

Remembrance of Léon Tabah, Director of the Population Division from 1972 to 1984

Léon Tabah, former Director of the Population Division, died on 4 October 2020 in Boulogne-Billancourt, France, at the age of 97 years.

Léon and Frédéric, his twin brother, were born on 16 May 1923 in Istanbul, Turkey. Their family emigrated to France in 1926 and lived in the Parisian suburbs. Tabah obtained his baccalaureate at the Lycée du Parc in Lyon and then began studies at the Faculty of Sciences in Lyon and at the Faculty of Law in Paris. Under the Occupation of the second World War, he had to flee Paris. In 1941, he joined the National Liberation Movement (MLN) with his brother and took part in the Résistance. In 1944, he participated in the liberation of Lyon.

Tabah resumed his studies after the Occupation and obtained a doctorate in economic and social sciences.

In 1946, Alfred Sauvy recruited him to work at the National Institute for Demographic Studies (INED), which Sauvy had founded in 1945. Tabah assisted Sauvy in editing the journal *Population*, whose first edition appeared in January 1946. Tabah published his first article, together with Armand Perdon, in the first issue of 1947. His work gained recognition following the publication of an article with Jean Sutter in 1951 on consanguineous marriages – a subject that he quickly abandoned, however. In fact, the thirty or so articles that he published in *Population* through 1972 addressed rather eclectic topics but with a common focus on the relations between population and development in the Third World.

In 1957, Tabah was recruited by the United Nations to teach at the Latin American Demographic Center (CELADE) in Santiago de Chile, where he participated in the training of an entire generation of young researchers and future demographers of various Latin American countries.

In 1963, he returned to INED, where he led a research group on the demography of the Third World. At the same time, he taught at the Ecole pratique des hautes études (EPHE), and at the Institute of Advanced Studies on Latin America and the Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po).

In 1972, Tabah returned to the United Nations, where he became Director of the Population Division in New York, a position that he held until 1984. Only one person, John Durand, has held this post longer than Tabah (by roughly one year). It was in this capacity that Tabah served as Deputy Secretary-General of the World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974 and of the International Conference on Population in Mexico City in 1984, when he retired.

Back in Paris, the French Government gave him the task of reflecting on how to relaunch the programme of technical cooperation in the field of population, which led to the creation of the Center for Population and Development (CEPED).

From 1990 to 1993, Tabah was President of the Committee for International Cooperation in National Research in Demography (CICRED), while also serving on the High Council for Population and the Family (from 1990 to 1995).

In his preface to a special issue of *Population* devoted to the Maghreb and published in 1971, he wrote, “Demographic studies [...] must help to enlighten political choices”. This is no doubt the best summary that one can make of Tabah’s own career.

An avid player of chess and bridge, Tabah was appreciated and well-liked by all who knew him. He was also a very caring grandfather.

Tabah was a recipient of the Resistance medal, a Knight of the National Order of Merit and an Officer of the Legion of Honor.