
30 YEARS WITHOUT

ERNEST MANDEL

HIS LIFE AND WORK COMPASS FOR A SOCIALIST SOCIETY
WITHOUT WAR - EXPLOITATION - OPPRESSION

A TWO-DAY EVENT

LAW SCHOOL OF ATHENS, 31 MAY-1 JUNE 2025

On 20/7/1995 Ernest Mandel, one of the most important -if not the most important- Marxist theorists after the 2nd World War and leader of the 4th International, passed away. In the 72 years of his life he passed down one of the most important legacies for comprehending modern capitalism, analyzing the problems of our times, the transition to Socialism and its content. He was a combination of intellectual, political leader and revolutionary militant whose main features were his faith in class struggle, his revolutionary optimism and his profoundly composed personality. He contributed his best to the building up and maturation of the 4th International, the struggle for the Revolution and Communism.

He was born in Belgium, in 1923 and grew up in a deeply politicized family and social environment. His parents were members of the German «Spartacus» (of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht) and he was raised surrounded by revolutionary workers. From a very young age he was connected to revolutionary Marxism and the labour movement of Belgium, where he contributed his best to the organization of workers. At the age of 15 he joined the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the Belgian section of the 4th International. He experienced capitalist brutality since the beginning of his political life. Three events left their mark on him and sealed his unwavering commitment to revolutionary Marxism: a) The assassination of Leon Trotsky by the Stalinist agent Mercader. b) The slaughter of the miners in Belgium. c) The slaughterhouse of the Second World War. During the occupation of Belgium by Nazis, he took intense internationalist and antiwar action, addressing both the Belgian proletariat and the German troops. He was arrested three times. He escaped twice convincing his guards to help him. The third, he was transferred to a concentration camp in Poland, where he remained until the end of war. Indicative of his revolutionary optimism was the fact that, even when he was transferred to the camp (which meant almost certain death) he continued his action because he believed in the upcoming European revolution.



The situation after the war

After the Second World War, the world was very different and complicated. The after-war status quo was being weaved. The world was divided into zones of influence (Yalta Agreement). The hegemony of American imperialism was established, the Cold War was initiated and the rapid development of colonial revolutions started. The global capitalist system experienced a new long wave of growth which skyrocketed capitalist profits. The «confrontation of the communist danger» was brought out as the main ideological tool of bourgeoisie in order to hit the labour movement.

This growth of capitalism was a challenge for the Marxist economists, who anticipated an intensification of the crisis and believed that the war would be the exordium for a wave of revolutions in Europe, as it had been the case with the First World War. This development caused significant concerns and was the base on which Stalinism and Social-democracy advanced the revision of Marxism.

Confronted with this confusion, the proletariat did not possess the necessary ideological tools to perceive the changes and its class duties, in depth. The reformist mutation of Stalinism had been completed. The 3rd International had been sacrificed as a gift to the imperialist «allies». After Trotsky's death and the assassination of Trotskyist leaders, during World War II, the 4th International was weakened in numbers.

The titanic task of explicating the new world and drawing up a revolutionary programme was undertaken by Ernest Mandel through his theoretical and practical work. Due to this invaluable contribution he gained a place in the pantheon of Marxism, next to Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, etc.



His contribution to Political Economy

A) Possibly the most significant contribution of E. Mandel to revolutionary politics is that he brought back Political Economy, which had been abandoned by the two main currents of Reformism (Stalinism and Social-democracy), in the heart of Marxist analysis. Against the views advocating the bankruptcy of Marxism, he proved, using multitude of elements, the validity of the general laws of Marx's Capital in the post-war imperialistic system. He examined-explained the forms of capitalist system's evolution and the obscure post-war environment, especially with three works: 1. Marxist Dissertation on Economy. 2. Birth and Evolution of Marx's Economic Theories. 3. Late Capitalism. Up to nowadays, these works constitute the most complete study of the evolution of post-war capitalism, the long wave of growth and the transition to the long wave of recession.

B) E. Mandel completed and advanced Marx's theory of crises. With persistent work, he developed the theory of «Long Waves» and he worked on it until the end of his life. He proved that the rapid growth of capitalism does not signal the overcoming of its contradictions,

as reformists claimed. The capitalist system is doomed to fall into structural crises in regular periods of time -around every 20 years. These crises cannot be tackled with an internal (structural) way and their duration is irregular - instead, they intensify competitions, inter-imperialistic conflicts on redistribution of markets, and class war against workers - they lead to spasms that spread poverty, impoverishment, and death. This analysis of Mandel has been confirmed today in the most explicit way.

C) He explicated the changes at an international level concerning the anti-colonial revolutions, the new forms of exploitation of the depended countries by the imperialistic ones (which are diffused in the traditional colonial relations), as well as the way in which different countries manage to escape the grip of imperialists and develop a «national» economy.



The building up of the 4th International

After the war, E. Mandel headed the Belgian section and became the youngest member of the 4th International Secretariat, just at the age of 23. Since then and for half a century, he played a determining role in the building up of revolutionary parties, national sections of the 4th International and the 4th International itself. Under his leadership, it managed to have sections in 68 countries (about as many as the sections of the 3rd International). His tireless revolutionary action cost him an entry ban in the USA, France, both Germanies, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, etc. -and of course in the USSR and China.

He contributed in the defense and reinforcement of anti-colonial revolutions and movements around the world. In 1950, he participated in the brigade that the 4th International sent to boost the Yugoslavian revolution and the young revolutionary state that Stalin threatened to crash. He supported, in every way (politically and materially), the revolutions in Algeria, Cuba, Nicaragua, etc. Having started to gain international fame as a Marxist economist,

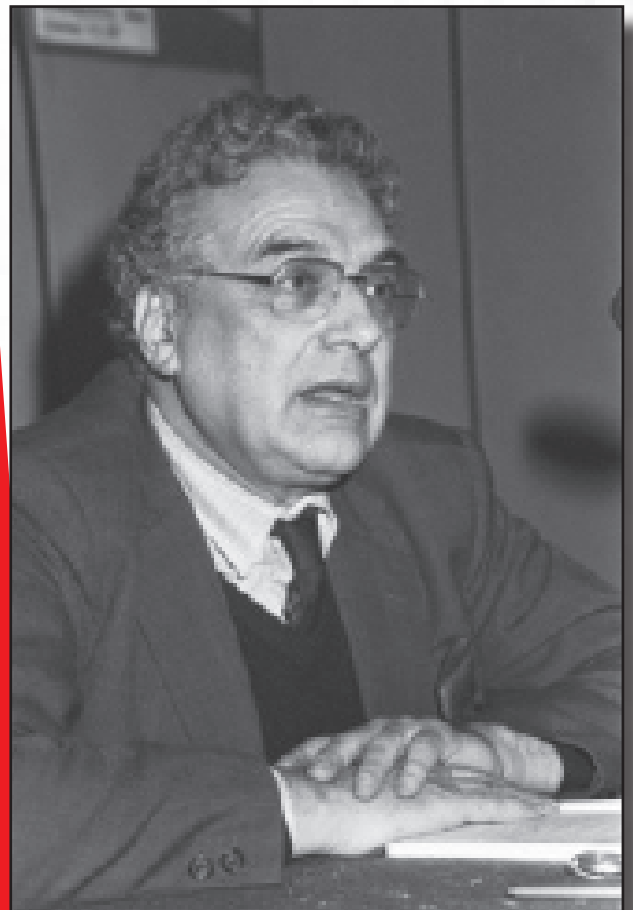
he was invited by Che Guevara to participate in the debate about the newly established planned economy of revolutionary Cuba.

He was one of the pioneers of the shift towards the building up of the 4th International through its autonomous participation in the revolutionary wave of 1965-75, getting past the «entrism» of the previous period. Up to the end of his life he remained loyal to the cause of building up revolutionary parties -the essential tools for the victory of the Socialist Revolution.

Mandel's socialist vision

The red thread that permeates E. Mandel's work is revolutionary humanitarianism. His theories and analyses are not connected to abstract forms but to class struggle itself and the suffering of poor people, and they conclude to the liberating vision of Socialism. He had always had a deep belief in class struggle and its potential, he had always connected the fate of humanity to class struggle itself.

In this light, E. Mandel did not see, as the goal of Socialism, the growth of production alone. That was only a means to the growth of the individual and the society. Wealth would be measured by free time which would be linked to the development of skills. Through democratic planning and self-management, production would be submitted to the fulfillment of the social needs rather than to the profit of a handful of rich and elites.





A profound theorist of Marxism

E. Mandel contributed to the building up of the national revolutionary sections of the 4th International with his theoretical work, the essential political directions and with the advancement of revolutionary tactics and strategy. He was one of the most prolific writers of the 20th century – he published around 2.000 articles and 30 books in various languages. There is no sector of revolutionary politics in whose development he did not contribute:

1) He described the changes that were taking place in the working class and class struggle, in the formation of a vanguard. This comprehension allowed the 4th International to become part of the movements that broke out, develop a struggle programme and emerge as a distinct pole in the labour movement, especially after May 1967.

2) He understood and explicated Reformism and its role after the war. He clashed with both Euro-communism and Stalinism, writing dozens of articles and books. He predicted the events of 1989-91, perestroika and the fall of USSR, producing timely analyses on the progress of Stalinist regimes' contradictions.

3) He developed in depth the tactics of the United Front and freed them from reformist distortions. He explained that the «united front» is not simply an association of organizations, an electoral welding, but a militant unity of the working class, which ensures its class independence.

4) He contributed, in a determining way, to the content of «Socialist Democracy», the comprehension of the kind of socialism we are fighting for: this contribution was a turning point in the course of Trotskyism and the revolutionary movement. It made clear that Socialism has nothing to do with the brutal, one-party, oppressive, Stalinist dictatorships. He restored its credibility in the masses' conscience.

5) He placed the self-organizing structures in the centre of the revolutionary programme. For E. Mandel, these were workshops which trained the working class for the establishment of democratically concentrated labour power. In this context, he developed the policy of Labour Control: workers have to try and impose their own interests on the company, raise a veto to capitalists' decisions with a view to build their own power against the bourgeois power.

6) Despite the events of 1989-91, the restoration of capitalism in the bureaucratic, degenerate labour states, he continued his work travelling around the world (he also passed from Greece), defending the ideas of Socialism, analyzing and explaining, as early as then, the deep crisis and the dead-ends of capitalism (which, at the time, seemed like an eternal triumphant) and the inevitable revival of labour struggles and anti-capitalist contestation.



The struggle for Socialism, the only solution against the slaughterhouse they have been preparing for us

At the end of his life, E. Mandel spoke of the «Four Knights of Apocalypse» which the deep structural crisis of the capitalist system wages: 1) the nuclear disaster, 2) the environmental destruction, 3) the spread of poverty and impoverishment, 4) the antidemocratic retreat - encroachment on democratic and political rights.

Today, these have become gigantic, bringing humanity on the brink of destruction. Inter-imperialistic conflicts between the USA and China - Russia have been intensifying, and the military conflicts have been spreading (Palestine, Lebanon, Ukraine, Syria, etc). The USA and the «willing» partners from the EU are threatening to massacre the whole planet in order to maintain their dominance. The democracies of the rich have waged a ruthless class war against the working people, the youth and the poor popular strata in order to preserve the profits of the elites and raise military expenses: They cut down on wages, privatize - destroy public infrastructure, raise taxes, push living standards down. In order to remain in power, they impose a gigantic state of emergency (antidemocratic retreat, oppression, policing, encroaching of democratic rights and liberties).

In our country, Mitsotakis' regime has declared a ruthless class war against the workers, the poor, the youth. High prices, poverty, anti-labour measures and oppression are escalating. Privatization-commercialization of everything (health, education, public housing) are generalized, while the rich and big businessmen are earning incredible profits. Exorbitant amounts of money are given to oppression apparatuses and military equipment. We are getting deeper and deeper involved in war and dangerous developments in our region.

For humanity to breath, for us to get rid of the democracies of the rich and not be driven to extinction, we have to fight for the overthrow of the capitalist system, which, at its swan song, is taking us down to distraction. The life and work of E. Mandel lead the way. He has been a role-model of tireless devotion to the cause of Socialism and of brilliant optimism about the communist future of the human kind. His incredible legacy, his theoretical as well as political, practical and moral contribution to the 4th International, the labour and revolutionary movement are a beacon for every militant who seeks answers to the gigantic issues of our times.



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Programme

SATURDAY 31 MAY

16:30 Views on the Crisis of Capitalism

The Theory of Long Waves

- NIKOS THEOCHARAKIS, emeritus Professor of Political Economy
- NIKOS STRAVELAKIS, PhD Lecturer MPhil TOE EKPA
- HERACLIS CHRISTOFORIDIS, OKDE

18:45 The Struggle for Building Up the 4th International

- JOSU CHUECA INTXUSTA, REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST LEAGUE, BASQUE SECTION OF THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL (1972-1987), PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BASQUE COUNTRY
- PAULIN BUBULLIMA, OKDE

20:00 Socialist Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship

- SOPHIA KARASARLIDOU, OKDE

SUNDAY 1 JUNE

10:00 The concept of dependence - Dependent countries:

The case of Greece

- SOTIRIS LAPIERIS, ARAS, LAE-AA
- STAVROS SKEVOS, OKDE

12:15 MANDEL: His contribution to Revolutionary Marxism. The Man

- GIORGOS GIANNOPOULOS, publisher of ENEKEN magazine
- GEERT SEYNAYEVE, long-standing militant of the 4th International - Belgium
- SOFRONIS PAPAPOPOULOS, OKDE

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