

Auschwitz or the great alibi: What we deny and what we affirm

A recent press campaign that goes from Figaro à Rouge via Le Monde, Daeninckx, Vidal-Naquet and others presents our article "Auschwitz or the Great Alibi", published in 1960 in Communist Programme, as "the founding text of left-wing negationism".

At first we think that our accusers have not read this article, which talks about the extermination of Jews, death camps, crematoria and Nazi barbarity in general, as a proven fact of blatant evidence.

When you think about it, however, you can see why even the people who have read it are blending those who deny the reality of Nazi horrors with us who seek to explain them and at the same time show the co-responsibility of "democratic" states.

Our "absolute perversion" (Vidal-Naquet dixit) is to demolish in this way the mythology that presents Nazism, and fascism in general, as a manifestation of the Devil that all men of good will must fight. It is to explain fascism (racist or not like its Italian prototype) and at the same time to explain that the real front of social and political struggles does not pass between democrats and fascists, but opposes the forces of proletarian revolution to those of bourgeois conservation.

That is what we are actually reproached by both the naive bourgeois democrats and the subtle Trotskyist tacticians who seek to rely on them. Against one and the other, let us recall in a few points what we deny and what we assert.

1) We deny that denouncing the crimes of democratic states makes the Nazis "innocent". We deny that denouncing the anti-immigrant policy of French democracy, from the hypocritical contortions of the PS to the Pasqua laws, from the closing of borders to charters, is tantamount to trivializing Le Pen and favouring the FN. We affirm that the French proletariat had a duty to denounce the massacres perpetrated by France, which had barely returned to democracy, in Algeria (1945), Indochina (from 1946), Madagascar (1946), etc., and that this denunciation did not detract from the condemnation of Nazi barbarity.

2) We deny that noting the complicity of democratic states in the liquidation of Jews was tantamount to exonerating the direct perpetrators of these massacres. But we are saying that we should denounce their co-responsibility and the hypocrisy of crocodile tears that they shed on the bodies.

3) We deny that the extermination of Europe's Jews can be used as an excuse for any racism, oppression or massacre whatsoever. We affirm that we must denounce all States based on the same principles as the Nazis, race and/or religion based states and aiming at hunting or even killing other population groups. We affirm that to condemn the Jewish settlers of the Territories who blackmail their children with songs similar to Hitler's songs (in the name of the enemy) like two drops of blood to those of the Hitler Youth is in no way to absolve the Nazis.

4) We deny that racism or anti-Semitism is a mere aberration of the mind. We affirm that they have very clear historical social roots, certainly, but also linked to contingent situations, in Germany yesterday as in France today. We affirm that, if they have their own logic as well as any ideology, their development and penetration into the minds of large populations are caused by social strikes, themselves linked to economic situations. We affirm that they must be combated in every way, practically in their consequences, theoretically in their pseudo-scientific foundations, and also by

attacking the socio-historical conceptions that tend to paralyze this struggle.

5) Thus, we deny that the war of 1939-1945 was a democratic St. George's Crusade against the Nazi, fascist or Nippo-imperial dragon. We affirm that, like that of 1914-1918, it was an imperialist war between two imperialist blocs fighting for world supremacy. Moreover, if during the war the Allies affirmed their virtue against the villainy of others, it was especially after the victory that they justified themselves by Nazi barbarity and the extermination of Jews in particular. In reality they tolerated and helped the Nazis to seize power. And for years they had ignored the testimony about the horrors of the Hitler regime and the death threats it posed to Jews.

6) We deny that "democracy" and "fascism" correspond to different types of society, linked to different ways of life and social activity. We assert that they are only two different forms of the bourgeois state, each ensuring the domination of capital and its functioning, but under different conditions.

7) We deny that the bourgeoisie's recourse to totalitarian methods comes from the wickedness or delirium that accompanies them. We affirm that, when economic, social and political conflicts are not too acute, democracy is the best form of state for the bourgeoisie; leaving a certain amount of room for competition and social antagonism avoids violent explosions and maintains the illusion of common interest. But when the economy and society find itself in a deep crisis, when consensus breaks down and antagonisms break out violently, fascism presents itself as the saviour: It does not only aim to completely subjugate the proletariat, which is generally already beaten or politically disorganized and disoriented; it also strives to unify and centralize all the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois factions in its grip, and to impose on them, sometimes against their particular interests, the general requirements of "national salvation".

8) We deny that fascism can be combated by calling for the maintenance of an idealized democracy, just as we deny that monopolies can be combated by promoting free competition. We affirm that a genuine struggle against fascism requires that we place ourselves on the ground of a genuine struggle against capitalism. We affirm that even anti-fascist propaganda can only be done on the basis of serious anti-capitalist propaganda.

9) We deny that significant sections of the bourgeoisie can effectively fight fascism. We affirm that, if the situation demands it, the determining centres: from big capital to fascism, bringing about a large majority of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois.

10) We deny that the broad anti-fascist fronts can seriously oppose the rise of fascism. We affirm that they actually prevent an effective anti-fascist struggle: history and theory as well as current politics! - demonstrate that, under the pretext of maintaining unity and not blowing up the "front", the most radical elements are forbidden to claim and lead, even in propaganda alone, a consistent anti-capitalist struggle.

11) We deny having "renvoyé dos à dos" [ed: to have dismissed two parties who are in dispute, without giving any an advantage over the other] (as Rouge says) the Nazis and other imperialisms, democracy and fascism. We affirm that we have called and called to fight the one and the other, on the basis of the immediate and historical demands of the proletariat and without any unnatural alliance. Only fundamentally defeatist people, who have forever accepted capitalist exploitation and oppression and would only like to make them milder, may not see the difference between these two positions.

12) We affirm that the proletariat must fight resolutely on the basis of its own positions. It must provide a positive perspective for the transformation of social relations that can eliminate exploitation, misery, oppression and wars. It is only in this way that it will be able to drag certain petty-bourgeois strata into a real struggle against racism, against fascism and against bourgeois domination in general.

What strikes above all is the despicable hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie and its lackeys, who would like to make it appear that racism and anti-Semitism are in themselves responsible for the suffering and massacres, and in particular for the deaths of 6 million Jews in the last war. The article we reproduce exposes the real roots of the extermination of Jews, roots that should not be sought in the realm of ideas, but in the functioning of the capitalist economy. And it also shows that while the German state has been the executioner of the Jews, all bourgeois states are co-responsible for their deaths, on which they now shed crocodile tears (extract from the introduction).

Martin Axelrad

(1926-2010)

Last August Martin Axelrad, known in the party as "Jean-Pierre", "Nicolas", etc., known as "Mackie" for his relatives, passed away in Rome. A long-time advocate for the right of everyone to decide his or her own end, his last fight was to get doctors to stop the relentless therapy and let him die in peace.

As a child of a Jewish Austrian family, Martin had to leave his native country to take refuge in France at a time when German troops were making the Anschluss in Austria, the unification imposed by the Nazis with Germany. Luckily his family settled in Grenoble which, after the French defeat during the war under Italian occupation, experienced little anti-Jewish measures, Italian fascism, unlike German Nazism, having resorted to anti-Semitism only in a relatively marginal way.

After the war he became a militant in the Trotskyist Youth, before coming into contact and joining our movement in 1958, following his wife. The first text he wrote for the party was an article entitled "Auschwitz or the Great Alibi" (published on Communist Programme in 1961); this article also met his personal need to demonstrate that Marxism perfectly explained the causes and reasons for the Jewish genocide - something that antifascist democrats deny with the last energy. His last text was "Auschwitz or the great alibi. What we deny and what we say", wrote in response to a press campaign in which the "bordigists" were accused of being "revisionists", "negators" of the Jewish genocide and in some way facilitators of a supposed "red-brown" alliance. As he jokingly put it, if he had physically escaped from the concentration camps, he hadn't escaped it politically! He was proud to have written a textbook (which he found in his desire to make sculptures); and a certain mistrust of intellectuals, the "sorbonnards", reinforced his politically motivated opposition to the intellectualist drifts of a Camatte and a Dangeville in the 1960s.

A scientist by profession, his knowledge of the subject combined with his understanding of Marxism made him particularly qualified to hold a report on "Marxism and bourgeois science" at a general meeting of the party. He was particularly attached to the defence of dialectical materialism: a discussion opposed him on this subject to a mathematician of world renown who marvelled that mathematics, pure constructions of the spirit according to him, corresponded to reality. We know since Pythagoras that being a mathematician is not a guarantee against idealism...

We do not intend in these few lines to retrace the activities of "Jean-Pierre" and "Nicolas" nor to make a detailed assessment of his positions in the internal vicissitudes of the party. As one of the leaders of the organization, he had his share of responsibility for the errors and weaknesses that ultimately led to the serious political crisis of the early 1980s.

(...) In his circular letter of 23/9/82 he wrote that he felt the crisis "as a personal failure. All materials have their 'breaking points' and break under too much tension. I was broken by this crisis, and a broken activist does not stick together". It was at this time that he retired from active political struggle.

Those activists who are still new to Marxism, who have learned from him the foundations of Marxism, will not forget what they owe him.

Extract from Prolétaire No. 497, October 2010