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# Obituary: Reuven Kaminer, our teacher of politics

Wednesday 21 October 2020, by [WARSCHAWSKI Michael](#) (Date first published: 26 September 2020).

**Two Israelis of the same generation passed away last week: Meron Benvenisti and Reuven Kaminer. I know both, but only Reuven was a friend, a comrade. Benvenisti was a politician, a dignitary. As deputy mayor of Jerusalem, he was architect of the annexation of East Jerusalem, with everything this implies for the Palestinian population of the city. I'll leave it to the mass media to eulogize Benvenisti, a duty which I'm sure will be duly discharged.**

Reuven Kaminer was an activist. Not a leader but a teacher, of three generations. His militancy was expressed not only in educating others about the fundamentals of class struggle, but also in transmitting strategies for resistance and construction of social movements to radically change the policy of entrenched powers. Transmission to the new generations was our big failure, but not Reuven's: for decades we saw him in demonstrations, talking to young people, inviting them to his home for discussions, lending them books (which he often never saw again), speaking with them on equal footing. My daughter Talila, to whom I transmitted very little (and for which she has reproached me), was one of the many young people that Reuven, this Socrates of our time, met in a gathering and convinced to participate in informal lectures he organized.

Originally from the United States, Reuven emigrated to join a kibbutz, and from there the Israeli Communist Party. He attentively followed the political life of his country of origin. Reuven was thus one of the first here to identify the new left of the sixties, which represented a rupture with the old Stalinist discourse. He was instrumental in establishing Siah (New Israeli Left) and subsequently Shasi (Israeli Socialist Left), organizations which had real impact in the politicization of the campuses in the seventies, under the direction of, amongst others, Reuven's son Noam.

Uncompromising in political and ideological reflection, Reuven was one of the engineers of unity politics (and therefore compromise) that allowed for creation of important groupings that marked Israeli progressive politics for two decades: Campus (Jewish-Arab student group), Solidarity Committee with Bir Zeit University, and especially the Committee Against the War in Lebanon, which functioned as the locomotive of the anti-war movement from 1982-1985. This unitarian approach is certainly the most valuable value I've inherited from Reuven.

Reuven did not lead demonstrations and rarely spoke at public rallies (perhaps also because of his American-accented Hebrew he never got rid of): he left these tasks to his young disciples, in whom he had full confidence. Using a Yiddish expression and flashing an enchanting smile, Reuven often told me that "young people should do the job in their own way, and not just follow us old farts." When he intervened in meetings, it was generally to successfully help unravel a political tension that had developed among activists.

In my Hebrew blog, I describe my long-standing friendship with Reuven, who acted as a mentor in

my activism. I won't go over this again. I will end, however, on a certain sentiment of jealousy regarding transmission and education. In Jerusalem there was the expression "the Kaminers": Reuven and his partner Daphna, a great feminist and anti-colonialist activist, created a militant dynasty. Their children and grandchildren have taken up the torch of struggle. Further proof that Reuven was not a "leader" in the usual sense of the word - he was our teacher. In the best sense of the word.

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## **Michael Warschawski**

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