

## **Workers and Labour Movement Activists Celebrate the Life of Friend and Comrade: Eddie Webster**

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I join the many who celebrate the life of Edward Webster, a friend and comrade to many in the workers movement here in SA and internationally. We send our sincere condolences and love to his life partner, cde Luli Callinicos and his children and grandchildren.

Khanya College joins the many comrades and friends in celebrating the life of Edward Webster, a friend of the College and the workers movement internationally. We send our sincere condolences and love to his life partner, cde Luli Callinicos and his children and grandchildren.

At 81 years old, Webster retained an active interest in the social justice and the workers movements. He continued to work his craft rigorously, was productive and will remain forever young. His was a life that was well lived in the service of others – students, academics and the workers movement. Webster's footprint in the sociology of work looms large internationally. He was a caring academic and teacher, committed to students and the creation of knowledge. I often teased him as a 'reluctant Marxist', given his depth of knowledge in seminars and informal discussions over coffee at his home together with Luli Callinicos and the late Oupa Lehulere.

Cde Eddie had an illustrious academic career spanning three universities – Wits, Oxford and York over six decades – but importantly, he was an intellectual committed to the workers movement.

Edward Webster was prominent in the 1990s and the debates around the Workplace Forums and the Labour Relations Act; and got a rigorous response from the late Oupa Lehulere, from Khanya College. The two engaged gracefully and never took the debates personally. Fraternal relations with cde Eddie deepened in about 2002 when cde Luli became a member of the Khanya College Board of Trustees, and the Workers Museum in Newtown. And, I got to know Eddie even more when I studied for a PhD in 2006, as a mature student. Eddie accepted differences, worked on his craft, prepared for every seminar and never took his many years in the academy for granted. Together with Jacklyn Cock, Sakhela Buhlungu and Michael Burawoy, they were formidable mentors in research methodology, debates and understanding the world concretely.

But Webster was different to most academics in two respects: his contribution to struggle as organiser and a builder of organisation. He was not a one-dimensional academic who only focused on teaching and writing but was committed to intervening in struggles to build a humane society. Eddie was exemplary in his direct and significant contribution to the emerging trade union movement in the 1970s and the formation of FOSATU. He influenced, raised awareness and channelled many students to actively support the union movement (amongst others, as organisers). This included tremendous detail in organising and building organisations. Cde Eddie has not been adequately acknowledged for this important role in the movement

building of the democratic trade unions in South Africa; (and perhaps this is difficult given the demise of this movement today). Eddie also spent enormous time and energy building institutions to potentially enrich the workers movement – the Sociology of Work Project, the Chris Hani Institute and the Institute for Inequality Studies – one hopes they will draw inspiration from Eddie's life's work.

At a time when the working class is defenceless and needs the support of progressive academics and students, in South Africa and internationally, the life of Edward Charles Webster is a beacon of hope and inspiration that it can be done, that progressive academics can align themselves to actively organise and help to build social justice movements.

Hamba Kahle cde Eddie, we miss you, and you will never be forgotten.

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