

JEAN VAN HEIJENOORT (1912 – 1986)\*

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Jean van Heijenoort was killed in tragic circumstances on March 29, 1986 during a brief visit to Mexico City. To most readers of this volume he was best known as a logician, philosopher, and editor and historian of mathematical logic. But he also had two other quite different careers to which he devoted a good part of his life and energy. In the years between 1932 and 1946 he was a full-time political activist committed to the ideals of Marxism as set forth by Leon Trotsky; and from 1940 until his death, he was an historian and archivist of political history.

Jean van Heijenoort was born in 1912, in Creil, France, in the region of the Oise River. His mother, Charlotte Hélène Baligny was, by all accounts, a remarkably intelligent and resourceful woman whose formal education had been cut short at age eleven when she was obliged to go to work as a domestic. His father Jean Théodore van Heijenoort, was an immigrant from Delft who came to the industrial area of Northern France looking for work and was hired as a design painter in the large safe factory in Creil.

Two events, one historical and one personal, had a profound effect upon van Heijenoort: the World War that began in 1914, not long after his second birthday, and his father's traumatic death right at the beginning of that war. All the experiences of his early years were colored by his having grown up in the immediate vicinity of the battlefields and bombing targets where dying was an everyday thing. His own father's death had an even more directly distressing effect on his emotional state.

Yet these adversities and sorrows did not seem to hamper young Jean's success as a student. In the provincial milieu where almost no one

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