was great news. It was due to effort of some extremely brave men and women in defiance of the impossible conditions in Bosnia at that time.

Mick Woods was one of the heroes on this convoy organized to support the Mine Workers Union in Tuzla, one of the few places where some kind of multi ethnic co-existence still prevailed in 1993 when the vicious war in Bosnia was creating death and destruction.

When Mick and the four other persons on the convoy on their way to Tuzla reached the office of UNHCR in Zenica in Central Bosnia UNHCR sent

a fax to the head office in Zagreb: "I was surprised, to say the least, to see this somewhat motley crew turn up at a time when all UNHCR convoys are suspended and tensions are so high (...) I am quite suspicious. Can you please confirm the identity of these five persons".

After reaching Tuzla on November 8th 1993 IWA in cooperation with the Trade Unions in Tuzla and other organisations established cooperation between ordinary people around Europe and people in Tuzla. It was a truly grassroots-organisation with people having different ideas joining hands to fight, at least for a decent Europe. This was a period when we saw the ugly face of modern fascism in the form of this extreme nationalist idea of dividing people and forcing hundreds of thousands of people to

leave their homes.

Mick was one of the important persons turning the ideas to concrete action. Altogether Mick drove around 20 IWA-convoys.

He could be stubborn but he had a big heart and close to a good laugh. His sense of humor became well-known within IWA and when we at IWA-HQ in Stockholm received a typical Mick-report with the headline "This ain't no technological breakdown, this is the road to hell" we feared the rest of the content in the report. "Shit happens" Mick admitted describing how the two trucks of IWA were lost by bad luck on the Igman Road in a convoy from Tuzla to Sarajevo on 25th of November 1994.

Mick continued to be an important part

of IWA for the coming years and also worked for STS, StÅ, t Tuzlas skoler, organized by Vagn Rasmussen, another IWA-veteran who passed away in 2016.

The bravery of Mick and the other comrades in November 1993 changed or at least affected a lot of peoples lives. Our mutual experiences in IWA created a very strong bond of friendship, still existing today. It was also the source of love, marriages (and divorces) and was the root of birth of a few children.

Mick Woods was not only a dedicated socialist, a brave truckdriver but also a talented writer. In the printed IWA-bulletin no 7 (November 1998), a special issue to celebrate IWA first 5 years, Mick collected his memories in the long article "Daddy - what did you do during the Bosnian war?". He made the conclusion: "To briefly draw a political balance sheet of IWA and our operation in ex-Yugoslavia - despite all our errors I believe we have in the last 5 years written a small chapter in working class history. We have made the notion of proletarian internationalism and solidarity come to mean something."

Mick continued: "On a personal note I would say that my activities in IWA were the most satisfying and meaningful in over 20 years of intense political activity. IÅ´m glad I was there. I believe that those of us who were involved in the war have been changed for ever".

When we in Copenhagen in June 2013 celebrated IWA 20 years, Mick was there and some of us discussed the idea of celebrating IWA 25 years in

Tuzla. It was with sadness we in May 2018 had to celebrate in Tuzla without Mick, too sick to travel to Bosnia.

Now Mick has passed away. In the hearts of people in what was IWA-Sweden and other countries he will be remembered for all his commitment.

If there is a place in heaven for brave truckdrivers Mick will be sitting there saying "'It seemed like a good idea at the time! Sretno".

## Preserving the archive

At the memorial in Denmark me, Ulrik and SÅ, ren, who were all active in the IWA campaign finally arranged meeting to organize all the paperwork from the campaign. We had talked about it before. We think there is an important story to tell. A story about how the left wing operated at the time, a story about how to do concrete national and international solidarity work and a story about mobilizing lots of groups all over Europe. But also a story that contains a lot of facts, that are withheld or denied in the official narrative about the Balkan war.

One of the problems is, that the IWA work, took place in a time between writing on paper by hand or type writer and the www. revolution; in the few years where we thought that the fax machine was a fantastic invention. Now we know, that things written on fax paper do not last.

I stored a lot of IWA papers, and can see that we have to act now or the story will be gone. Ulrik and I met in Copenhagen to have a look at the

material - and it is still possible to read about 90 % of the pages. The material is from Croatia, Bosnia, Denmark and Sweden (between whom the international office circulated) and papers from some of the international meetings. This makes it possible to tell the story.

So the first step is finding funds to read through, sort and store papers and deciding how the story is to be kept and told. We will continue to work on this.

*Lone Degn*

**If you want to donate we are using the ESSF account - but *please* mark any donation IWA appeal.**

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# Troglo: will, initiative and revolutionary generosity

9 April 2018, by **Manuel Garí**

We were expecting the fatal outcome, but when the blow came it was no less

harsh. José Ramón Castaños, known to hundreds as Troglo, has died. I

identify with the heartfelt words written by Jon Fano Letxepan, Petxo



Idoia, Jaime Pastor, MartÃ Caussa, Raul Camargo, Pierre and Sally Rousset published in Viento Sur which I recommend to the activist generations of today who need to know more about this part of the history of the social and political struggles in the Spanish state, most especially in Euskalherria. [63] For my part, I will add my feelings and some more elements that show the intersection of this life of a militant with the trajectory of Anticapitalistas (section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state.)

One of the best experiences of those who were in the LCR was to meet and merge with that very close group of people that made up ETA VI and very specifically Troglo. [64] From different starting points and experiences, suddenly, in the heat of the anti-Franco struggle, through the common aspiration for a socialist society, and thanks to the good influence of the people of the French Ligue and the Fourth International, we were able to converge in points of view and projects with a high degree of agreement. And, in addition, something to emphasize, they were loyal people. I met Troglo in a period of clandestine activity. I do not remember exactly when, but I am sure that we began to work together as a result of his transfer to Madrid to participate in the unified party leadership.

In those years I knew how easy it was to discuss with Troglo, who defended his ideas and proposals with passion, but also, that it was even easier to finally reach agreement on "what is to be done". The important thing. And all accompanied by a friendly, unconditional comradeship. Something to be valued in times when

competitiveness between individuals and lack of political debate characterized the life of the forces of change.

It is impossible to summarize in a few lines a life full of revolutionary activity of a person with great capacity for initiative and infinite dedication to the cause.

I will highlight two aspects not addressed in the previous In Memoriam articles that affected me more directly. After the failure of the unification with MC - a fusion that led to the unjust and erroneous price of leaving the Fourth International - Troglo and I felt a moral and political obligation to repair the damage done; we were accomplices in the "return" to the International's leadership body (IEC) of the people in Euskalherria who shared with Troglo the need to establish this relationship and the people who, in Euskalherria and the rest of the state, were grouped together in a long sequence (Izquierda Alternativa, Espacio Alternativo, Izquierda Anticapitalista and finally Anti-capitalistas) that we wanted to be part of the international organization. In those years, our friendship and collaboration were strengthened, even though we did not have the same political-organizational project in construction of the party, but we did have a broad pool of ideas, programmatic points and ways of seeing the relationship between the social and political struggle. And in particular the ecosocialist vision.

The other question that I want to highlight is that Troglo, at the initiative of the Ecosocialist Encounters that began in Geneva, passed the baton to Madrid and then were held in Bilbao - thanks to his

commitment when he was already very sick - established a very close path of collaboration with Anticapitalistas and with the environmental organizations of the Spanish state. Thanks to his proposal and commitment, they will continue in Lisbon in November 2018 .

Knowing Troglo is how I understood in a simple way that one can have a firm pro-independence political position in defence of the rights of the Basque people and, at the same time, not have to resort to identity politics. Or so I understood it. And, at the same time, he was an internationalist and in solidarity with the struggle of the peoples like few others.

As a friend Troglo never failed me and I knew of his capacity for affection when I needed it the most in 2008 and 2009, in the various trips he made to chat with me. Just to chat between one bus and another bus. To paraphrase and invert the Sandinista motto, for Troglo, tenderness was solidarity among people. And he practiced it.

Just a final remark. On 31 December 2016, Sophie, Josu, Marga and I went to see him in his hamlet. Luckily, we got there, and did not get lost in those roads and curves between mountains and valleys. In those hours of New Year's Eve he never stopped making proposals for future work: an agreement between foundations, which, unfortunately, we have not yet documented; a social initiative against precarity with sectors of the church; and, as already said, the preparation of the fourth meeting of the Ecosocialist Encounters. He gave us messages and proposals. We will fulfil them.

Troglo lives, the fight continues.

## On the death of Carl T Brecker, AIDC Chairperson 1996 - 2006

2 February 2018, by **Brian Ashley, MP Giyose**

Our sadness is that much greater as we were not able to reconcile and heal our differences and hurt, arising from an acrimonious disagreement and break-up in our relationship. Nevertheless, all through the years of our estrangement, the role Carl played in the building of AIDC and the contribution he made materially, intellectually and politically was never forgotten.

In fact, it was with a small legacy of his wife Kate Truscott, that Mercia, Brian and Carl set out on the road of building a space for reflection, research and activism that could respond to the profound changes that had occurred in South Africa, with the ending of Apartheid and globally with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

From the Chair of AIDC, Carl guided the work of the organisation and ensured that through its infant stages and right up to its maturity AIDC was

embedded in an anti-capitalist politics. Although, AIDC was successful in winning donor finance from a wide range of sources, church, foundations and state, Carl's commitment to working class politics ensured that AIDC never lost focus and retained its radical and militant edge.

Under Carl's leadership the Board of AIDC was never reduced to playing a nominal role simply to meet statutory or donor requirements. On the contrary, the AIDC Board was an active board that shaped the strategy and politics of the organisation. Carl would almost weekly be in touch with the Director, wanting to know details of the organisation's programmatic work, interacting with staff and drafting documents for the organisation.

Most significantly, Carl was a teacher, formally in his contribution to the political education courses, such as our leadership training courses, youth

camps and schools, but also informally in every-day discussions, when staff and the Board would be able to draw on his wealth of knowledge and myriad of experiences.

The rupturing of our relations was a great loss to the organisation but equally we believe it was a great loss to Carl. AIDC, and the associated political activities enriched Carl's life and provided a sense of meaning and a certain fulfilment.

In some senses AIDC was a vehicle where Carl could take forward his life-work of constructing a socially just and equitable world.

At AIDC we will continue to take forward this legacy of Carl and make sure that our programmes are devoted to the emancipation of working class and poor people.

Hamba Kahle [65]

# The greatest statesman of the last half-century

4 January 2017, by **Guillermo Almeyra**

Cuba is a small country of 11.5 million inhabitants. For a long time it depended economically on the export of a monoculture - cane sugar - as well as rum, tobacco and tourism and it now depends also on the provision of services (tourism, dispatch of doctors and teachers). This "dessert" economy (based on dispensable luxuries such as tobacco and drink) reliant on services produces very little surplus value and depends on the distribution of world surplus value produced in more industrialized regions, in other words on the economic surpluses available to the sectors that consume these goods and services which are not indispensable. It is therefore a fragile and dependent country.

One of the great merits of Fidel Castro was having made possible the

immediate raising of the cultural level of Cuba and the rapid and exemplary development of scientific research and medical sciences of high quality. The son of a landowner who grew sugar and a pupil of the Jesuits, he broke the dependence on sugar and, with a poor population which until then believed in the African saints and richer classes which were Catholic or Protestant, built a scientific and secular education system.

Tons of insults have been dumped on the corpse of Fidel Castro, with the objective of minimizing his achievement and preparing the final assault against Cuba, to recolonize it and rebuild the brothels and gambling houses. But there have also been unpleasant incidences of conservative moralizing and necrophiliac assertion from the eternal opportunists, or the

eulogies of sincere supporters of the Cuban revolution and faithful Fidelistas who cannot distinguish between a people's revolution and the virtues and limits of its leaders. It would offend the ethics and intelligence of readers and I would be remiss in my duty as historian, journalist and of socialist if I unthinkingly joined them.

Fidel Castro was in fact a great revolutionary Cuban, of the stature of Martí, and a great Cuban statesman, a permanent and courageous defender of the independence of Cuba against US imperialism and, in his own way, of the transformation of a democratic anti-imperialist revolution as a point of departure for the construction of the elementary bases of socialism - which can really be built only at the world level - in this small, poor and

dependent island. But he was neither a socialist when he was an activist in the student movement and in the party of Guiteras [66] as an anti-imperialist radical nationalist, in opposition to the Popular Socialist Party (Stalinist/Communist), then allied with the dictator Fulgencio Batista, nor when he attacked the Moncada barracks with fellow democrats, nor when he disembarked in Cuba in the heroic Granma expedition. That is why the US State Department believed he could be used to get rid of Batista, increasingly an embarrassment, and sent Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times* to interview him in the Sierra Maestra - until 1959 Communist Parties throughout the world fought him as a petty bourgeois adventurer.

All my life I have defended the Cuban revolution without identifying it with Fidel Castro or other leaders. I was president of the Argentine Committee of Solidarity with the Cuban Revolution created in 1957, two years before the triumph of the revolution and the "progressive" government of Frondizi jailed me for that.

I can say therefore that Fidel's errors were many and sizeable, derived from his lack of socialist education and the tactical necessities of the alliance with the worldwide counterrevolutionary bureaucracy that ran the Soviet Union.

During the missile crisis of 1962, which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, Fidel and the Cuban Government faced the great danger and repudiated the betrayal of Khrushchev who withdrew the defensive rockets without consulting them. But then, to renew all its productive apparatus, Cuba had to rely on the Kremlin and Castro, imitating the Soviet Communists, created a single party that transformed into the Communist Party and identified the latter with the state, rather than keeping it separate and making it an organ of critical control. While imperialism, with its military and political attacks and its criminal blockade, created shortages in Cuba, sowed diseases and forced a poor country to build a disproportionate military force, thus generating poverty and bureaucracy, Fidel and his comrades believed that development and socialism could be built on the

basis of apparatuses and blocked the way to self-management, workers' control and the real participation of the workers in the decisions of the Communist Party and the government. This strengthened the bureaucracy.

Censorship, cultural repression and homophobia as well as support for the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 damaged Fidel's global prestige. The failure of the huge "zafra" (sugar harvest) of 1970 disarticulated the economy. Fidel also characterized the corrupt Brezhnev as a "great Marxist" and supported the Argentine dictatorship during the Malvinas war, believing that it was anti-imperialist. As a statesman, he was guided by what he believed was good for Cuba, not by what aided social liberation, and he identified states and governments with peoples - he was the first to hail the fraudulent victory of Salinas in the Mexican presidential elections of 1988.

These errors had an enormous cost but Cuba today is no longer the Cuba of 1959. Fidel will always be remembered as an anti-imperialist revolutionary.

# Fidel Castro: Undaunted Revolutionary

4 January 2017, by **Jeff Mackler**

These same critics "especially the government of the United States, whose 50-year illegal embargo/blockade of Cuba has been condemned by virtually every other nation" have no qualms about supporting the world's real tyrants, provided only that they offer zero resistance to the interests of the world's dominant imperialist powers. In the minds of Fidel's critics, his "original sin" was to challenge and overthrow capitalist power and prerogatives in Cuba and to spread Cuba's liberating message worldwide.

The 1959 establishment of the Cuban workers' state aimed at the

construction of a socialist society on an island of only 11 million people shook the world and continues to do so.

"Fidel," as he was referred to by friends and comrades around the world, was the son of a wealthy landowner. With a Jesuit secondary school education, he graduated from the University of Havana in 1945 with a degree in law. He engaged in radical student struggles, but was not yet dedicated to socialist revolution, and became a member of the traditional bourgeois opposition formation, the Orthodox Party. His 1952 candidacy for the Cuban national congress was

cut short with the military coup of Coronel Fulgencio Batista, a former Cuban president (1940-44), who proceeded to abolish Cuba's constitution and installed himself as dictator.

As a human rights attorney, Castro filed an unsuccessful lawsuit challenging Batista's coup on constitutional grounds. Not long afterward, he and a youthful band of radical followers, mostly students, organized a failed military attack on the Moncada and other police barracks in Santiago de Cuba on July 26, 1953. While Fidel and his young comrades were foiled in their

expectations that the Moncada attack would spark a nationwide revolt, the date nevertheless became synonymous with and is celebrated as the beginning of the Cuban Revolution.

*December 31, 2016*

Fidel was tried before a Batista court and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Less than two years later, however, and on the occasion of Batista's 1954 post-coup election victory, the dictator, seeking a modicum of legitimacy for his regime, and facing broad opposition from working-class and bourgeois forces, declared an amnesty and freed all Cuba's political prisoners, including Fidel and his brother Raul.

Fidel represented himself in court and defended his attack on Moncada. His concluding statement, four hours in length, typical of Fidel's ever-defiant revolutionary character, was a ringing denunciation of the Batista tyranny that proved to be prophetic. He concluded: "I do not fear the fury of the miserable tyrant who snuffed out the life of 70 brothers of mine. Condemn me, it does not matter. History will absolve me."

Indeed it did! Two years later, Castro and 80 revolutionary fighters, including the Argentine doctor, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, who had originally signed on as a medic, arrived in Cuba on a 61-foot rickety wooden yacht built for a few dozen at best—the Granma. They set out to begin a two-year guerrilla war in the Sierra Maestra, which defeated successive waves of U.S.-backed and armed Batista forces.

The guerrillas won the support of Cuba's peasant masses and were aided by a well-organized underground support network in Cuba's major cities. Their July 26 Movement, beginning with skirmishes at local Batista outposts, eventually vanquished the main force of the Batista Army in Santiago de Cuba. In time, commanders of the revolution, including Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, led military columns that defeated qualitatively larger but increasingly demoralized and disintegrating Batista forces across Cuba.

## The rebels enter Havana

In a speech from Santiago de Cuba, Fidel proclaimed the revolution's victory on New Years Day, Jan. 1, 1959. Batista and his entourage fled to the Dominican Republic the following day. A week later, Fidel and his comrades, 10,000 strong, and having defeated an army five times their size, triumphantly entered Havana to be welcomed by hundreds of thousands of cheering Cubans.

The conservative *Time* magazine soon after described the scene as follows: "The face of dictatorship in Cuba was the padlock on Havana University, the bodies dumped on street corners by casual police terrorists, the arrogant functionaries gathering fortunes from gambling, prostitution and a leaky public till. In disgust and shame, a nervy band of rural guerrillas, aided by angry Havana professional men (plus opportunists with assorted motives), started a bloody civil war that cost more than \$100 million and took 8,000 lives. Last week they smashed General Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship."

But Cuba's socialist course was not immediately assured with the military victory of the July 26 Movement. The fundamentals of capitalist power, including Cuba's largely privately-held land and property, remained in the hands of foreigners – mostly U.S. corporations – or the Batista-era capitalist elite, including Cuba's anti-Batista capitalist supporters of the 1959 revolution. The central question – Which class shall rule? – the masses of Cuban workers and peasants or the capitalist few – remained unresolved.

Castro, still a revolutionary democrat, initially named key anti-Batista bourgeois figures to the central posts in the Cuban government, including anti-Batista politician Juan Miro Cardona as prime minister, Judge Manuel Urrutia as provisional president, and Cuban banker/economist Felipe Pazos, a one-time International Monetary Fund official in Washington.

In short order, however, beginning a

few weeks after their initial appointments, these prominent figures proved incapable of meeting the ever-growing aspirations of the Cuban masses for land and fundamental changes that advanced their well-being. Thus, the modern history of the Cuban Revolution begins with the early and critical decisions of the Castro team as it confronted both U.S. imperialism and Cuba's national capitalist class. Both forces fully expected that Castro and his followers would differ little from past idealistic bourgeois revolutionaries in other countries, who had illusions that their visions of justice, reform, and democracy could be achieved within a capitalist framework.

Castro himself had honestly explained to prominent U.S. journalists, like Herbert Mathews, a New York Times editorial writer who visited Castro and the July 26 Movement guerrilla fighters in the Sierras, that he was not a "communist" but merely a dedicated revolutionary whose interests were not in conflict with those of the United States.

Ed Sullivan, a right-wing New York *Daily News* columnist, flew down to Havana and interviewed Fidel on Jan. 11, 1959. Sullivan assured Castro that "The people of the United States have great admiration for you and your men because you are in the real American tradition of George Washington." Fidel later appeared in his military fatigues on Sullivan's CBS show, one of the nation's leading popular entertainment television programs, and viewed by tens of millions of people. Said Sullivan, while this writer was watching the show in awe, "Ladies and gentlemen of America, I want to introduce you to Fidel Castro, the George Washington of Cuba." Fidel smiled but did not speak. The live audience thundered with applause.

## Cuba's transformation

The conquest of military power in Cuba marked only the beginning of a transformation process that would steadily unfold over the next two years. At each juncture, the Castro



team was confronted with decisions that would either return Cuba to the capitalist orbit or irrevocably embark it on a socialist course. The first steps along the socialist road were taken when most all of the initial capitalist appointees proved incapable of implementing the revolution's key promises—including a land reform that would, as Che Guevara, the first Minister of Agrarian Reform, argued, employing the credo of the 1911 Mexican Revolution, "grant the land to the tillers."

In May 1959, under Fidel's leadership, Cuba began confiscating U.S.-owned land and distributing it to Cuba's poor peasant masses. This had been the policy of the July 26 Movement before the formal conquest of power. Land in the countryside that had been liberated during the course of battle with the Batista army was given to the affected peasants, thereby cementing their loyalty to the revolution while winning new forces to the revolutionary army. In a similar vein, captured Batista soldiers were freed on condition that they did not return to fight Fidel's growing insurgency.

In the course of the next two years Cuba's land reform exceeded any in modern history since the great Russian Revolution of 1917, when the Bolshevik party of Lenin and Trotsky nationalized the land of a nation that was one-sixth of the earth's land surface and granted it to peasant committees for distribution to Russia's most oppressed, who represented 90 percent of the population.

Needless to say, Cuba's evolving and ever-deepening land reform program alienated both U.S. business interests and the landed interests of Cuba's national capitalist class. The latter increasingly separated themselves from the Castro-led revolutionary process, including financing and arming, with U.S. support, short-lived counterrevolutionary militias in the Escambray Mountains aimed at Fidel's overthrow.

With every step toward implementing the revolutionary promises of July 26 Movement, the U.S. government countered with increasingly hostile measures. Fidel and his evolving team consistently responded by

deepening the ongoing revolutionary process. When the U.S.-owned Cuban oil refineries refused to process Soviet crude oil, they were nationalized. The U.S., under the Eisenhower administration, responded by cutting off Cuba's sugar quota. Largely a "one crop economy," sugar sales to the U.S. represented a major portion of Cuba national income.

With regard to the economy as a whole and with the ouster of former Batista-era banker Felipe Pazos, the initial head of Cuba's National Bank, Fidel began a search of a replacement. He is said to have asked Cuba's core leadership group if "...anyone in the room had experience as an economist." Che Guevara reportedly raised his hand and was so appointed. Soon afterward, this humorous but incisive episode reveals, when asked about his "economist" experience, Che responded, "I thought Fidel asked if there were 'communists' in the room." As head of Cuba's central bank Guevara proceeded to implement a series of measures that centralized key sectors of Cuba's economy and allowed for Cuba's wealth and industries to operate to benefit the Cuban masses as opposed to the previous capitalist elite.

## **"To the wall with the terrorists!"**

A critical choice was required when soon after the January 1959 victory the Cuban people spontaneously organized mass tribunals to bring to justice some 500 of the worst of Batista's murdering and raping death squad criminals. The ensuing public trials, often conducted in huge stadiums with thousands of Batista's victims present, many of whom proffered uncontested testimony as to the old regime's monstrous crimes, were challenged by U.S. government officials on the grounds that "due process," in the U.S. definition of the term, was denied. Few, if any, however, denied the guilt of Batista's assassins.

U.S. officials demanded that Castro intervene with forces from Cuba's new revolutionary army to halt these proceedings. Once again, Castro and

his team refused. The murderers were shot before the firing squads of the revolutionary people when the mass verdict, "Al paredón por los terroristas!" (To the wall with the terrorists!) was proclaimed by Cuba's aroused and participating masses. As with every serious revolution in history, including the 1776 American Revolution and the U.S. Civil War, justice is rapidly dispensed by the long brutalized victims of ruling-class murder and tyranny.

## **The Bay of Pigs invasion**

In addition to U.S.-backed military incursions, not to mention some 100 recorded U.S.-orchestrated efforts at Fidel's assassination over the course of the following decades (some put the figure at 600), the U.S. terminated all diplomatic relations with Cuba and imposed soon after a vicious and illegal embargo/blockade that continues to this day.

The U.S. embargo and diplomatic break with Cuba was followed by the CIA's secret organization and training in Nicaragua and Guatemala, then both U.S.-backed dictatorships, of some 1500 Miami and New Jersey-based Cuban exiles for the infamous April 17, 1961 invasion of Cuba at the remote Playa Girón (Bay of Pigs). Two days earlier, CIA pilots employed B-26 bombers in a failed effort to cripple Cuba's modest air force. But the attack signaled to Fidel and Cuba's armed forces that an invasion was imminent.

U.S. intelligence agencies had predicted that their sponsored invaders would be immediately welcomed by what they conceived of as the "Communist-oppressed Cuban masses." It never happened. In fact, the invasion was secretly conceived by the U.S. military as a pretext to enable the invaders, the sons and hirelings of Cuba's expropriated capitalist class, to quickly establish a beachhead at the Bay of Pigs and beyond, plant their counterrevolutionary flag as "legitimate" occupiers of Cuban territory, and then immediately call for U.S. official recognition and military support.

For the Cuban revolutionary government, the quick defeat of the invaders was crucial. Fidel himself, in a tank at the Bay of Pigs, and at the risk of his life, took command of Cuba's defenses. In less than three days, over a thousand invaders were captured: 100 were killed. Cuban government losses were also significant.

The John F. Kennedy administration initially denied any U.S. involvement, only to be discredited around the world by the direct testimony of many of the invaders. The U.S. propaganda/demonization machine shifted to spurious accusations that the Castro-led government would soon execute all those captured. Instead, the Cubans negotiated an agreement that returned almost all of the invaders to the U.S. in exchange for a U.S. pledge to supply medicines sufficient to inoculate the entire Cuban population against preventable diseases like polio, diphtheria, measles and smallpox.

Whatever remnants of capitalist property remained at the time of the 1961 U.S. invasion were eliminated outright when, in the name of the Cuban people, Fidel announced that the Cuban Revolution would proceed to nationalize the holdings of the Cuban capitalist class and all foreign-owned capitalists, "down to the nails in the soles of your boots." But the method employed by Castro's revolutionary team with regard these nationalizations was unique to say the least. The value of the properties taken from Cuba's elite was determined by the Batista-era official tax records, values reported by the owners themselves. When the latter complained that these figures were inaccurate and highly understated, the Castro team retorted, "You mean to tell us that for decades you have not been paying your fair share of taxes!" Based on Batista's tax records all confiscated capitalists were offered full compensation... paid for via newly-minted Cuban bonds that matured in 20 years! Just compensation indeed! Needless to say Batista fled the country with whatever cash reserves remained while he and his cohorts retained control over the foreign bank accounts they used to stash monies long plundered from the Cuban

people.

## **The Cuban Missile Crisis**

It was only after the Bay of Pigs invasion that Fidel formally announced, on Dec. 2, 1961, that he was a Marxist-Leninist. The previous month, he had declared that Cuba's revolution was socialist in character.

Fearing yet another invasion, this time perhaps with the open participation of the U.S. military, the Castro government shocked the world in 1962 when it called on the USSR to aid in the construction of nuclear missile launching sights on Cuban shores. As Russian ships headed toward Cuba loaded with nuclear-tipped missiles, President Kennedy ordered the U.S. Fleet in the region to intercept them while proclaiming that if Cuba fired a single missile at the U.S. the U.S. would consider it an act of war by the Soviet Union and would respond in kind.

This Cuban Missile Crisis put the entire world on edge. For the first time, the possibility of a nuclear war between the USSR and the U.S. loomed as a distinct possibility. At the last moment a negotiated agreement was reached wherein the missiles were withdrawn in return for a U.S. pledge to never invade Cuba. Unpublished or secret aspects of the agreement included the U.S. dismantling of its nuclear weapons bases in Turkey.

Cuba's revolutionary internationalism included its sending thousands of Cuban fighters to support the Angolan government's defense of its sovereignty when confronted with a massive armed invasion by apartheid South Africa's military aimed at restoring a pro-U.S. regime in that country.

At the famous 1986-87 Battle of Cuito Cuanavale Cuban troops defeated a U.S.-backed South African invasion, in time contributing to the end of South African rule of its protectorate in Namibia, and, in 1994 to the end of South Africa's apartheid system. Nelson Mandela, in a subsequent

address to the Cuban people, stated that Cuito Cuanavale was "a turning point for the liberation of our continent and my people."

## **Fidel: the evolution of a revolutionary**

Fidel Castro was a bold and courageous revolutionary fighter who came to understand from direct experience that his democratic and egalitarian aspirations could not be realized within the framework of the capitalist system, which is inherently oppressive and predatory.

Under his leadership and with the massive political and moral support of Cuba's oppressed and exploited, Fidel first led in the conquest of military power against a brutal U.S.-backed dictatorship and then proceeded to lead in the establishment of what he hoped would be an egalitarian capitalist democracy with equal rights for all. But he quickly came to realize that his initial liberal capitalist allies had no intention of sharing their wealth and economic prerogatives with the Cuban masses. When they resisted implementing the revolution's promised land reform and other such democratic measures, they were quickly eliminated from formal government power.

For another six months, more or less, Cuban society existed in a contradictory form - a workers and farmers government. That is, the formal and evolving government administrative structures were under the control of representatives of the mass of workers and small farmers while the economic forms - private ownership of land and the means of production, banking and finance - remained dominated by the elite capitalist few.

The Castro leadership resolved this contradiction early on, with each adopted measure increasingly limiting the economic power of Cuban capitalism - both the foreign and the native variants. By mid-1959 Cuban became a workers' state, having effectively and qualitatively eliminated

almost all capitalist private property relations.

For the first time in the Western Hemisphere, a free nation, revolutionary Cuba, devoted its resources to the advancement of the interests of the vast majority. Cuba's literacy program became of model for the world. On a volunteer basis, students' more than half were women' were encouraged to leave their schools and universities to head for the countryside with only a Coleman (kerosene) lantern and the barest possessions in hand.

By day, the students joined the newly landed poor peasant farmers to toil in the field; by night, in the still electricity-lacking rural areas, they taught these same poor farmers to read and write, in short order raising Cuba's literacy levels to the highest in the world.

Cuba's prostitutes (Havana had become infamous for its mafia-owned gambling casinos and brothels) were trained to take their place among Cuba's finest teachers. Rent on all forms of housing was limited to 10 percent of income, and soon phased out completely. A massively expanded and free system of quality health care and free education was established throughout the island. Cuba today graduates a higher percentage of its population with post-college degrees than any other nation. Cuba has the highest percentage of its population working as medical doctors of any nation earth.

All kinds of government financial support to Cuba's peasant poor was advanced, including low or zero-interest loans for the purchase of seeds and machinery. Universities and hospitals were constructed throughout the island, free to all. Cuba abolished all forms of institutional racism, established mass women's organizations to advance the well-being of women, organized trade unions where workers discussed and debated the nation's priorities and, above all, established the famous Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. The latter were neighborhood-based and armed committees to defend Cuba against U.S.-initiated terrorist activities - and

there were many.

Indeed, revolutionary Cuba functioned as a nation of armed people with weapons in hand, day and night, to defend their own interests - perhaps the most striking example of the Castro leadership's confidence in the Cuban masses.

Cuba established a world-class biomedical industry devoted to finding cures for diseases that plague people in Cuba and around the world. Cuban culture' art, music, ballet, sports, literature, etc.' flourished as never before in the modern era, with Cuba becoming a world cultural center. Its ballet ranks among the top 10 in the world. For a small nation, its athletes win unprecedented numbers of Olympic metals, often ranking in the top 10-20 of all participating nations.

All of the above, and more, were realized in revolutionary Cuba only as a consequence of its abolition of capitalism, led by the Fidel Castro leadership team.

While Cuba's example permeated the consciousness of the youth and revolutionary fighters around the world, U.S. imperialism employed the most monstrous methods of destruction to defeat it, including using biological warfare to wipe out Cuba's banana crops and to kill an estimated 100,000 pigs, not to mention bombing Cuban hotels and shooting down a commercial aircraft that killed Cuba's Olympic fencing team and many other passengers.

Fidel Castro never relented in his defense of the interest of the Cuban and the world's peoples, whose periodic popular and massive mobilizations in the many millions of people exceeded almost any in human history.

## Combating racism

Cuba, thoroughly racist and segregated under Batista rule, boldly brought its anti-racist message to the U.S. in 1961 when a Castro-led team attended a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly. When news that a high end mid-town Manhattan hotel had refused rooms

for the multi-racial Cuban delegation, Malcolm X, then a leader of the Nation of Islam, publicly invited the Cubans to stay in Harlem.

The New York chapter of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, led by Berta Green, a member of the Socialist Workers Party, followed up on Malcolm's challenge and reached an agreement with the Cubans to spend their days in Harlem's Hotel Theresa, where Fidel met with Malcolm' a stunning rebuke not only to U.S. racism but to a good portion of the U.S. socialist left who at that time rejected Malcolm's revolutionary black nationalism as "racism in reverse."

The Castro-team's internationalism was not limited to words. Believing that Cuba's guerrilla example could be extended to other countries, in the mid-1960's Cuba organized teams of fighters to establish guerrilla "foci" in every Latin American country except Paraguay and Mexico.

Cuba sponsored the famous OLAS conference (Conference of Latin American Solidarity) in 1967 where the vast majority of delegates favored the extension of Cuba's socialist revolution. Fidel's closing remarks noted that a minority of the conference delegates were not in agreement with this perspective, an unmistakable allusion to Moscow-oriented Communist Parties.

OLAS's concluding declaration stated in part: "Revolutionary armed struggle - triumphant in Cuba and already started in Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala and Bolivia - will not end until the bureaucratic and military apparatus of the bourgeoisie and the landholders is destroyed and the revolutionary power of the working people is established, confronting at the same time the internal counterrevolution and Yankee intervention, to resolutely tear out imperialist domination at its roots."

## Cuba and permanent

# revolution

There was no doubt that Cuba's revolutionary idealism and dedication to peasant centered rural revolutionary struggle to remove U.S.-backed Latin American dictatorships flew in the face of the Stalinist USSR's view that socialist revolution in poor countries was not on the agenda.

But Fidel and his well-intentioned revolutionary fighters tended to underestimate the critical importance of constructing urban-based mass revolutionary workers' parties of the Leninist type and instead focused on relatively isolated rural guerrilla warfare, not as an adjunct to the seizure of power but rather, as the central directing agency of the revolution.

While successful in Cuba, Cuban-supported rural guerrilla warfare efforts, as with Che's unsuccessful effort in Bolivia, had to be abandoned as it became clear that isolated guerrilla struggles, especially with U.S. imperialism on the alert as never before, could not substitute for the construction of deeply rooted and disciplined, urban-based, revolutionary working-class parties.

Like all human beings, Fidel Castro and his compañeros in the Cuban leadership were never without flaws or free from mistakes and shortcomings. Despite its socialist and democratic spirit and practice, beleaguered Cuba failed to establish the forms of direct democracy that characterized the highest point of the Russian Revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky in 1917.

Soviets (the Russian word for workers' councils, as the basis for the direct political rule of the working masses) do not exist in Cuba. In essence, Cuba's Communist Party makes most of the key decisions in Cuban society.

In my view, a revolutionary workers state finds its fullest expression in the formal, direct, democratic, and institutionalized rule of the working masses. A revolutionary party, no matter how dedicated to the people's cause it may be, cannot substitute itself for the rule of the working

masses.

The Cuban leadership's forging of democratic workers' councils today would be the surest way to ensure the ongoing commitment of the Cuban people to the revolution's historic goals, as well as the efficient planning of an economy that best represents the interests of the Cuban masses. Fidel's criticism of Stalinism

Fidel was keenly aware of the Stalinist nature of Cuba's Batista-era pro-Moscow Popular Socialist Party. The latter opposed Fidel's July 26 Movement's struggle for power as "ultraleft," if not "Trotskyist."

In the view of Cuban Stalinists, whose policy was to seek a rapprochement with so-called progressive capitalist governments, including Batista's during his first presidency, socialist revolution was premature and impossible in poor and neo-colonial countries. This contrasted with Trotsky's conception of the revolutionary process in the modern era—demonstrated to the world with the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Trotsky held that any successful revolution in the modern era must be "permanent," or uninterrupted, that is, it had to both accomplish the democratic tasks that modern capitalism could no longer implement (e.g., land reform and democratic rights for all) and it had to place the working class, as opposed to capitalist reformers, in power and abolish the capitalist system itself.

The Cuban Revolution amounted to a rejection of the Stalinist "two-stage" conception of revolution, wherein overthrowing capitalism and replacing it with a workers state with the goal of building socialism are to be relegated to a distant "second stage," if at all. This single question remains the critical issue that today separates revolutionists from pro-capitalist reformers the world over.

Venezuela is a prime example of the latter strategy, where the Hugo Chavez/Maduro governments, unlike revolutionary Cuba, failed to challenge the essential framework of Venezuelan capitalism. Venezuela's land, banks, and key financial institutions, as well

as significant portions of its massive fossil fuel resources, have remained in the hands of its capitalist ruling class. Notwithstanding the constant ever-deepening U.S. imperialist efforts at undermining Venezuela today, this single fact – the failure or political incapacity of Venezuela's leaders to challenge capitalist property relations and lead in the empowerment of Venezuela's working masses – in great measure explains Venezuela's tragic devolution today.

## Cuba and the USSR

The miracle of the Cuban Revolution is the simple fact that it has endured in the face of the greatest imaginable obstacles. These include a fifty-five year and still ongoing U.S. embargo/blockade, an act of war that would have likely destroyed any lesser revolutionary effort. Add to this the demise of the USSR in 1989-90. As a result, Cuba's tragically necessary lifeline to basic fossil fuel resources and other necessities for more than three decades was terminated virtually overnight, bringing on a great depression that few believed Cuba could survive. Yet revolutionary Cuba, re-charged by Fidel's unbending optimism and egalitarian spirit, did survive and set out to maintain its revolutionary commitments against all odds.

Fidel referred to this "Special Period," a period of "neither war nor peace," as one that would test the mettle of the Cuban people and its leadership as never before. A strict and egalitarian food rationing system was implemented that assured the minimum requirements of the entire population. Cuba transformed its fossil fuel and chemical fertilizer-based food production infrastructure to a model of sustainable agriculture, implementing unprecedented systems of innovative crop rotation, organic fertilizers and non-poisonous organic pest control techniques, all of which resulted in productivity levels that exceeded "modern" chemical-based agricultural practices.

Every aspect of Cuban society, including transportation, industry,



healthcare, and even rooftop gardening, was revisited and transformed to maximize efficiency to meet the needs of the virtually isolated Cuban masses.

## Fidel and Stalinism

To his death, Fidel remained the harshest critic of U.S. imperialism, constantly cautioning Cuba's leaders, even after his retirement a decade ago, to beware of the capitalist-restorationist intentions that of the Obama administration.

While isolated Cuba was compelled to adopt many of the Soviet-style, that is, Stalinist aspects of bureaucratic planning and management, Fidel was nevertheless exemplary in taking his distance from world Stalinism, at least in part. While the Cubans reluctantly endorsed the USSR's crushing of the 1968 Prague Spring uprising against Stalinist rule in Czechoslovakia, Fidel incisively questioned the legitimacy of a government and of a "socialism" that required the use of force against its own people. Fifteen years later Fidel excoriated Grenada's Bernard Coard as a Stalinist for his key role in the assassination of Grenada's Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop. The latter had been imprisoned for challenging Coard's moves to implement Stalinist-type bureaucratic institutions in Grenada as opposed to Bishop's efforts to foster decision-making workers' and zonal councils and related forms of socialist democracy. Bishop's assassination marked the end of the promising Grenadian Revolution and opened the door wide to the 1983 U.S. invasion. Only the Cuban's, assigned as workers to build Grenada's world class airport, resisted the U.S. onslaught, with Fidel's subsequent and lengthy analysis of this tragedy, condemning Coard's Stalinism and the U.S. invasion, widely disseminated.

No doubt, Fidel and his revolutionary team were not without important limitations. The near total identification of the Cuban Communist Party with the Cuban state institutions or government saw the Cubans not infrequently supporting repressive

governments like Mexico, especially when Mexico was seen as a critical source of oil and other necessary resources. It is one thing for the Cuban state to establish trade and other relations with capitalist governments; it is quite another for the Cuban Communist Party to politically support such repressive governments, as it did in supporting Mexico's PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) dictatorship. Need we mention that Cuba expressed a preference for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election as it did for most Democratic Party presidential candidates in the past?

## Party and state in Cuba

In Cuba, despite the formal separation of the Cuban CP and the National Assembly of People's Power (the latter the official government of Cuba) few doubt that any significant decisions in Cuban society are made outside the purview of the CCP. To be sure, such decisions are frequently made following the massive input or "consultation" with the Cuban people through multiple thousands of local assemblies that engage millions in discussion and debate over critical issues. But the final decisions reside with the party only. However much the Cuban CP relies on periodic input from the masses, and however much, in sharp distinction from Stalinist CP's in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the past, the Cuban CP in no manner represents a hardened bureaucratic or Stalinist caste that must rely on mass repression to maintain its rule, Fidel's party ran and continues to run the Cuban state.

In contrast, in the earliest years of the 1917 Russian Revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky, power in society as a whole was vested in the workers' councils (soviets in Russian) established on a national basis in the course of the revolution itself. Representatives to these councils at every level of society were directly elected by the Soviet people, most often at the workplace. All representatives were subject to immediate recall and received the pay of skilled workers in their industry. In

contrast to Cuba today, the Russian soviets of workers, peasants and soldiers representatives constituted the state power itself and not the Bolshevik Party. The latter was a vanguard party of the most advanced workers but not synonymous with the Soviet Government, that was structured to represent the broad Russian working class and peasant masses. Workers council-type institutions do not exist in Cuba, in significant part perhaps because the Cuban CP as well as Fidel, beleaguered by imperialism, isolated in the extreme and subjected to constant pressures from within and without, believe that the Cuban CP would be less subject to capitalist restorationist pressures than the Cuban masses themselves. In my view, the establishment of direct socialist democracy, that is, the rule of the revolutionary masses in their own name and not the rule of a party, however revolutionary the latter may be, would strengthen not weaken the Cuban revolution. The direct involvement of the working masses, who are daily involved in every aspect society's productive processes, can only increase overall efficiency and generalized acceptance. Workers' organization and control of production and other key aspects of society's functioning would also lend maximum credibility to decisions made, even if these decisions might involve implementing necessary social cutbacks in order to best ensure the common good. Democratic socialist planning and control of society would also strengthen the bond between the CCP as the leading party of the revolution and the Cuban masses, the very bond that brought the revolution to power and enabled it to survive to this day.

Undoubtedly, no nation on earth, not to mention a tiny island nation surrounded by a world imperialist system that relentlessly seeks its overthrow, can endure indefinitely. "Socialism in one country" has never been the view of serious revolutionaries. Socialism has always been conceived of as a new social order of plenty as opposed to a beleaguered fortress of scarcity that has limited a options to solve the most elementary needs of its people. Yet Cuba continues to defy the odds, and,

in fact, has amazingly won victorious against all its arrogant detractors as well as its would-be ruthless conquerors.

## **Fidel's example endures**

Cuba's historic socialist revolution, its fundamental break with capitalism, its half century-plus endurance and the undaunting respect and admiration it holds in the hearts and minds of oppressed people everywhere, reminds us once again that capitalist oppression and plunder is incompatible with human progress,

that capitalism cannot exist without racism, sexism, exploitation and war and that capitalism must be challenged and abolished at the hands of its victims. This is Fidel Castro's lasting contribution to humanity's future, a legacy of uninterrupted struggle to usher in the world socialist order.

# **Trupti Shah (1962-2016) : Remembering a Comrade and a Loving Sister**

**30 May 2016, by Soma Marik**

Although I was involved in the autonomous women's movement from 1986, I met Trupti initially as a member of the Inquilabi Communist Sangathan in 1987 but not as a fellow comrade as I joined many years after. So my interactions started much later in the 1992 especially following the Babri Masjid destruction when anti-communalism became an important plank of our work, and then during the 1996 all India Workshop on Gender Just Laws, in which three of us went from Nari Nirjatan Pratirodh Mancha, while Trupti came from Sahiyar, that we came much closer. Over the last two decades, we had developed a close friendship.

What had struck me, right from the beginning, was the commitment which both Trupti and Rohit had. It is easy to sound like a fire breathing revolutionary for a short time. It is much more difficult to live one's entire life, much of it in an era of downturn of class struggle, as a committed revolutionary Marxist. And what was even more difficult was to lead the lifestyle they did. It is easy to mock at Gandhian styles, but when it is totally internalised with a Marxist politics, it provides a model which all of us may not be able to follow, but which can still be an example. I have often felt myself amazed at the cheerful way in which Trupti went about, not having large expectations regarding personal life and gains there, and committing herself to her work.

For a decade, she was working in the Maharaja Sayajirao University, Baroda, as a contractual lecturer. Every year she had to get a fresh appointment. And it meant a terrible class load for limited benefits. But she did not have personal grumbles. What was surprising to me was the ability she showed, in taking up work for Sahiyar, and for Pariyavaran Suraksha Samity other organisations, on top of all that. I would see her come back from work and immediately get into political work, or looking after Manav. Sitting in front of a computer keyboard and swiftly keying in a draft statement in Gujarati, or talking with people about a coming programme, or asking me to get up on her scooty to take me to the Sahiyar office - she would cheerfully move from one work to another.

The 2003 split in the Inquilabi Communist Sangathan left us with two choices - either create an organisation of the same time immediately, pretending that there had been nothing wrong but for a number of politically wrong persons, or to step back, work in the mass movements, and then think of how to rebuild. In Baroda, Rohit and Trupti started from scratch. Formally, a number of ICS members were with their political opponents. But they simply worked in the mass organisations and won in the movements. In the PUCL, they had been present all through, and indeed the charge was that they were not

"using the PUCL for the political benefits of the ICS". In Sahiyar, Trupti was the central and dynamic leader. They were also working on environmental issues, as they had been from the time of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

In 2006, we had a National Conference of Autonomous Women's Organisations. Trupti came to the Conference. We had a very fruitful conference, and this was followed up in 2007. Mira Roy and I had presented a plenary talk Women and the Left Front: Expectations Betrayed. In 2007, Trupti assisted us in publishing it in a pamphlet form, from Documentation and Study Centre for Action, Vadodara.

In political work, Trupti was never aggressive, and very optimistic for the long run. I have found these very attractive qualities, because I suffer both from an aggressive stance, and pessimism in course of organizing battles. After 2003, Rohit and Trupti always identified themselves as Human Rights Activists, Environmental activists, etc. There were possibly two reasons. The decades of Magan Desai's aggressive style of insisting on a flag hoisting style of Marxist politics perhaps made them unwilling to highlight a Marxist identity. And of course, the fact that for several years after 2003 there was no organisation to relate to. In the work they did, in taking up Hema

Chemicals, or more generally environmental pollution, in taking up the struggles of the people of Mithi Virdi, in campaigning over the Statue of Unity, the Garudeswar Weir, etc, they were pushing a class point of view.

With so few people of committed Marxist politics, and with their own time going into so many social movements, building a political group did not come up very high on their agenda even after Radical Socialist was formed. But that was due, as Trupti once told me in a discussion, at least partly to the fact that as prominent activists in some of the organisations, they found it difficult to not present themselves as faces of the movement itself. But their work had a pluralist style which stems largely

from the tradition of Trotskyism itself, which sees socialism as something not gifted from above but coming due to the struggle of toiling people for their own liberation. Because of this, a potential certainly exists in Gujarat for developing an alternative kind of revolutionary democratic socialism.

Rohit has been unwell for many years. Trupti would consistently take care of him, worry about his well being. And they were able to bring up Manav to be a good human being. Rohit too did the same with his illness when Trupti was fighting bravely with lung cancer. I remember many letters in which she made us feel positive by writing that the collective spirit and best wishes from all will help her to fight cancer. In 2014, I met Trupti for the last time

when she came for the first national meeting of Radical Socialist. She and I made presentations at the session on women and gender. Subsequently Radical Socialist decided that there was a need for a detailed position paper/booklet, taking up the relation between women's liberation and Marxism, situated in the present day global context and looking at Marxist theory as well as Indian reality. The two of us were assigned the duty of writing this. Both of us were involved in various kinds of work, and this would be one project remaining unfulfilled.

Certainly it is an immense loss to human rights movements with a class angle but it is upto us whether with take up her unfinished work and make her dreams come true.

## **Trupti Shah (1962-2016): Communist, Feminist, Human Rights Activist, Fighter for Environmental Justice**

**30 May 2016, by Kunal Chattopadhyay**

Comrade Trupti had been suffering from lung cancer since 2014, and it had subsequently spread to other parts. Despite this killer attack, however, she continued to be involved in a range of activities. In 2015 March, when she was already diagnosed with lung cancer and under treatment, she was still active, for example, with the struggle of the people of Mithi Virdi against the proposed N-plant.

Born in 1962, Trupti was the daughter of Thakore Shah and Suryakanta Shah. Her mother was a social service activist. Thakore Shah was a Gandhian, the nature of whose Gandhism involved "not to tolerate any injustice", and which led him to Marxism, something recollected by Trupti, who attributed her own turn to Marxism partly due to this influence. He became an activist and later a leader in the Indian Section of the Fourth International.

In the 1970s, Gujarat witnessed a massive social struggles. Known as the Navnirman andolan (movement), this saw the radicalisation of many student youth activists. In Vadodara and elsewhere in the province, this also led to a small, but very committed group of activists coming into the Communist League, Indian Section of the Fourth International. Then just about 11, Trupti was influenced by some of these younger people, notably, as she would relate herself later on, Dr. Vibhuti Patel, who emerged as a dynamic young feminist and leader of the Trotskyist movement. Trupti herself was arrested for talking part in anti-price rise stors and kept in a remand home for juveniles for three days.

It was in 1980 that Trupti joined the Communist League, not because she had reluctance earlier, but because the CL leadership were not willing to

give her membership till she completed 18. The present writer also joined CL in 1980, and met her late that year during a trip to Vadodara.

### **Women's Movement**

The CL, and its successor, the Inquilabi Communist Sangathan, formed through the merger of CL and the Bolshevik Leninist Group, were both numerically small, but had a number of activist members who played, then as well as later, important roles in various social movements in India. Trupti was one of several feminist activists who were militant fighters of the CL and the ICS. During the countrywide agitations over the Mathrua Rape Case verdict, a forum named the Nari-shoshan Virodhi Samiti was created in

Gujarat. Her experience in it was mixed. She had gone into it as a young woman, deeply shocked at the cases of rape and the role of state agencies in hushing up rape. Disillusioned by women from various political parties who were trying to gain clout within the Samiti, she turned to the autonomous women's groups. In 1980, she attended the conference of the Autonomous Women's Groups in Bombay. Inspired by the conference and contrasting it with how the Samiti in Vadodara was run, she made a commitment to forming an autonomous women's organisation in her hometown.

Between 1980 and 1984, Trupti was also involved in the running of a youth organisation named Manthan. In 1984, Sahiyar was set up, with students from M.S. University, Baroda playing a big role. For thirty-two years, it has continued working. In her write up for Zubaan's project, Poster Women, Trupti made a crucial point, in her usual soft, yet firm manner.

"The struggle to survive as a movement and not get trapped in institutionalisation as an NGO is difficult but not impossible. While networking on issues at the state or the national level, we have experienced that the movement turned into projects and campaigns are constrained by funding. Young activists prefer to turn to well paid NGOs instead of movements. In such circumstances, we have been able to survive without big funding and FCRA for more than 25 years.... I feel we need to create a sustained platform where activists can gather beyond projects, beneficiaries, targets and lists of achievements or success stories to address the issues we feel are important and find out innovative ways to challenge the patriarchal system as interwoven with all forms of hierarchies without being constrained by the funding."

In the years between the founding and the moment when this note of warning was sounded, Sahiyar would be engaged with various campaigns. A campaign over a rape of an adivasi woman led to her own deepening of understanding about the intersection between gender oppression and class and caste exploitations. This was in

1986. A decade later, in 1996, the Harivallabh Parikh rape case was seen as an important game changer, because the case came to be known by the name of the rapist rather than the victim.

Along with the campaigns against rape, there were campaigns against sex selection, campaigns against domestic violence, etc. And there were other sorts of work, for example the production in Gujarati of a multi volume book on Women's History, in both Hindi and Gujarati. While this was incontestably a team work, Trupti was the soul of the project.

## Communist Activist

It is easy, given the larger than life image that Trupti Shah has in the women's movement in Vadodara, and her considerable presence in the autonomous women's movement in India as a whole, to forget or downgrade her role as a communist activist in a small organisation. It would be totally wrong to do so, however. In the 1980s, the Fourth International had started International cadre training schools. Over a few years, the Communist League/Inquilabi Communist Sangathan was able to send three comrades, probably the first or second being Trupti. At that time it was a long programme, and Trupti, who had never been abroad till then, and who was a complete vegetarian on top of that, had serious problems with food. But as Penelope Duggan, one of the comrades associated for ages with the International's schools, told us yesterday, "she was willing - although she had never eaten meat in her life - to accept non-vegetarian meals so that cooking would be less of a burden for the collectivity". As it happened, when Trupti returned to India it was at Bombay that her flight came, for in those days there were few international flights at Ahmedabad. The ICS had a leadership meeting in Bombay, so I was able to meet her. Somewhat in a jocular tone, I told her, "now that you have been trained by the International leadership, we will expect more from you". Totally serious, she replied, "Yes of course. I

shall be thinking of immediately becoming a full time activist".

In Vadodara, Trupti was to come in touch with Rohit Prajapati, a young activist in Manthan, who also joined the ICS and became a full time activist. Given the small size of the ICS, the notion of a full time activist was not that the ICS pays one a (however small) monthly amount, or something of that sort. It meant, in effect, Trupti and Rohit, who would also become companions, putting in time for the ICS, for several social movements and organisations, AND managing to get funds. Trupti's mother was certainly a tremendous support for the work her daughter was doing. Along with this they would periodically work in various sectors. For Trupti, it was often part time teaching or research. She was connected to the Women's Studies Research Centre, M.S. University, Baroda, between 1998 and 2001, and as a contractual lecturer in the Commerce Faculty of the same University for a decade, from 2001 to 2011.

Between 1991 and 2003, I was closely involved in the political work of the ICS along with Rohit and Trupti. Some of the issues in which they were involved included sustained anti communal and anti casteist work, much before Manuvad was a term known to many of the other sectors of the Indian left; support for the Narmada Bachao Andolan, support for the anti-nuclear activists of Mithi Viridi. At the time of the Baxi Commission recommendations, there were massive upper caste violence, which quickly also turned into communal violence. From that time on, the ICS would take anti-communalism seriously, as a core component of its political agenda.

Comrades in Gujarat, including Trupti, Rohit, as well as some Bombay based comrades with Gujarat links, would collaborate in the caste battles as well. It was the Gujarat State Committee that came up with the arguments about why reservations must not be linked only to the former "untouchables". At one ICS meeting it was Trupti who presented the main arguments. So when the Mandal report was implemented half a decade



later, we were ready and able to relate to it immediately.

From the late 1980s, as the threat of communalism increased, the ICS was urging the bulk of the left to take it far more seriously. We had our own debates, with basically three positions emerging. Achin Vanaik felt that communalism should be understood in the Indian and present day context without reference to the fascism paradigm. Rohit, Trupti, the present writer and others would develop an argument about the relationship between fascism and communalism. And there would be an economic reductionist view, upheld by Magan Desai and some others. In 2002, when the pogroms broke in Vadodara, Trupti and Rohit were involved in sustained work. One of the things that stood out was their resistance to elite pressure concerning their residence. They lived, and still do, in Tandalja. It used to be a Muslim majority area with a significant Hindu minority. Over the years, as in Ahmedabad, so here in Baroda, regular communal "incidents" have turned Tandalja into something like a 90% Muslim area. In and after 2002, Trupti and Rohit faced and beat down all pressures to make them move, as a conscious gesture that anti-communalism cannot be all theory, and public demonstrations, but also needs articulation through one's own life and personal deeds.

However, their work led to unwarranted left wing attacks as well, with a small segment of people suggesting they were out to get personal applause. In fact, these attacks, connected also to the attempts to build proletarian environmentalism, as opposed to economistic trade unionism, resulted in the split in the ICS in 2003, when first Rohit, then Trupti, Thakore Shah, and the West Bengal members all came out.

Since 2003, lacking a definite political organisation, Trupti and Rohit would often sign statements as "activists" etc. They were however involved in the process whereby Radical Socialist was created in 2008, and they also attended its first all India meeting of 2014, in which Trupti was one of the two comrades leading the discussion on women's oppression and gender

issues.

That was the last time I met Trupti. We had a discussion during a break, about how difficult it was to root out sexism even within the left. This was when the British SWP scandal had blown up, showing how sexism and rape apology can also find space within the left. Trupti argued that we needed firmness, but also patience. People around us were subjected to the social milieu. But if they went wrong we had to be clear that they were going wrong. This reminded me of how we had once gone wrong. At the 2001 ICS conference, we elected a leading team, where Soma Marik was brought in. Trupti was dropped. I argued that there was no need to drop Trupti. Why should there be an implicit feminist quota? But Trupti and Rohit kept silent, for understandable reasons. Certainly this was not sexual harassment. But this did show that an organisation could pay lip service to gender equality but not understand what it looked like in practice.

I would not like to end this part of my remarks on the above note though. That would make Trupti appear to be rather different from the person we knew. At one Conference of the ICS, she organized a Garba programme. During her stay for the Fourth International cadre school, she introduced many of her co-participants to Indian classical dance.

## **The Many Dimensions of Social Struggles**

Trupti was not one to keep her life into separate categories. She was a student of Economics and did her doctoral dissertation on "Economic Status of Women in Urban Informal Sector - A study of Baroda City". She also contributed an article, in collaboration with Bina Srinivasan, for a collection published by the International Institute for Research and Education. This dealt with capitalist development and violence on women.

From the days of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (whose offices and those of

the ICS were at one stage in the same premises in Vadodara) to later, more recent times, she was also involved in environmental issues, relating them to capitalist exploitation and the burdens on women. In the last period, she was concerned with the the Statue of Unity project, the Garudeshwar Weir project and the recent Vishwamitri Riverfront Development project, questioning their impact on common people and the environment.

I had tried to write an obituary note. But this was writing about a friend of thirty six years. My trips to Baroda in the 21st Century have always meant staying with Trupti and Rohit. To add to that, she was younger than I am, and that made this a particularly difficult work. Trupti and Rohit were joined in their beliefs and their work. They worked to make people understand that the environmentalism was not a middle class fad about certain lifestyle issues. They were activists in the PUCL in Vadodara. In fact, there was hardly an event in Vadodara, or in much of Gujarat, where radical politics was being pursued and they were not to be found. The PUCL report on the Gujarat pogroms of 2002, for example, were very much to see their inputs.

It is not for nothing that the Narendra Modi government, and its successor government, were continuously after their blood. So much was the intensive surveillance on them, that when, some time back, I asked Rohit whether we should organise any fund collection drive for Trupti's treatment, his response was that if funds came in through banks, the people who made those transfers would be facing grilling from the police, and would find it difficult to prove that they had sent money only for her treatment. And since, on the other hand, neither Trupti nor he wanted to take a lot of cash without receipts, they would do without that money.

To Rohit, and to their son Manav, our heartfelt condolences. As long as human oppression and exploitation is being resisted, as long as women are facing violence, as long as caste-community oppression are persisting, the kind of political work Trupti Shah did will remain relevant, and her memory will compel us to continue

# Claude Gabriel, Claude Jacquin (1947-2016): Comrade, friend and mentor - an immense human being

**2 May 2016, by Brian Ashley, Mercia Andrews**

For over 35 years we have been comrades, friends and close collaborators with Claude. So important has he been in our own political and even personal development that we are experiencing a profound sense of loss; a great difficulty to come to terms that he is no longer part of our collective endeavour at rebuilding radical politics in South Africa. While many might have known him as Claude Jacquin, for us he was Claude Gabriel. Our daughter, Alexandria Gabriela was named after Claude and an important revolutionary Neville Alexander who first introduced us to Claude.

Ours was a comradeship that started during the dark days of repression and at the height of the postcolonial struggles in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola, Mozambique Mauritius etc. Describing this period speaks to the difficult nature of those early years. South Africa was completely isolated and hemmed in- for many of us this isolation even meant an absence of books and an international political milieu to relate to.

Despite this bleak backdrop, it was also an intense moment of heightened struggle, resistance, the construction of organisations and political formations. Claude played an important role in this period.

In our youthful days it was not an easy relationship, we were militants in the trenches and often we were less concerned with theory and analysis and much more pre-occupied with direct forms of resistance and "smashing the state". We were

impatient and very 'rough'.

In those early years he worked alongside us with great patience and a huge capacity for solidarity to develop and deepen our method of analysis and activism. Claude was very special in the way he introduced these issues to us. He never proselytized. He wanted us to think the issues through with him. In spite of the frenetic way he took up tasks he was extremely patient in the way he worked with comrades. He stood alongside rather than above.

Of course Claude was an internationalist and introduced us to the Fourth International. Through him we met many revolutionaries that would enrich our politics. He facilitated meetings, tried to create links and open debates, always patient never telling us what to do and never insisting that our first task was to build an FI section. Rather, his approach was to be useful and unify. This set Claude apart from many internationalists that came to South Africa to build their local franchise and sectarian grouplets.

Today we are in touch with political activists around the African continent with whom we continue to work towards building a network of the African anti-capitalist left. This was another important legacy of Claude linking us with comrades from Senegal, Mauritius, Congo, etc. This work started decades ago and reflected Claude's profound interest in Africa. One of our comrades worked with Claude already in the 1970s in publishing 'Africa in Struggle', that grouped a small collection of Africans

living in the diaspora, most of whom were in exile engaging clandestinely in left politics. Claude was the architect of 'Africa in Struggle', and it established a foundation for on-going political work on the African continent.

In the last five years as he battled with cancer, his contribution to our political work in South Africa became even more intense. He would welcome and host all activists from South Africa that travelled through Paris. He continued to follow everyday politics closely. We would see emails from him daily and he showed impatience when we did not respond quickly enough (as in 10 seconds after receiving his email.) There was a new urgency; it was as if everyday mattered more. We spoke on the phone and we would Skype weekly.

This urgency had less to do with his cancer but rather the new situation that was developing in South Africa, as the hegemony of the ANC unravelled in the face of challenges from the left. Like us, he saw possibilities for the re-emergence of left politics at a mass level, as mineworkers, farmworkers and now students embarked on waves of mass protests.

Claude was a man of immense courage. He suffered greatly during his 10-year struggle with cancer mostly in silence, never complaining and always expressing concern for others and their minor ailments. In fact one of his last emails on hearing of a minor stomach ailment read:

"And you eat yogurt for your stomach

!! it is a resolution of the FI Usec !!"

We share this insignificant anecdote and insight because we suspect not many people were privileged to get to know Claude, the human being.

One thing is for sure he was an extremely private person and despite his warmth and empathy he did not allow people, even those he was close to, access to his personal life, his anxieties, doubts, disappointments and regrets. We were privileged to see Claude's soft interior on a just a few occasions. One such occasion was after watching the documentary of the Marikana massacre in which 34 mineworkers were killed, Claude broke down and cried, just as he did when he left South Africa for what was going to be the last time we would see each other.

For us this was a new side to Claude. We are sure that Silvie, his great love, companion and partner is responsible for the emergence of a softer Claude. Silvie's love for Claude was immense and eased the suffering he endured in the last years of his illness. A great love affair had blossomed between the political animal and the actress. Silvie and Claude found joy in art, theatre, film and of course traveling. Claude found it extremely difficult to be separated from Silvie. There was a great gentleness and tenderness to the way he nurtured this love for Silvie. We can only imagine the extreme pain and emptiness that Silvie is experiencing with the Shakespearean tragedy, that Claude's death represents for her and to all who loved him.

We were not aware of Claude as someone into art and culture. And certainly, on our many visits to Paris, Claude did not take us to the art

galleries, museums and music halls. Rather it was to find a café where we could enjoy a good meal as a means to facilitate a discussion on the current state of the balance of forces in South Africa. Of course Claude was a Parisian, with many things that this implied – not least a love for good food and for cooking. In this regard it might be appropriate to share an anecdote that captures our relationship with Claude. Brian arrived in Paris with an important leader from SA and Claude thought he would impress this activist and endear himself to Brian by taking them to a fancy restaurant. He was thus dismayed when Brian ordered cream with his chocolate mouse. The waiters could not understand; Claude could not believe this outrage of ordering cream with chocolate mouse. "Don't you understand the cream is part of the mouse" Nevertheless, he was forced to explain to the waiters that this odd South African wanted cream with his chocolate mouse. Of course you could imagine Brian's dismay when the cream came it was sour cream and not the whipped desert cream he was expecting.

So for the next 20 years this became our joke which he would share as part of the teasing close friends do - more as a sign of love than anything else. "These South Africans are so uncivilised they order cream with their chocolate mouse" – he would tell everybody as away of introduction.

You can imagine that over 35 years there were many incidents and occasions where we tested Claude's comradeship and friendship. Possibly the most difficult was when we were attending the Fourth International school in Amsterdam and Brian's visa ran out. Pierre and Sally were strongly of the view that Brian should leave the

school so as to avoid a possible incident with the police and a possible crack down on the school. We rebelled. How can revolutionaries be so afraid of the police for a possible minor visa problem and we caused such ructions. When Claude heard of this, he was in his car like a shot and drove all the way from Paris to fetch us and take us back with him to Paris, where he duly entertained us by hosting many meetings with various comrades. He ensured our education continued even after leaving the school.

Up to the end he retained an optimistic exterior and displayed incredible courage by traveling to South Africa as late as February this year. During this occasion he was able to meet with the student leaders of the student movement that our daughter is active in. It was a good moment – he teased her and called her like he did Brian (little gangster) he was proud, listened to their views, encouraged and shared his own experiences, after all Alex is named after him.

Many will miss Claude. Many did not have the privilege to learn and understand the incredible strategic insights that our friend and comrade had. It is a shame there will be no revered place for Claude in the legacies of the great individuals that made and changed history. Yet in our memories and in our actions as we fight for another world, that Claude and ourselves believe is possible, his contribution will live on. He was a special man, perhaps his fault was to be too humble, too self effacing.

*Hamba Kahle* – go well our big brother. We miss you already

**Brian and Mercia**  
April 27, 2016

## Ellen Meiksins Wood (1942-2016)

13 April 2016, by **Robert Brenner**

The following tribute is abridged from a presentation last November by Robert Brenner, an editor of Against

the Current, longtime co-thinker and close friend of Wood, at an informal conference held by Verso Books to mark the re-publication of three of Ellen's books. The full text will be published on the [Verso website](#).

Ellens' parents lives and politics had an especially big impact on her own political-intellectual formation. Both Ellen's mother and father were from Latvia, where they were leading figures in the Bund, the Jewish Socialist Party. In 1940 they had to flee the country to Paris, then to flee Paris and ultimately France to get away from the invading Nazi forces. Bundist organizations in the United States, apparently in collaboration with the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union and its president David Dubinsky, secured them the precious safe passage through Europe and the U.S. visa to get on a ship from Portugal.

One can get a good idea of what Ellen's family had to go through from the Preface to Arno Mayer's fine book on the Judeocide, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?*, which describes in fascinating detail the harrowing journey his family took to escape the Nazis, ending up on the very same ship by which Ellen's parents got away.

Ellen's family lived for a time on the New York Lower East Side, then epicenter of Jewish working-class radicalism in the country. Ellen's mom went to work for the United Nations Relief Agency, travelling all over Europe for a number of years, aiding displaced persons.

Ellen's dad was a chief interpreter at the United Nations, translating English and French into Russian. He described himself as a Marxist, a Menshevik, and a radical analyst. Ellen has often spoken to me about how much she respected and adored him, and what an influence he had on her political formation. It was no wonder that Ellen, from a very young age, identified herself ever increasingly with working-class politics and organization — trade unions, socialist democracy, internationalism, Marxism.

I first met Ellen when she, along with

her husband Neal Wood (1922-2003), also an historian of political theory, invited me to give a talk at the Politics Department at York University in Toronto in 1978. From the time of that visit, Ellen was my friend and, on many fronts, my intellectual and political comrade.

As it turned out, Ellen and I had gone to the same high school together, the infamous Beverly Hills High School, although we barely knew each other there. Beverly Hills High was a quintessential Beverly Hills institution — dominated, as you'd expect, by Hollywood values, conventional attitudes, fancy cars, and beautiful clothes (and there was an oil well, too).

Both Ellen and I had found ourselves alienated, and more than a bit turned off, by the self-defined in-group that dominated the scene and felt ourselves to be outsiders, though certainly unapologetically so. Still, I have to say that, at the time, Ellen seemed to me as anything but an outsider. She was a very smart, high-powered intellectual; a very cool, very attractive woman, with great cheekbones like Audrey Hepburn — an impressive person even then, although I knew her mainly from afar.

## History of Political Theory

At the time I met them, Ellen and Neal were just embarking on one of their central intellectual-political projects — a historical materialist account of the evolution of political theory, from the ancient world to the present. In 1978 they published their first book on this theme, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory*.

Their aim, there and subsequently, was to provide what they called the historical-social context for understanding the development of political ideas. This might seem rather mundane . . . but only if we fail to take into account that most of the practitioners in the field at the time — and probably even today — understand political philosophy to entail the thinking and rethinking of timeless issues concerning the

meaning of the state, freedom, justice, a conversation across time among the greats.

By contrast, Ellen and Neal sought to comprehend the enterprise of political theory — and its history — as involving the attempt to grapple with the specific contradictions and conundrums that were posed by the specific structures and practices, the distinctive class struggles, of particular, historically-developed societies.

This project begins with a series of iconoclastic studies of the political theory of the ancient world, which Ellen argues must be understood in terms what she sees as its dominant social-property relations of peasant and lord, rather than as traditionally by Marxists, of slaves and masters.

Her striking conclusion is that it was the peasants of ancient Greece, in their struggle against the landed aristocrats for political control of the polis, who were responsible for the first, classical statement of real political democracy. Only in these terms of peasant-lord class struggle can we properly understand the lastingly influential, anti-democratic philosophy, articulated by Aristotle and especially Plato.

The project continues in the early modern period, where Ellen and Neal see the rise of agrarian capitalism as the key to understanding classical English political theory from Thomas More onwards. It is only in terms of a deep historical analysis of the rise of the fairly unique system of agrarian capitalist social-property relations in England that we can understand the capitalist aristocracy, the Tudor state, the English landed-class led revolution, the rise of Leveller artisan radicalism, and finally the English revolution of 1688.

Only in terms of the political problems posed by the emergence of these social forces and political processes can we grasp the contributions of the succession of epoch-making political theorists from Hobbes, to Harrington, to Locke.

In undertaking her famous critiques of contemporary postmodern theorizing,



especially its voluntarism and reformism, Ellen as always brought to bear her understanding of its social-historical context – specifically, how capitalism works today. The ultimate point of Ellen’s theoretical-historical analysis was that capitalism and democracy are incompatible, that democracy can only be realized as workers’ self-organized socialism.

## Separation of Political and Economic

At virtually the same time as Ellen was making her first contributions as an historian of political theory, she was also debuting as a social-political theorist in her own right, seeking to fundamentally recast the then prevailing forms of historical materialism.

In her path-breaking article on “The Separation of the Economic and Political in Capitalism,” published in *New Left Review* (May-June 1981), Ellen argued that Marxism could not realize its enormous potential as a tool for understanding society and politics historically, so long as it remained hobbled by an ultimate commitment to an economic, indeed technological, determinism.

Here Ellen’s main target was the then most rigorous available version of Marxist theory, which had been put forward by Gerald Cohen in his celebrated work *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*. Ellen argues that the fundamental weakness of Cohen’s account is to be found in his very point of departure, which is that the productive forces inevitably advance...and bring about the rise of relations of production that nurture the forces of production’s further development.

Wood’s point is that, on the contrary, the only way to found a viable historical materialism is to understand the causal chain the other way round, viewing historically developed social-property relations or relations of production as determining the material development of the forces of production.

For Wood, the approach of the Marxist historian Guy Bois was emblematic of the orthodoxy she was attempting to counter. Bois crafted the term “political Marxism” to criticize my own work and that of co-thinkers like Ellen in the name of his own version of economic determinism.

Political Marxism, he argued, “amounts to a voluntarist vision of history in which the class struggle is divorced from all objective contingencies, and doesn’t take account of the place of laws of development under each mode of production” – i.e. the tendency for the rate of profit to fall under capitalism and for the rate of rent to fall under feudalism (in Bois’s own work).

Ellen responded by accepting Bois’s challenge. If Bois wants to characterize our approach as “political Marxism,” she said, that’s his prerogative. What is actually at stake is recognizing the systematically different ways in which “the economic” and “the political” interconnect in pre-capitalist and capitalist societies respectively, and the profound implications of this difference for the structure and developmental patterns of each type of social system.

As Ellen goes on to point out, pre-capitalist modes of production are founded for the most part, as Marxists have long realized, on “peasant possession,” a set of property relations or relations of production in which the direct producers hold the their full means of subsistence, primarily embodied in their plots of land.

This possession makes it possible for peasant families to reproduce themselves economically in an independent fashion, but what makes peasant possession possible is peasants’ organization into political communities, constituted to defend individual members’ holdings by carrying out collectively the political functions of justice and police.

It is because peasants’ possession is sustained politically that lords’ own reproduction must be similarly so. The latter can only reproduce themselves economically as individual lords by

taking part of the peasants’ product by force as feudal rent. But lords, too, have organized themselves into political communities, which stand behind and support each of their members in their exactions from the peasants.

The bottom line, argues Ellen, is that in understanding pre-capitalist societies like feudalism, you can if you wish follow Bois in arguing that the forms through which economic reproduction takes place are determining of how the society works. But you can do this only if you realize first that these “economic” forms are themselves politically constituted.

Capitalism, Ellen argued, is just the opposite. Its emergence depended on the separation of the direct producers from their possession of the means of subsistence, and of the rulers from their capacity to take by extra-economic coercion – both resulting from the defeat and destruction of the political communities that formerly defended and reduced these contending forces.

The outcome was a completely different system, in which neither of the main social forces, neither capitalists nor workers, could any longer depend on political-coercive arrangements, backed up by political communities. Instead they had to buy on the market everything they needed, and this meant they had to sell some product competitively if they were to survive.

Capitalists had to specialize, invest their surpluses, and innovate to cut costs so as to ensure profits. Workers had to sell the one product in their possession, their labor power, to the capitalists, opening the way to their exploitation. Individual economic reproduction thus took place without the need to recur to political action, at least in the first instance.

Where “the political” re-emerged, of course, was in connection with the state, which had “only” to defend the existing distribution of property to make possible the economic reproduction of both capitalists and workers. But much of Ellen’s work was devoted to fleshing out the consequences for politics of a system

where the class struggle was carried out, at least in the first instance or much of the time, in an economic realm separated from the state which nonetheless guaranteed the exploitative system operative there.

“The Separation of the Economic and Political,” in other words, only laid out a problematic that Ellen would spend an entire career unravelling and demystifying.

## Politics

It is critical not to leave the impression that Ellen was just a Marxist intellectual, however brilliant, concerned only with theory and ideas. What is in the end perhaps most striking is that, while realizing a truly formidable series of important intellectual projects, she was putting political functioning at the center of her life.

In the 1980s she worked on the New Left Review as a very active member

of its editorial board, as well as an advisory editor of *Against the Current*. In the 1990s, she became editor of *Monthly Review*. All the while, her directly political interventions came as fast and furiously as her theoretical conquests.

Ellen was, first and last, a socialist devoted to the self-emancipation of the working class, and she would have been more than content to be remembered that way.

[Against the Current](#)