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Obituary

Pierre Broué 1926-2005

- News from around the world -

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The Marxist historian and Trotskyist militant Pierre Broué died on July 26th after a long battle with cancer. Before becoming a renowned historian Pierre Broué was a militant, and he never ceased to be one. He began his political activity at the age of 10 by supporting the French general strike of 1936 and the Spanish republicans.

Moving to Paris during the Second World War, he became involved in the Resistance and joined the Communist Party. But he fell foul of the party by wanting to organise internationalist propaganda among German soldiers.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/broue78.jpg>]

He was duly expelled - neither the first nor the last to be accused of "Trotskyism" without knowing exactly what it was, though he already knew some of Trotsky's writings. Towards the end of the war he joined the French Trotskyist movement, of which he was an active member and leader for several decades.

But Pierre Broué's most important contribution was in the field of historiography. He was a first-rate historian, allying great erudition to clarity of expression. But what marked him out was that he wrote history, the history of the workers' movement and of revolutions, as a Marxist educated in the Trotskyist tradition.

This was important in a country where Stalinism dominated the left intelligentsia, and most of Broué's books challenged that dominance, very effectively. His first major work, written along with Emile Témime and published in 1961, was *The War and Revolution in Spain* (translated into English, but hard to find).

In this book, Broué brought revolution and class struggle back to the forefront, in a domain where both Stalinist and bourgeois historians had preferred to see simply the "civil war" between Republicans and Fascists. He wrote about the anarchists and the Trotskyists, and in *El Pais* of August 22nd, Wilebaldo Solano, former general secretary of the 1930s revolutionary Marxist party, the POUM, paid tribute to him and the impact his book had had.

Broué wrote many other books, hardly any of which have been translated into English, unfortunately. He published a history of the Bolshevik Party (*Le Parti bolchevique*, 1964). His monumental and magnificent *The German Revolution 1917-23* has finally been published in English [1], 34 years after it first appeared. As well as writing his books, Broué also created the Institut Léon Trotsky in 1977, directed the publication of Trotsky's works in French (27 volumes so far) and published the review *Cahiers Léon Trotsky*.

When the closed section of the Trotsky archive at Harvard University was opened in 1980, Broué was among the first to work on the new material. The most notable result was his 1988 biography, *Trotsky*.

When the Wall came down and the Soviet Union collapsed, Pierre Broué was again on the trail of newly opened archives, including those of the GPU (or at least some of them). The result was a series of books - *Staline et la Révolution : le cas espagnol* (1993), *Rakovsky ou la Révolution dans tous les pays* (1996), *Histoire de l'Internationale communiste, 1919-1943* (1997), *Communistes contre Staline. Massacre d'une génération* (2003). His biography of Rakovsky was the culmination of his efforts over many years, notably in the *Cahiers Léon Trotsky*, to restore this outstanding revolutionary, whose role in the Left Opposition was second only to Trotsky's, to his rightful place in history.

He also met those members of Rakovsky's family who had survived, as well as other children and grandchildren of

murdered Old Bolsheviks, and some of the very few among the latter who had not been exterminated. He collaborated with the Russian organisation Memorial, dedicated to defending the memory of Stalin's victims.

Broué spent most of his politically active life in the “Lambertist” branch of Trotskyism. Many people wondered how someone so intellectually curious and undogmatic could stay so long in this highly dogmatic and sectarian organisation. But he was not the only talented intellectual to do so. He was finally expelled by Lambert in 1989, but he remained politically active.

He published the magazine *Le Marxisme aujourd'hui* and was close to the current Démocratie et socialisme around Gérard Filoche, first of all in the LCR then in the Socialist party - though Broué himself joined neither the LCR nor the Socialist Party.

He remained open to discussion and collaboration with other socialists. He attended the 13th World Congress of the Fourth International in 1991 as a visitor, and towards the end of his life collaborated with the international tendency led by Ted Grant and Alan Woods. The Political Bureau of the LCR paid homage to him in a communiqué announcing his death.

This article was written for Frontline, journal of the ISM, a Marxist platform in the [Scottish Socialist Party](#), and will appear in issue 18.

[1] The German Revolution, 1917-23, translated by John Archer, edited by Ian Birchall and Brian Pearce. Published by Brill, Historical Materialism Book Series 5, 2005.