

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8434>



History

Missak Manouchian: their commemoration and ours

- Features -

Publication date: Monday 4 March 2024

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French president Emmanuel Macron decided that the French Resistance figures Missak and Melinée Manouchian should be interred in the Pantheon on 21 February 2024, the anniversary of the execution of the “Manouchian group“ in 1944. [Missak Manouchian](#) was a leader of the [FTP-MOI \(Francs Tireurs et Partisans - Main d'Oeuvre Immigrée\)](#)- in other words a branch of the Communist resistance formed of immigrant workers.

This decision by a president who had recently forced through a restrictive immigration law with the support of the far right and right in the National Assembly was not welcomed by the left as a recognition of the contribution of immigrants and communists to France - quite the contrary. [IVP]

Honouring the memory of the Resistance fighters and members of the FTP-MOI (francs-tireurs et partisans) is something quite different from welcoming their entry into the Panthéon alongside the Napoleonic generals.

Macron's latest political manoeuvre to give himself a left-wing veneer, at the very moment when he is implementing the policies of the far right again this week with the plan to abandon the right to legal status in Mayotte, by using the greatness of the militantEs who fought with arms in hand against fascism, for emancipation, for socialism, is quite simply disgraceful.

Depth of conviction

These foreigners would not have been able to reach France if Frontex had existed. Their membership of the "language groups" of the MOI [1], set up by the Communist Party in the 1920s and 1930s, which published newspapers in their own languages and organised schools, youth movements, theatres, choirs and sports associations on a national basis, would today be seen as separatism. And despite their political choices to reject attacks on civilians, what would we say about their attacks on Nazis and collaborators?

For us, honouring them means understanding the depth of the convictions that guided their actions in France and their participation in the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War.

Determined internationalists

From the start of the war, when the Communist Party was unable to organise anything against the Germans because of the Hitler-Stalin pact to break up Poland, political awareness led these young men and women, driven from their countries by poverty, anti-Semitism and fascism, to make a total commitment. They set up clandestine structures to provide assistance, but also to fight.

When the Communist Party launched armed resistance after the invasion of the USSR in 1941, MOI groups provided the first helping hands, and were part of the first FTP networks set up in 1942, the FTP-MOI. More seasoned by the underground, more determined as internationalists, they were better able to resist the first waves of arrests, so much so that in 1943, when Manouchian took over the leadership of the group [2], it was one of the few to be able to operate in Paris. They carried out dozens of operations, the most spectacular of which was the execution of Julius

Ritter, the French head of the STO (Service du Travail Obligatoire).

In 1943, at a time when the post-war period was being negotiated, the Communist Party, which had become the Communist Party of France, sent these groups on spectacular actions designed to demonstrate the activity of the “patriots”, but wanted nothing to tarnish its tricolour image. In the years following the Liberation, both the Gaullist memory and the official Communist memory obscured the actions of these thousands of foreigners.

Yes, we honour all these fighters, and particularly Manouchian, the man who, a few months before the headline in the Communist Party newspaper *L'Humanité*, “To each his own Boche”, was able to write in his last letter: “At the moment of death, I proclaim that I have no hatred against the German people or anyone else.... I wish you all happiness.”

15 February 2024

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

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[1] MOI: Main d'Oeuvre Immigré (Immigrant workforce), the largest groups were Italians and Jews.

[2] It accepted a Trotskyist: [Arben Abramowicz Dav'tian](#), known as Manoukian with a k.