

Goodbye Daniel

Obituary for Daniel Guérin, French libertarian communist

Workers Solidarity Movement

1988

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DANIEL GUERIN DIED on the night of April 13th last. He was 84 years of age. The news reached us when the summer issue of Workers Solidarity was already in preparation, hence this belated obituary.

One of France's best revolutionary activists and thinkers, he was best known in Ireland as the author of books such as Fascism and Big Business, 100 Years of Labour in the USA and Anarchism.

Within France he was well known, not only for his prolific writings, but also as a long standing trade union militant of the CGT; as a veteran anti-imperialist who supported the victims of French aggression in Indo-China, Algeria and today the Kanaks of New Caledonia; as a fighter for gay rights (he was bisexual) in the 'Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action'.

ANTI – COLONIALIST

Entering socialist politics as a convinced anti-colonialist, he joined the Socialist Party and got involved with an internal opposition group of non-Trotskyist revolutionaries — the "Revolutionary Left". This current was expelled from the party just before the outbreak of World War 11. They attempted to form their own party — the Workers and Peasants Socialist Party — but their new-born organisation fell apart when the Nazis invaded. During the war years Daniel took part in underground activity.

After the war he began working out where he stood politically. He had no time for Stalinism, social democracy or the numerous would-be Bolshevik Parties of Trotskyism. He gradually moved towards anarchism, though was always clear about not taking on board useless parts of the anarchist tradition or rejecting useful ones in Marxism. At the time of his death he was a member of the French anarchist organisation, the Union of Libertarian Communist Workers, His book Anarchism remains one of the best available introductions to our tradition and its politics.

HELD IN RESPECT

Shortly after his burial the UTCL organised a commemoration ceremony. The attendance indicated the high regard Daniel was held in. Speeches were made by many including representatives of the liberation front of New Caledonia, the gay movement, the proof-readers branch of the CGT and a veteran of the Algerian War of Independence — Mohammed Harbi. Messages were received from a multitude of organisations, a few of which were the French Anarchist Federation, branches of the CFDT union, the anarchist radio station in Paris (Radio Libertaire), the Spanish CNT, the Italian Federation of Communist Anarchists, the Swiss Libertarian Socialist Organisation and the Workers Solidarity Movement. There were also messages from other left wing movements such as the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, the main French Trotskyist groups and the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Sadly some Trotskyist organisations, notably the British SWP, have tried to downplay Daniel's anarchist politics. (See their obituary in Socialist Worker Review, June 1988). As tribute and to set the record straight we have translated the text. It was written as a Preface to his 1984 book 'Towards a Libertarian Communism'.

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