

Rob Lambert: 24 December 1945–20 May 2019

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Professor Rob Lambert was an academic at the University of Natal in South Africa before joining the academic staff of the Business School at the University of Western Australia (UWA). Beginning with his doctoral thesis, *Political Unionism in South Africa: The South African Congress of Trade Unions 1955-1965*, Rob's scholarship made a critical contribution to labour studies. Rob's thesis first focused his attention on the concept of social movement unionism, and his early writing both defended and extended this.

However, his concern about the status of labour under the neoliberal agenda saw Rob's scholarship switch to a critique of the effects of neoliberalism on labour. The strength of his scholarly work was recognised in many ways but he was especially delighted when he (with Edward Webster and Andries Bezuidenhout) was awarded the 2009 Distinguished Scholarly Monograph Prize by the American Sociological Association, Labor and Labor Movements section. The award was for their for monograph *Grounding Globalisation* (2009). With many citations and publications, Rob had a distinguished scholarly career. At UWA, he served as Head of School and Head of Discipline and was actively involved in many service roles.

Outside of UWA, Rob became involved with the International Sociology Association's (ISA's) Research Committee (RC) 44, on Labour Movements. Founded in 1990, the aim of RC 44 is to encourage international research on the political and industrial relations role of labour movements, with a particular focus on the Global South. After serving as Vice-President of RC 44 in 2002-2006, Rob was President between 2006 and 2010. During this time, the contribution of Southern scholarship to ISA Congresses increased commensurately. The focus on the South remains today with successive Presidents and key Board members of RC 44 continuing to come from the South.

Rob's academic career was equally matched by his commitment to pursuing the values of solidarity, justice, and human dignity in the community. Indeed, it was the violence that engulfed South African townships in the mid-1980s that led Rob and his family to migrate from South Africa to Australia. Nonetheless, it was Rob's concern for the status of workers in the South that motivated his most lasting activism. His research had taken him to some of the nearby countries in the South, where he met and saw first hand the status of workers. His critique of neoliberalism was developing at this time. This scholarly understanding, combined with his concern for the workers that he met, initially inspired him to become involved with the trade union movement as the International Affairs Officer for UnionsWA. He subsequently became the Western Australian representative on the Australian Council of Trade Union's (ACTU's) International Affairs Committee, where he worked both to raise awareness and to foster action about the status of workers in countries of the South.

Rob soon realised though that a new labour internationalism that supported independent trade union groups was what was mostly needed. He established SIGTUR (Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights, <https://sigtur.com>) in 1991. The Initiative brought together trade unions including COSATU (South Africa), the ACTU (Australia), CUT (Brazil), KCTU (South Korea), CITU (India), and Kilusang Mayo (Philippines) and organised over 10 conferences. These were held in Perth, Calcutta, Johannesburg, Seoul, Bangkok, Kochi, and Sao Paolo. The labour internationalism of SIGTUR still exists today and continues to run coordinated campaigns about workers' status.

Rob retired as a Full Professor in 2017, and passed away on 20 May 2019. The community of labour studies and the labour movement especially in the South has lost a true Gramscian 'organic intellectual'. Rob never lost sight of the 'cause' nor wavered in accepting his responsibility to create real social change. His unique use of scholarly tools in combination with social movement leadership ensures that his contribution to labour scholarship and activism in the South and globally is, and will remain, seminal.

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