Sal Santen was an outstanding Dutch Trotskyist and a close co-worker of Michel Pablo (Mikhailis Raptis) in the leadership of the Fourth International for some fifteen years. From 1969 he became a writer of novels and (auto-)biographical works. The following biographical sketch is chiefly based on the material listed in the last paragraph of the Selected bibliography section below.

Sal (Salomon) Santen was born into the working class milieu of Jordaan (Amsterdam, The Netherlands) on August 3, 1915 as the second of three children of Barend Santen (1887-1942), a Jewish shoemaker, and his wife Sientje Santen (b. Menko, 1886-1942). Almost the whole Santen family was wiped out by the Nazis during World War II, thus both parents as well as Santen's younger brother Maurits (1916-1942) were murdered by the Nazis in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Sobibor, respectively. His sister Saartje (born 1913) died of tuberculosis in 1928.

In 1936 or 1937, Sal Santen married Gijsberta (Bep, for short) Blaauw who died in 1993. She was the stepdaughter of Henk Sneevliet, who was called “Netherlands' first professional revolutionary”. The couple got three children.

After finishing school education at the age of fifteen, Santen gained certificates in English, French,
German and shorthand. During most of his adult life, he earned his living primarily as shorthand writer (thus he was occupied with Vrij Nederland and Arbeiderspers), correspondent and contributor to various newspapers and magazines; at the same time he was an active revolutionary Marxist, thus one could say that he lived a double life for some two or three decades, to a certain degree probably comparable with that of Sherry Μangan, an American writer, poet and publicist and at the same time a central figure of the international Trotskyist movement. After having discontinued his revolutionary political activity in 1967 and following some years of personal and psychological crisis, Sal Santen started a career as author with his first novel, Jullie is jodenvolk, the first in a series of some 15 well-received novels most of which being characterized by strong autobiographical references, political and personal reminiscences, and self-analysis or therapy, too. Thus, almost all his books, published between 1969 and 1995, were shaped by the background of either his Jewishness (e.g., Jullie is jodenvolk, 1969, Kinderdief, 1988, De B van Bemazzel, 1989) or his experiences as a Trotskyist militant for some three decades (e.g., Adios compañeros, 1974, or Dapper zijn omdat het moet, 1994, the latter reflecting the Algerian liberation struggle). Another book, Saartje gebakken botje (1983), was dedicated to his beloved sister. Perhaps one of his finest works was a biography about his father-in-law, which was published in 1974 with title Sneevliet, rebel. As a writer, Santen was a member of the Dutch PEN Centrum and a leading member of the Vereniging van Letterkundigen (Writers Association).

Before starting his career as a writer, Santen had been a very active, although 'quiet', political activist and militant of various radical political parties and currents. Thus, after some years of activity in a socialist youth group, the Arbeiders Jeugd Centrale (AJC, Workers' Youth Centre) and in the trade-unionist youth movement, he became radicalised during the years of the Great Depression; in 1932 he joined the ranks of the Onafhankelijke Socialistische Partij (OSP, Independent Socialist Party), which as a left socialist splinter group had split from the strong Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij (SDAP, Social Democratic Labour Party). When it merged in 1935 with the Revolutionair Socialistische Partij (RSP, Revolutionary Socialist Party) led by Henk Sneevliet to form the Revolutionair Socialistische Arbeiders Partij (RSAP, Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party), Santen joined its ranks. Party leader Henk Sneevliet became something like a father figure to the young Santen who in 1936 became secretary of RSAP's youth arm, the Leninistische Jeugd Garde (Leninist Youth Guard). In 1933, Sneevliet's RSP had become an affiliate of the Trotskyist International Communist League (ICL) and Sneevliet himself a member of ICL's International Secretariat. However, in 1935 and 1936 a series of ideological and tactical disputes and tensions between Sneevliet and Trotsky troubled their relations and the RSAP alienated more and more from Trotsky's ICL, or Movement for the Fourth International (as the ICL was called from 1936), eventually broke with Trotskyism in the middle of 1937 and became definitively associated with the London Bureau.

Sal Santen, after a phase of hesitating, did not side with his father-in-law, Sneevliet, but instead with the Trotskyists and thus in 1939 became a militant of the Dutch Groep van Bolsjewisten-Leninisten (Group of Bolshevik-Leninists) and Bond van Communisten (League of Communists), respectively, af-


4) As far as we know, none of his books - all were written in Dutch - have been translated into other languages.


6) Both the Dutch OSP and the RSP in 1933 had signed together with the German SAP (Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands, Socialist Workers Party of Germany) and Trotsky's ICL the so-called Declaration of the Four. But the Bloc of Four which Trotsky hoped to transform into a nucleus of a new International soon broke up and only the RSP and its successor, the RSAP, joined the international Trotskyist movement, at least for a few years.

7) Officially named International Bureau for Socialist Unity, the London Bureau was a loose federation (existing from 1932 to 1939) of - as classified by Trotsky - 'centrist' parties opposed both to the Second [socialist, reformist] and the Third [communist, Stalinist] Internationals; however, they equally opposed to the founding of a Fourth International as advocated by Trotsky and his supporters.

8) Santen's entire political itinerary from his youth up to his disaffiliation from the Fourth International in the 1960s has been comprehensively accounted within the framework of a Dutch doctoral dissertation written by Ruud Keurentjes: Sal Santen - van revolutionair tot schrijver, Nijmegen, Univ., 1981, 250 pp. (particularly pp. 41-125)
filiated with the Fourth International (FI) and forced to operate clandestinely as underground fighters in the face of the 1940 fascist German occupation of the Netherlands. When in 1942, as a result of some regroupment processes in the face of brutal fascist repression and persecution, a new Dutch Trotskyist underground movement was formed, the Comité van Revolutaire Marxisten (Committee of Revolutionary Marxists), Sal Santen from the beginning played a leading rôle in it and edited its illegal paper. After World War II, Santen continued his leading political and organizational activities in the ranks of the Revolutionair Communistische Partij (RCP, Revolutionary Communist Party), the renamed Dutch section of the Fourth International. The Greek Trotskyist militant Michel Pablo (Mikhailis Raptis), who during the Second World War had become one of the most influential and integrating leaders of the European sector (European Secretariat of the FI) of the international Trotskyist movement, from 1945 became a central figure in Santen's life, too, probably substituting Sneevliet, who had been executed by the Nazis in 1942, as a father figure.

From 1945 to the mid-1960s, Santen functioned not only as a leader and inspirer of the small Dutch section, but at the same time as a leading cadre of the Trotskyist Fourth International, participating in various international Trotskyist conferences such for example the first one held after World War II in Paris on March 3-5, 1946, and becoming a member of the Fourth International's newly composed International Executive Committee (IEC)\(^9\), the highest body of the movement between two world congresses. When the so-called Pabloite split (or, Cannon-Pablo split) in the Fourth International occurred in 1953\(^10\), Santen of course sided with the Pablo leadership representing the Dutch section at the FI world congresses. In his capacity as member of the leading bodies of the FI (International Secretariat of the Fourth International, as it was usually called now in order to distinguish it from the International Committee of the Fourth International\(^11\)) and as Pablo's special confident, Santen in 1953 was sent to Latin America for several years. During the long lasting Algerian War, the FI from the very beginning strongly supported the anti-colonial liberation struggle of the Front National de Libération (FNL) as did many independent, non-communist intellectuals and adherents of the New Left in France.

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10) For the history of the RCP see Lubbersen, R.: Revolutionair-socialisme in Nederland tussen oorlog en intrede de Revolutair Communistische Partij (RCP), Nederlandse Afdeling van de Vierde Internationale van 1945 tot 1952, Amsterdam, 1983. [Unpubl. ms., not in our possession]


12) In the wake of the Third World Congress of the Fourth International (1951), substantial political debate over perspectives and orientation, combined with an intensifying factional and power struggle shook the leading bodies of the Fourth International as well as some of its more important sections, particularly those of the U.S., France and Britain. The controversy and factional struggle resulted in a split of the French section (1952) first, and eventually in a split of the entire International (1953/54) following the International Executive Committee (IEC)\(^10\), the highest body of the movement between two world congresses. When the so-called Pabloite split (or, Cannon-Pablo split) in the Fourth International occurred in 1953\(^10\), Santen of course sided with the Pablo leadership representing the Dutch section at the FI world congresses. In his capacity as member of the leading bodies of the FI (International Secretariat of the Fourth International, as it was usually called now in order to distinguish it from the International Committee of the Fourth International\(^11\)) and as Pablo's special confident, Santen in 1953 was sent to Latin America for several years. During the long lasting Algerian War, the FI from the very beginning strongly supported the anti-colonial liberation struggle of the Front National de Libération (FNL) as did many independent, non-communist intellectuals and adherents of the New Left in France.

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13) See preceding footnote.
Sal Santen

Bio-Bibliographical Sketch

and elsewhere. Michel Pablo (Mikhalis Raptis), in the 1950s one of the most influential leaders of the FI, Sal Santen and other FI militants got deeply involved not only in propagandistic solidarity work, but also in very practical and effective support of the Algerian fighters, most probably even by smuggling counterfeit money and weapons or by assisting in the setting-up of illegal arms factories. In June 1960, Sal Santen and Michel Pablo got caught in Amsterdam and were committed for trial; they had to spend no less than 13 months in pretrial detention, before they eventually were tried before a Dutch criminal court and found guilty of having forged identity documents and of having provided counterfeit money for the FNL fighters. Both men were given a fifteen months sentence and – since the judges made allowance for the time served while awaiting trial – were released from prison on September 12, 1961. Their arrest and the trial led to a worldwide protest by supporters and sympathizers of the Fourth International and by renowned writers and intellectuals as for example Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jorge Amado, and Pierre Vidal-Naquet.

Shortly after the reunification congress of the Fourth International in 1963, Michel Pablo stated some principal discrepancies with the newly formed United Secretariat. In 1964, Pablo, then head of the African Bureau of the FI, launched a paper (titled Sous le drapeau du socialisme) without the approval of the United Secretariat; he soon was blamed with factionalism and with having violated democratic centralism. However, the conflict between Pablo and the majority of the United Secretariat continued to grow and Pablo, who did not participated in the 1965 world congress of the FI, was suspended officially from leadership and, together with a small number of his supporters in various sections, eventually was purged in 1965. The 'Pabloites' soon established their own organization called the International Revolutionary Marxist Tendency (IRMT) which strongly advocated 'autogestion' (self-government on all levels) and more and more gave up its allegiance to traditional Trotskyist positions. Together with Pablo, Sal Santen left the Fourth International, and after a number of conflicts, but perhaps chiefly for personal and psychological reasons, disaffiliated from Pablo's current, too, no longer actively engaging in revolutionary Marxist politics. Unlike many other long-time militants who anytime left the movement, Santen never repudiated his past but continued to call himself a Trotskyist until his death.

Henceforth he dedicated his life to writing novels.

Sal Santen spent most of his life in his home-town Amsterdam; his home was at Noorderbreedte 165. He spent the last years of his life in the Beth Shalom Old People's Home, Amsterdam. Still full of life and just recovering from a hip operation, he unexpectedly died from a heart attack on July 25, 1998, some days before his 83th birthday.

Selective bibliography

- Selective bibliography: Books/pamphlets (co-)authored by Santen

Adiós compañeros!: politieke herinneringen. - Amsterdam : Wetenschappelijke Uitg., 1974. - 227 pp. - (Unofficial history)


Selectiv bibliography 17


16) See above, p. 2.

17) TSB item numbers (e.g. <TSB 0716>) refer to Lubitz' Trotskyist Serials Bibliography, München [etc.]: Saur, 1993, which is out of print but available as PDF file within the framework of the Lubitz' TrotskyanaNet website. In TSB you can find detailed descriptions of the respective Trotskyist journals, newsletters, bulletins and the like.

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Een geintje : verhalen. - Amsterdam : Arbeiderspers, 1975. - 131 pp. - (Grote ABC ; 252)


Jullie is jodenvolk : herinneringen aan een jeugd. - Amsterdam : De Arbeiderspers, 1969. - 104 pp. [With strong autobiographical reference]

Jullie is jodenvolk. - 2. dr. - Amsterdam : Querido, 1980. - 111 pp. - (Salamander ; 507) [With strong autobiographical reference]


De kortste weg : verhalen. - Amsterdam : Arbeiderspers, 1979. - 174 pp. - (Grote ABC ; 350)


Stormvogels : roman. - Amsterdam : Arbeiderspers, 1976. - 180 pp. - (Grote ABC ; 282)

- Selective bibliography: Books/pamphlets and journals (co-)edited by Santen


Information Bulletin / International Secretariat of the 4th International (Amsterdam ; London) [ISSN 0429-2782] <TSB 0543>

De Internationale (Amsterdam, 1957-72) <TSB 0732>
The Internationalist : information bulletin (Nottingham) [ISSN 0444-3314] <TSB 0761>

De Rode October (Rotterdam, later. Amsterdam) <TSB 1408>

De Tribune (Amsterdam) <TSB 1716>

- Selective bibliography: Books, collections, journals, bulletins to which Santen contributed

Bulletin intérieur / Secrétariat International de la IVe Internationale (Paris) <TSB 0542>


Fourth International / International Executive Committee of the Fourth International (Paris) [ISSN 0429-2790] <TSB 0535>

Fourth International (New York, NY, 1940-56) <TSB 0532>

De Groene (Amsterdam) [ISSN 0017-4483]

Haagse Post (The Hague)

De Internationale (Amsterdam, 1957-72) <TSB 0732>

ISSS-berichten / International Society for Socialist Studies (Amsterdam)

Maatstaf (Amsterdam) [ISSN 0024-8851]


Het Parool (Amsterdam) [ISSN 1389-2975]

Propria cures (Amsterdam) [ISSN 0033-1414]

Quatrième Internationale (Paris etc., 1936-) [ISSN 0771-0569 - ISSN 0765-1740] <TSB 1282>

La Vie du parti : bulletin intérieur (Paris) <TSB 1787>
Volkskrant (Amsterdam)
Vrij Nederland (Amsterdam) [ISSN 0165-666X]
Workers Liberty (London) [ISSN 0960-8753]

• Selective bibliography: Books and articles about Santen

[Anon.]: Santen, Salomon, in: Wie is wie in Nederland, 1.1984/88 : p.1040. [Also in later eds.] [Biographical sketch]


Ettv, Elsbeth: Het Amsterdam van Sal Santen : de tocht van 'een bang jodenjonggetje', in: Ons Amsterdam, 43.1991 (9), pp. 204-207.


Note: More informations about Santen are likely to be found in some of the books, pamphlets, university works and articles listed in the relevant chapter(s) of the Lubitz’ Leon Trotsky Bibliography [ISSN 2190-0183], e.g. in chapter 7.5.03.
Sidelines, notes on archives

A note about archives.
The papers of Sal Santen are preserved at the famous IISG (Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis) (International Institute of Social History, IISH), Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The Archief Sal Santen comprises archivalia covering the period of 1912-2003, the bulk of papers, however, dating from 1932-1998. The collection's scope today is some 5.75 m. The first portion of the archive was deposited at the IISH by Santen himself in 1969 with the stipulation that it should not be opened before 2000. In 1994, Santen deposited some further portions at IISH archives, and eventually in 2004, Santen’s daughter, Ellen, donated another complement; further amendments were added in 2012. The entire collection has been processed, some items which were neither manuscripts nor printed or typed documents, i.e. photographs, sound cassettes, films and posters, were removed and integrated into the respective special collections at IISH. An inventory (folder level description) of the Archief van Sal Santen, prepared by Marja Musson in 2001 (revised 2004), is available online.
The Archief van Sal Santen chiefly consists of some 190 folders containing documents reflecting almost all aspects of Santen’s life and activities, i.e. letters, postcards, manuscripts, reports, memoranda, notes etc. recording Santen’s activities in the RCP 1945-1948, the International Secretariat and International Executive Committee of the Fourth International 1946-1963, etc., for example his considerable letter exchange with Michel Pablo, some 50 folders containing material impounded by the police at Santen’s and Pablo’s homes in the wake of their arrest in 1960, e.g. bank statements, notebooks, address books, etc. The collection also includes rich material documenting the trial of Santen and Pablo in 1960 (proceedings, protocols of interrogations, final speeches, press clippings, solidarity letters, etc.), manuscripts of articles by Santen, newspaper issues and clippings, internal documents of the Fourth International, Santen’s letters to his family written when he was in prison (1960/61) and rich material about the Algerian liberation movement and its endorsement by Santen and other FI militants. Those portions which were added to the archive in 2004, chiefly consist of personal and family papers such as for example passports, diplomas and similar documents, items recording Santen's psychotherapeutic treatment in 1966-1971 and his death in 1998, and last not least a great number of letters and cards exchanged between members of his family including his parents, brother and sister, and the Sneevliet family.

It goes without saying that some originals or photocopies of letters and memoranda by Santen can be traced in the collections of some prominent Trotskyists whose papers are preserved at renowned public archives like for example IISH, Hoover Institution Archives, Tamiment Library, etc.

A film about Sal Santen.
An impressive and celebrated 75 minutes documentary film (16mm, colour) titled San Santen, rebel focusing on the life, activities and disillusionment of this outstanding Dutch revolutionary was screened at the Nederlands Film Festival 1982 where is was awarded the Grote Prijs van de Nederlands Film as best documentary of the year. It was directed by Rudolph van den Berg who was also the distributor. The spoken text sequences, among them interviews with Michel Pablo and Achmed Ben Bella, are in English, French and Dutch, English subtitles are provided. The film was also screened in the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival the same year and in TV programmes. The IISG preserves a copy of the film (call no.: BG F1/790-792)

Other audiovisual material about Santen to be found within the IISG collections includes two 16mm films titled Sal Santen Diemen (IISG call no.: BG F2/856-857) and Ellen Santen (call no.: BG F2/858-59), respectively. An audio cassette titled Sal Santen, rebel (Santen interviewed by Rudolph van den

18) For an overview see the Public Archives : America and Public Archives : Europe chapters within the framework of our Lubitz' TrotskyanaNet website.
Berg, broadcast October 1982) is available under the call no. BG GC6/30, and another audio cassette titled *Een leven lang : Sal Santen, schrijver*, a radio feature by Yvonne Scholten which was broadcast on April 8, 1993 (Radio Hilversum), is preserved under the call no. BG GC7/927.

— Quotation from obituary.

We should like to conclude our bio-bibliographical sketch about Sal Santen with a short quotation from a series of obituaries which appeared on the occasion of his death:

"'Brave because it is good' was the life-time motto of Sal Santen, who described himself as someone who in his heart was always a ‘scared little Jewish boy’. He had borrowed this motto, which was also the title of one of his books, from the farewell letter of his father-in-law, the resistance hero Henk Sneevliet, written just before his death in front of a German firing squad. Through Sneevliet, Sal Santen, himself coming from the poverty-stricken family of a shoemaker who supported the SDAP[^20], landed in the revolutionary movement during the 1930s. When Santen decided for Trotsky and his Fourth International, their ways parted. [...] He was too soft, too human and too emotional to be a professional revolutionary. His political commitment came from his humanity. Those who knew him or saw his bushy hair and soft brown eyes could see that fanaticism was alien to him. [...] A few years ago, I asked him to draw a balance of his life. ‘The most important thing is my family’, he answered, ‘That as a Jew I could still build a family is very important. And beyond that... I became a writer.’[^21]"

Note: The photograph (on p.1) was taken from the WWW, © Chris van Houts, Amsterdam.

[^20]: The SDAP (Social Democratic Labour Party) was the predecessor of Dutch Labour Party.