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Obituary

Daniel Bensaïd, Militant and Outstanding Marxist Philosopher

Sunday 24 January 2010, by [SPIRE Arnaud](#) (Date first published: 13 January 2010).

Marxist philosopher Daniel Bensaïd died of cancer in Paris last Tuesday; he was sixty-four.

Co-founder of the LCR (the communist revolutionary league), then of the NPA (the new anti-capitalist party), Daniel Bensaïd contributed, through his works and his militant action, to re-open in a polemical and novel way a dynamic of protest that challenges today's unbridled global capitalism.

Marxist philosopher Daniel Bensaïd died of cancer in Paris last Tuesday; he was sixty-four. His philosophical career straddled the 20th and 21st centuries. He disappears shortly after declaring about neo-liberalism in a recent book "The old world is dying." (*Post-capitalisme. Imaginer l'après*. Au Diable Vauvert pub. November 2009: Post-Capitalism: What Next?) As a matter of fact, his theoretical thought is one of the very few to have integrated – with regard to the current crisis – the point of view of praxis in his theory. It was perfectly clear to him that ecology's slow time is not the stock exchange's fast time (*Une lente impatience*: a slow impatience, April 2004) and that the economic and financial crisis reveals a historic crisis of the law of value where "I" alternates with "us".

"Beware of repetition!" – such should be the maxim of the most enlightened of his disciples. If a few cynics are still convinced that war alone can put an end to the most serious crisis that capitalism has ever known, it is clear that the extreme sophistication and dispersion of nuclear weapons today are a sufficient deterrent to suggest that the way out of the crisis can only be the global re-distribution of the balance of forces in the class-war, through major political events.

To suppose that it is possible both to promote consumption and to make consumption on that scale possible, or to reconcile the promotion of investment and the effective guarantee of big returns, he said, is tantamount to imagining "a world as unlikely as a tri-coloured rainbow". The question today is how we can transcend and prise out trade or market relations together with the philosophical categories they imply. Because it impedes the diffusion and perfection of innovation, liberalisation (privatisation) discredits neo-liberalism's discourse on the benefits of competition, and de-constructs the praise of the global market's institutional constraints. What is now on the agenda is a change from the very logic of capitalism: "The new society must invent itself without any pre-existing rules, through the practical experience of millions of men and women."

Daniel Bensaïd was an outstanding Marxist intellectual. He was one of those thinkers who, in the late 1970s, at a time when social protest was on the ebb, did not renege one bit on their radical political commitment. Better still, his works and political action have contributed for the last twenty years to re-open, in a polemical and novel way, a dynamic of protest that challenges today's unbridled global capitalism. Since then, in his *Marx, l'intempestif* (Fayard pub, 1995: Marx, the

untimely thinker), he has renewed the critical interpretation of Marx's historical, economic, and scientific analyses.

Daniel Bensaïd was a former student at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Saint-Cloud, and held a chair of philosophy at the Paris VIII university; he took an active part in the May 1968 movement with the LCR. The NPA loses the subtlest theorist of anti-Stalinism. He is known for his books on Walter Benjamin, Karl Marx and for his recent analysis of postmodernism in *Les Irréductibles. Eloge de la résistance à l'air du temps* (The irreducible: in praise of resistance to the dominant ideology) (Textuel pub., 1999)

Daniel Bensaïd showed respect for the lessons of modesty inherent in activism since its practical implication is that no one ever acts or thinks alone. He readily conceded that no political movement, not even his own, could boast of being the exponent of the radical critique of capitalism, only to add that "it cannot be said, however, that critical Marxist thought is such a crowded field." To be sure, the ratings for idols and gods are on the rise, and the sacred is back with a vengeance. But the urgent question, in France now, is to think out a liberal and secular political project for the future.

P.S.

* Daniel Bensaïd, philosophe et militant, un intellectuel marxiste rare, L'Humanité, 13 January 2010 Translated 14 January 2010, by Isabelle Metral and reviewed by Henry Crapo.:

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