

HANS

I first saw Hans in action defending workers' rights at a rally in Cheltenham, UK, in the early 1980s when the workers at GCHQ had their trade union rights removed. There had been some powerful speeches from UK trade unionists, some of whom had been barracked, and then Hans spoke. He connected with the heart of workers in a remarkable manner. The applause at the end for this largely unknown international trade unionist was ecstatic.

His resolve to take a stand on behalf of PSI members remained with him throughout his long career, whether it was in South Africa, where he was practically banned from entering the country during the apartheid period, in Turkey during the military dictatorship, or South Korea where he stood with the public service workers at the front of the demonstration wearing a bandana.

He would also make his voice heard in more formal meetings - at the ILO, the World Bank, the IMF and (only once) at the World Economic Forum in Davos. He detested the latter, preferring to see PSI represented at the alternative World Social Forum.

He was a strong supporter of Global Union cooperation, not as a cold war front but because he believed in the strength of unity; at the same time he also strongly defended the independent decision-making of each GU, for which he gained huge respect.

Hans was a modest man and never ever forgot his roots. He would often refer to what it meant growing up in modest circumstances. He never stood on ceremony and never used his badge of office as a status symbol.

He had a very strong constitution and endless reserve of energy, which he needed given his strenuous work schedule. He would go where he was needed by the members not thinking of his own needs. Ill health was rarely a deterrent to going where he thought he should be at any point in time.

Hans prepared himself meticulously for all PSI meetings. Every eventuality needed to be covered. He took his responsibility as a public service workers' representative seriously and he never lost sight of their needs. The biggest threat to the public sector throughout his term in office was the Reagan/Thatcher policy to privatize public services. With Hans at the forefront, PSI became a beacon of resistance to privatization and the neoliberal agenda which, with other stands taken by PSI, resulted in a considerable growth in membership worldwide.

On a personal note, I have many memories of Hans. I first visited PSI in the London office, close to Heathrow airport, when I was doing some work for it in West Africa. Hans had gained the support of the Executive Committee to move the office close to the ILO in Geneva, a major operation that was almost like re-starting the organization from scratch. Hans recruited me as Education Officer in 1987 and my family has fond memories of the time and trouble he went to make our move to France as smooth as possible. I became Deputy General Secretary in 1991. Working with Hans was never dull. He had a way of setting you challenges. For example, after I'd spent four years working on South Africa he announced one morning that he wanted me to switch my attention to Central and Eastern Europe where PSI had all

of two affiliates. How I was to go about this work wasn't clear, as there was no experience in the office of that region, but Hans saw clearly that PSI needed to be there.

I can't say that I always agreed with Hans but disagreement never led to a breakdown in communications. I never felt any resentment as we always found a way of going forward.

Last Saturday I visited Hans in hospital. I hadn't seen him for some time but we picked up the conversation relatively easily. He was weak but we managed to talk for half an hour. I was very pleased to be able to tell him what I thought his considerable contribution to PSI had been, how the organization had grown in his hands, and how he had literally given his life to PSI.

Alan Leather

Former Deputy General Secretary