

Tributes to




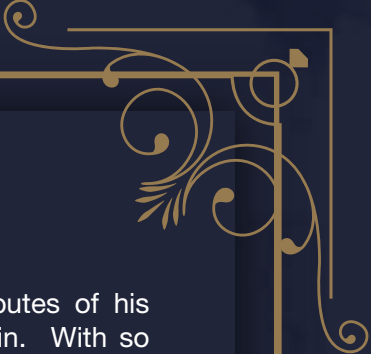
*Edward
Webster*

29 March 1942 to 5 March 2024

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG



100
1922
2022



After the news of Eddie's passing, messages of condolences, tributes of his contribution, and stories of encounters with Eddie started pouring in. With so many messages coming from so many people in so many countries and from so many locations (academics, unions, networks, friends, students), we decided we should collate the messages to give to the family at his Memorial on 16 March 2024. We have included all the tributes we have received and seen, and hope we have not missed any. We apologise if we have missed any. Many photos were included in tributes and some were sent separately, We have included all the photos we received. The tributes and photos are not in a particular order (given time constraints). Eddie made everyone feel special, and consequently, everyone feels deeply connected to him as seen in the messages.

The photo on the cover was taken of Eddie teaching the GLU-Engage course to international unionists in 2022 at Wits University. He was holding a boot to discuss global commodity chains and the role of workers throughout the production process.

March 14 2024



*Compiled by Warren McGregor (GLU-Wits) and
Michelle Williams (Sociology-Wits)*



Tributes



Cabinet Statement *14 March 2024*



South African Government's Cabinet expressed condolences to the friends and family of Prof. Edward Webster (82), the leading sociologist, academic and labour activist, who held various teaching and research positions in some of the

country's leading universities. He was instrumental in training several generations of left-wing scholars, many of whom are now leading academics, trade unionists, researchers and policy analysts.



Wits Communications *University of the Witwatersrand*

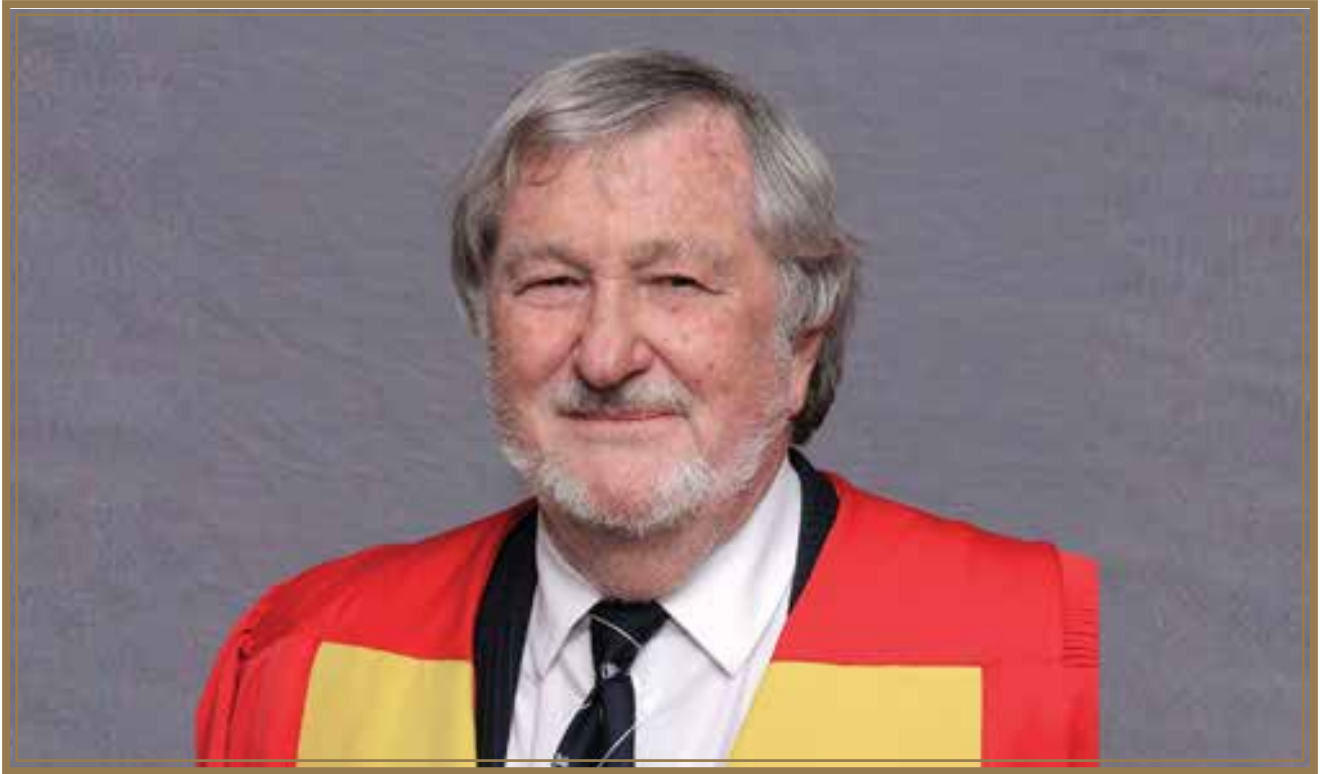


Wits mourns the loss of Professor Eddie Webster: <https://01r.me/Q3l3hXp>

Exit, voice and loyalty – these were the three interchangeable concepts described by Professor Webster as a way to illuminate a wide range of economic, social and political phenomena in South Africa, in a speech that he delivered at a

graduation which focused on inequality in the Wits Great Hall in 2018.

These three ideas illuminate some of Webster's characteristics – he was a humanitarian who used



his voice and agency to effect real change in the world, to speak truth to power, to openly protest, and to engage in critical debate, without fear. An outstanding academic, he was loyal to labour activism, good scholarship, equality, social justice and the advancement of the public good.

He made an immeasurable contribution to the labour movement through the establishment of the Sociology of Work Programme at Wits University, and more recently as the first interim director and then distinguished research professor at the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies. For his scholarly contributions, commitment to and advancement of democracy through labour activism, and the nurturing of several generations of leading labour sociologists, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Wits in 2017.

Professor Webster made an impression on generations of scholars, activists and workers, and even though he now exits the stage, he leaves behind an immeasurable intellectual legacy told through his life story, some of which is captured below.

The Legacy of Professor Edward Webster

Edward Webster was born on 29 March 1942 and educated at Selborne College. He obtained a BA Honours degree and University Education Diploma from Rhodes University, an MA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from Oxford University, and a Bachelor of Philosophy from York University. He obtained his PhD from the University of the Witwatersrand.

Professor Webster established the Society, Work and Development Institute at Wits. He was recognised locally and internationally for his significant contribution to scholarship, especially in the field of Industrial Sociology. His book *Cast in a Racial Mould* (1985), showing how the labour movement in South Africa was shaped by changes in the labour process, remains a classic.

His book with Rob Lambert and Andries Bezuidenhout *Grounding Globalization: Labor in the Age of Insecurity* was awarded the prestigious American Sociological Association award for the best scholarly monograph published on labour in 2008. He is the author of several books and

over 100 academic articles, as well as numerous research reports.

He pioneered the academic study of the sociology of work and labour in South Africa. As Head of the Department of Sociology at Wits University for ten years (1988 - 1995; 2000 -2002) he focused on the transformation of the curriculum and staff development (particularly of young, African scholars). Webster transformed it into the leading department of sociology in Africa. He introduced a Masters by coursework, and an Honours programme in Industrial Sociology which has produced many of the key industrial relations scholars and actors in South Africa.

He also developed the discipline of Sociology through his active membership in the South African Sociological Association of which he was President for three years. Through the creation of working groups on the public issues of the time, such as education, labour, gender, militarisation and the state, he gave the association new energy and direction.

Professor Webster was active in attempts at transformation of the University since his appointment in January 1976. He led the historic research report by Wits academics in 1986 Perspectives of Wits, which was aimed at changing the university from a bastion of white privilege to a more open and inclusive institution that would produce a new generation of black sociologists committed to serving society. He served as the Senate representative on the University Council for eight years and contributed to the resolution of many highly contentious issues and debates.

In 2008, SWOP was recognised as a strategic area of Wits University's research and granted Institute status and as a model of what has been termed "Public Sociology". Webster also established an ambitious research programme to train young students, attaching them to research projects on the transition to democracy.

An internationally recognised sociologist, Professor Webster was rated in 2004 as the top sociologist in South Africa by the National Research Foundation for his scholarly work. He had connections to several research institutes locally and around the world.

He was a Visiting Professor at many local and international universities and was the first Ela Bhatt Visiting Professor of Development and Decent Work at the International Centre for Development and Decent Work at Kassel University in Germany from 2009 to 2010. He also served as a Senior Fulbright Scholar at the University of Wisconsin, Madison from 1995 to 1996.

Webster served on the International Advisory Board of the Economic and Labour Relations Review Labour, Capital and Society; Work, Employment and Society; Social Forces and the Labour Studies Journal. He was founder and Editor-in-Chief of the Global Labour Journal, a joint venture between Wits University and McMaster University in Canada. He also served as the President of the Research Committee on Labour Movements of the International Sociological Association between 2002 and 2006.

He was the Founder and Chair of the Global Labour University at Wits, a global initiative by the International Labour Organization that connects universities in Germany, India, South Africa and Brazil. He was also a founding member in 1974 of the South African Labour Bulletin, South Africa's premier journal of labour. He co-founded the first workers' college in South Africa - the Institute for Industrial Education in 1973. He was a Non-executive Director of the Development Bank of Southern Africa, a Board Member of the Chris Hani Institute, the Labour Job Creation Trust, and the Human Science Research Council. He also served on the Human Resources Development Council of South Africa.

In 2017, Webster was appointed as the first interim director of the then newly established

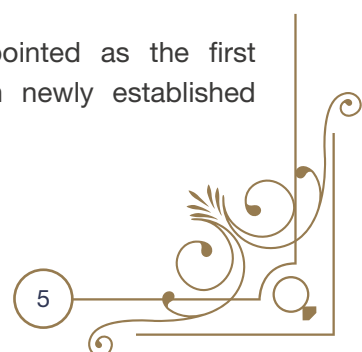




Photo: GLU Engage Graduation and GLU Transfer Conference 2021, Eddie was the keynote speaker

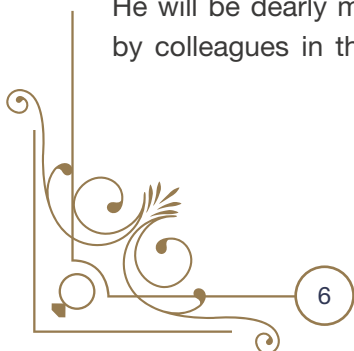


Southern Centre for Inequality Studies, where from 2019 until 2023 he served as distinguished research professor. At the SCIS, he played a key role in a south-south interdisciplinary research project examining how India, Ghana, Brazil and South Africa are responding to the growing informalisation of work. He was the leader of the catalytic research project titled Hidden Voices: Left thought under Apartheid in the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Professor Webster enjoyed interacting with students and supervised almost fifty students. He will be dearly missed by the Wits community, by colleagues in the higher education sector, by

comrades in the labour movement, by students, friends and family, and many, many people who feel honoured to have made his acquaintance. Go well, Prof. Eddie!

VIDEO: <https://k54.pl/Uhcljns>



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Prof. Ari Sitas
Dept. of Sociology
University of Cape Town

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Edward Webster – An Appreciation

I met Eddie Webster outside the Wits Library in 1976. I was a bit at a loss of what to say because he carried with him an aura of having been “there”- the Durban of the 1973 strikes, the new trade unions, the Institute of Industrial Education (I.I.E), the South African Labour Bulletin (SALB), the epicentre of the progressive “new”: the so-called “Durban Moment”. I said something arbitrary that I was to join his brand-new Industrial Sociology class. He said, that is interesting, “why?”

We have remained close since and I was to be his and David Webster’s first PhD student

and in constant exchange of agreements and disagreements, highs and lows, jokes and put-downs, celebrations and grief-related interludes that mark any close relationship. He was a tolerant supervisor and a harsh but caring inquisitor.

I am convinced that Webster’s contribution is too immense to deal with in a rather quick obituary. I know that many past and recent trade union leaders will be celebrating his stewardship of the SALB, the barometer of the emerging trade union movement, its challenges, woes and achievements since the early 1970s. From the debates around trade union recognition for the black majority, to the debates around “registration” after the Wiehahn



Commission granted such a possibility; from the formation of national federations like FOSATU and COSATU to the explosion of resistance politics and insurrection through the 1980s.

If the SALB was not enough, then there was the formation of the Sociology of Work Project (SWOP) which assembled a profound group of labour scholars who in turn, deepened the relationship between social science and black working-class life. These interactions gave birth to a unique labour studies concept: social movement unionism to characterise the quality of the trade union movement in South Africa and distinguish it from others around the world- a social movement that moved its aspirations and struggles beyond the shop-floor. Eddie and Karl Von Holdt argued its case with some eloquence and force.

This picture of committed scholarship takes us to the early 1990s when two major events shook his thinking. The first was Glasnost/Perestroika, initiated by Gorbachev in the Soviet Union before its collapse. Eddie did not write about it but I recall an 8-hour discussion we had which convinced us that a democratic socialism was the only viable project, stripping from the concept any notion of authoritarian institutions or practices. This took us back to Rick Turner's influence in Durban and how little of it was crystallised in his *Eye of the Needle*. We thought we should re-read the book against the backdrop of his newly-archived lectures on Hegel, Marx and Sartre, now available through Natal University's archive. This, we never did which I do regret deeply.

The second was the unbanning of the liberation movement and the gradual dismantling of the Apartheid status quo. Key challenge here was Joe Slovo's "Has Socialism Failed?" which argued, "no", what had failed was authoritarian and Soviet-style socialism. We had a few serious encounters with Slovo which concretised for Eddie and me, both our agreements and disagreements in the years to follow.

Eddie was also a formidable sociologist. He spent untold hours beyond departmental duties trying to create a genuine and progressive sociological association. ASSA then SASA more recently, owed

much to his energy during the late Apartheid years. A key text was "Towards a Sociology for Liberation" which challenged the "pragmatic realism" of many liberal reformers in our field. I cannot find the piece at the moment but a piece close to it is "Servants of Apartheid" in *Africa Perspective*, no.14 in 1980. The very idea that sociology had to link up to a project of human flourishing, touched my generation. Webster served as a president of the association and its annual conferences became anti-Apartheid and left festivals. The enthusiasm for the discipline of sociology carried over into the International Sociological Association where he and his SWOP colleagues turned the Association's Research Committee 44 into an exemplar of labour scholarship. The *Global Labour Journal* survives with aplomb.

He read voraciously but it seems to me, three sociological thinkers inspired him and shaped his thinking about the worlds of work: Harry Braverman and his *Labor and Monopoly Capital* a brilliant analysis and conceptualisation of the capitalist labour process which was published in 1974. Michael Burawoy's committed ethnographies of the politics IN production and the workplace- starting from *Manufacturing Consent* of 1976, how capitalism acquired shopfloor obedience and later Guy Standing's work on the "precariat". The Braverman and Burawoy influences were there in his first major work, *Cast in a Racial Mould*- his pioneering study of work in South Africa's foundries. All these influences came together in the book he co-authored with Andries Bezuidenhout and Rob Lambert (2008) *Grounding Globalization*, London: Wiley-Blackwell. An invisible influence too was his life's partner Luli Callinicos who always emphasised in her historical and contemporary work black working-class agency and creativity. He has been kind to list a range of his students as major contributors, but however charming to many of us, it speaks more to his generosity of spirit rather than our achievements.

To return to the changing character of South Africa's labour movement: there was a historic decision taken by COSATU on the eve of the transition to move its emphasis from a social movement unionism to a strategic one: the Congress would participate and help shape



*SWOP staff:
Eddie Webster, Shameen Singh, Khayaat Fakier, Rahmat Omar, Sarah Mosoetsa and Andries Bezuidenhout*

the democratic policy dispensation. Out of this flowed NEDLAC which brought together the state, business and labour and the search for forms of social co-determination. Webster threw himself whole-heartedly in the search for models that would not destroy shop floor democracy. Out of this flowed edited publications like, *Trade Unions and Democratization in South Africa, 1985-1997*, co-edited with Glenn Adler, (2000; Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press) and *Beyond the Apartheid Workplace*, (2005) co-edited with Karl Von Holdt (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press). He genuinely believed that trade unions could play an active role in producing radical and structural reforms whilst strengthening the emerging democratic state. [1]

By the late 2000s the relationship between the labour movement and the state entered a turbulent period and it was felt that one needed a broader and more inclusive left project beyond the tripartite alliance. It meant that the Chris Hani Institute had to broaden its vision and its governing body approached Eddie Webster to act as its director, a challenge that he took on with his unmistakable energy. This continued until the splits in the labour movement made its life unsustainable- tensions between COSATU and the ANC, tensions within

COSATU, tensions within the SACP, leading to the killing of miners at Marikana and serious polarisations that followed, tensions within the board made it impossible for us to meet and made its governing board structure impossible to operate bringing the experiment to a close.[2] Eddie returned to his research priorities and joined the Southern Centre for Inequality at Wits.

Whilst at the Chris Hani Institute Eddie was to lead a catalytic project funded by the newly created National Institute for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (NIHSS) titled “Hidden Voices” which started bringing to light ignored manuscripts of the Apartheid period. He supervised the publication of a range of books written by workers during the heyday of the struggle like Alfred Temba Qabula’s *A Working Life- Cruel Beyond Belief*; the biography of Jabu Ndlovu by Jean Fairburn, *Flashes in Her Soul*, Kally Forest’s *Bonds of Justice: the Struggle for Oukasie*, *The Struggle of One Tells the Struggle of All*, *Metalworkers Under Apartheid*, Petros Tom and Mandlenkosi Makhoba, curated by Paul Stewart, all published by Jacana Press. What really pre-occupied him over and above such voices though was the left’s contribution to the “national question” in South Africa. With the help of Karin Pampallis, a significant book, *The*

Unresolved National Question, (2017-University of the Witwatersrand Press) saw the light of day whose essays deal with the vexed questions of race, class, nation and ethnicity.

Webster threw himself straight into research on precarious work in the Southern Centre at Wits. The timeous result in 2023 was *Recasting Workers' Power -Work and Inequality in the Shadow of the Digital Age*, which he authored with Lynford Dor, Kally Forest, Fikile Masikane and Carmen Ludwig. (University of the Witwatersrand Press). A few months before its publication, he participated with great aplomb in the commemorative 50 years since the Durban Strikes conference in Durban which indirectly at least marked his contribution as a scholar and as an activist.

What must not be ignored was that he was a formidable teacher too- the cautious and hesitant founder of the Industrial Sociology programme at Wits who was at the same time a trialist for subversion, to a nurturer of some of the best talent I have encountered in Sociology. Readers of this must also go back and search for the *Festschrift* edited by Sarah Mosoetsa that captured his contribution as a teacher and a colleague published in 2009. Later, responding to the globalisation challenges, he became a co-founder of the Global Labour University to prestigious residencies as a professor of Development and Decent work at the Kassel University in Germany. A critical summation of what has been achieved is scripted by Michelle Williams and Eddie (2021) as "Public Sociology and Worker Education" in the *Routledge International Handbook of Public Sociology*.

It was wonderful to read in 2022 how he and his close friend and associate in the Department of Sociology and in SWOP Jacklyn Cock challenged the University to its foundations (Wits at a Time of National Crisis: then and now") insisting on the need: "to revisit our external stakeholders to see how they perceive us in the face of the multiple crises of increasing inequality, casualisation of labour and ecological devastation? Indeed, is it

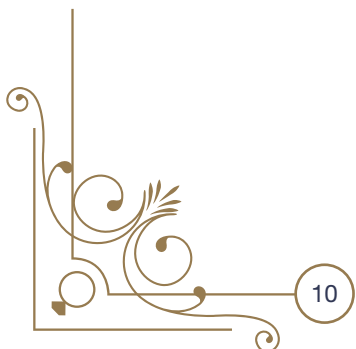
not time for all South African universities to revisit their multiple publics and explore with them what a public university in southern Africa in the 21st Century could – and should – become?"

There were three meetings recently that enhanced my appreciation of his stewardship: one to celebrate his 80th birthday in Hogsback (where he was raised as a child) and where he made almost all of us hike for 21kms in inclement weather. The second was in Durban during the "Durban Strikes" conference, where he fought to the ground a man who tried to mug him to the astonishment of the busy pavement (where afterwards he whispered a line from Dylan Thomas, never go gently into the dark night!). The third was two Mondays before his heart gave in, in Johannesburg where we reminded each other of our encounter outside the library at Wits.

It has been a long journey here.

[1] Issues of participation continued to pre-occupy Eddie and his close associates, see Christine Bischoff, Themba Masondo and Eddie Webster, "Workers' Participation at Plant Level"; and the implications of technology on the workplace, Bridget Kenny and Eddie Webster, "The Return of the labour process: race, skill and technology in South African labour studies."

[2] It has been revived as a strictly COSATU-SACP based Institute and continues to research labour-related issues.



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Prof. Andries Bezuidenhout
University of Fort Hare

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Obituary: Eddie Webster’s influence over generations of students extended to the country and beyond its borders

(Mail and Guardian, 06/03/2024)

Professor Edward Charles Webster — or Eddie, as he was known to his family, friends and colleagues — unexpectedly died of a heart attack on Tuesday. He was 81 years old, but about two years ago, he led an eight-hour hike in the Amatole Mountains near Hogsback as part of his 80th birthday celebrations. Eddie jogged, swam and regularly played squash. He was also active on Twitter (or X, I guess), where his handle was “Sociology Madala”.

To be sure, numerous tributes to Eddie, often accompanied by photographs of him, were shared on social media this week, ranging from overseas scholars to labour federation Cosatu.

While formally retired for some years now, Eddie never stopped working and only last year published yet another book, titled *Recasting Workers’ Power: Work and Inequality in the Shadow of the Digital Age* (2023, Bristol University Press). He also continued to supervise and mentor postgraduate students.

How does one even begin to describe the effect of this academic and activist on generations of students, but also the country more broadly? Then there is Eddie’s global stature and influence. His work was read well beyond South Africa’s borders and even used as an example of how theory formulated in the Global South can speak back to an academic field dominated by Northern scholars.

I will attempt to provide some detail on the significance of Professor Eddie Webster’s academic work, but I also want to say something about him as a human being who touched the



lives of numerous others. I was lucky to be one of his doctoral students and worked with him at the University of the Witwatersrand for more than a decade.

Activist academic

If there is one insight that defined Eddie's work and contribution as a scholar, I would say it is the understanding that any form of oppression and exploitation can and should be challenged. This is best done when people organise collectively, because when acting individually people often have limited power. For Eddie, democratic trade unions that are responsive to their members are a key part of attempts to create a more just world.

But building movement is hard work and Eddie was an institution builder par excellence. From the 1970s onwards Eddie was involved in setting up publications in support of the labour movement, most notably the South African Labour Bulletin, which he set up with Rick Turner and others. He was actively involved in the field of workers' education and supported the emerging trade unions with research. Because of his activism, he was arrested in 1975 and tried under the Suppression of Communism Act.

Understanding the power structures of society was one of the keys to also change society. For this reason, Eddie was central to defining labour

studies as an interdisciplinary field of study in South Africa. His first book, *Cast in a Racial Mould: Labour Process and Trade Unionism in the Foundries* (Ravan Press, 1985), is still considered to be a classic. In this book, he analysed changes in the intersection between race and class in South Africa's engineering industry. He showed how changes in social structures and technological changes in production had opened up the space for the emergence of militant black trade unions during the 1970s — a moment that eventually gave rise to Cosatu.

The spectacular success of trade unions in South Africa during the 1980s certainly provided historical evidence for Eddie's analysis of the power in democratic movements. Eddie called this "social movement unionism" and the initial successes of the South African labour movement, in particular Cosatu, is also why South African labour studies became globally influential.

Eddie founded the Sociology of Work Project (SWOP) at the University of the Witwatersrand, which became one of a number of such research and education projects that supported the labour movement. At Wits, he contributed to building what must be one of the world's leading departments of sociology.

Yet, Eddie was always aware of potential conflicts between academics and trade union leaders and



insisted that university-based academics, while working in support of democratic movements, should maintain their intellectual independence. He called this position “critical engagement” — an attempt to balance the need for a social science that is committed to social justice, but without getting drawn into the power politics of political organisations such as trade unions.

Going global

After the end of formal apartheid and during the early phases of South Africa’s transition to democracy, Eddie saw a new role for South African labour studies.

He was instrumental in setting up the Global Labour University, a consortium of universities in South Africa, India, Germany, Brazil, and the US who support trade unionists in doing postgraduate studies — almost like an MBA, but for trade unions. This programme is still going strong.

He was also instrumental in setting up the Global Labour Journal, an open-access journal that plays a role similar to the South African Labour Bulletin, but now with an international focus.

His own research turned outward and his co-authored book on how workers in South Africa, Australia and South Korea responded to the insecurities of globalisation, *Grounding Globalisation: Labour in the Age of Insecurity* (2008, Blackwells) won an award from the American Sociological Association, a testament to the global reach of Eddie’s work.

His most recent book returned to the question of technology in the workplace, trying to formulate new strategies for trade unions to organise workers in the gig economy — workers who are not directly employed, but who work for platforms that directly link them to consumers (such as Uber and food delivery companies).

Teacher roots

Eddie Webster was born in 1942 and grew up in the Eastern Cape. Both his parents worked as teachers at Healdtown school near Fort Beaufort. Eddie’s mother was one of Nelson Mandela’s teachers. His father was an Anglican and his mother a Methodist, and there was a deep commitment to social justice in the household. His parents left Healdtown when it was taken over by the apartheid state.

He studied at Rhodes University, later Oxford and York, and finally at Wits for his PhD. At Rhodes, he was active as a rugby player, but also as a member of the National Union of South African Students.

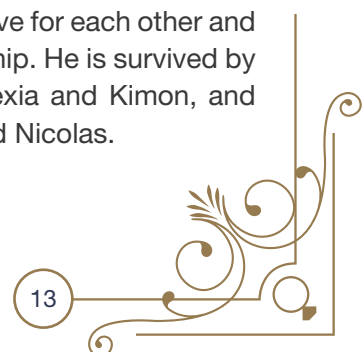
I only realised how important the Eastern Cape had been in shaping Eddie when I moved here to work at the University of Fort Hare six years ago. His extended family has a property on Hogsback and because of this, he visited a number of times and we were able to catch up.

In keeping with this tradition, Eddie celebrated his 80th birthday on Hogsback. Guests were treated not only to that eight-hour hike, led by Eddie, but also an historical tour of Alice and surrounds, including the University of Fort Hare and Healdtown, led by Eddie’s older brother Trevor.

At Healdtown I explored with Eddie the ruins of his childhood home. We discussed the significance of the fallout between Robert Sobukwe and his mentor at Healdtown and how we, as South Africans, often still struggle to find common ground. Conversations with him always left one with a sense of purpose.

For me, of all the hats Eddie wore, his role as teacher stood out. To build institutions and movements, you have to build people, and this is maybe the most radical thing anyone can invest their time in.

Eddie was married to the historian Luli Callinicos, the author of Oliver Tambo’s biography, *Beyond the Engeli Mountains* (2004), among many other books. I admired their deep love for each other and their true intellectual partnership. He is survived by Luli and his two children, Alexia and Kimon, and his grandchildren, Marcus and Nicolas.





Michelle Williams

Head of Department, Sociology

Wits University



A Farewell to our beloved Eddie

As head of the sociology department, I am speaking on behalf of the entire department, which was Eddie's academic home for 45 years.

Sociology was the thread that wove the many dimensions of Eddie's extraordinary life into a coherent whole.

Eddie's conception of the role of the university perhaps best reflects his life's work.

For Eddie, the university has three defining features.

First, the university must be guided by ethical principles. It must use its location in society to take a stand against injustice, a moral force for good, and be guided by an ethics of caring for humanity, especially the oppressed, exploited, and victims of all forms of violence. For Eddie, this commitment to ethical principles of social justice must course through knowledge production, teaching, supervision, writing, and building democratic and socially-relevant institutions. He held himself to the same standards and lived the life he valued: he was a man of enormous integrity, an activist-scholar who was embedded in the social world, while also always remaining independent. He believed deeply in a transformative non-racialism. As his own scholarship demonstrates, concerns about social justice remained central to him, and he moved effortlessly across scales from local, to national, to regional, to continental, to global. For Eddie the point of a university was to make the world a better place through knowledge production and teaching the next generation. Eddie never shied away from taking a stand against injustice.

Second, the role of the university is to be engaged in the social issues of its time. It is not enough to simply do research delinked from the social world. The university must see itself as engaging the world. For Eddie, this was reflected in his fifty years of dedication to labour, both formal and informal, in South Africa, Africa and the world. Eddie was truly an internationalist. But it is also reflected in his extraordinary connections with his students, a microcosm of South Africa, his engaged and collaborative research projects that always went beyond the university gates to workplaces and communities in South Africa and beyond. It is also reflected in his willingness to engage new ideas. He grew with the times, always engaging new and cutting-edge ideas. He loved engaging students, colleagues, workers, and friends around their ideas about social problems and possible solutions. For instance, he incorporated the importance of the climate crisis and a deep just transition, as well as the deleterious effects of the digital world on formal and informal workers. Through building programmes like the Global Labour University he helped make university education available to workers, and building programmes like SWOP he made university research relevant to labour and social movements.

Third, a university must be committed to its various publics, both internal and external. For Eddie the academic public included colleagues, students, and the institution. So it's no surprise that he created the most vibrant and dynamic 'industrial sociology' programme perhaps in the world, training scores of students who went on to do extraordinary things; he built institutions beyond Sociology within Wits such as the Global Labour University programme, SWOP, and the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies.



Photo: Wits Sociology Department, 2023



He helped build and revitalise networks such as the South African Sociological Association, the Labour Research Committee in the International Sociological Association, the Global Labour Journal, the South African Labour Bulletin, the Chris Hani Institute and many more. He supervised close to 50 postgraduate students, taught tens of thousands of students, including hundreds of unionists over his long career.

He also saw the university's public beyond academia. For Eddie, because of the historical importance of labour in fighting against injustice and in building a democratic and just society, he dedicated much of his intellectual life to labour broadly conceived. For Eddie commitment was also expressed in loyalty. Eddie was loyal to the cause of building a better world, he was loyal to labour, to students, to colleagues, to friends, to institutions, to Wits, and to his family. This is demonstrated in his lifelong friendships with so many people. Once you got to know Eddie, you were a friend, a colleague, a comrade for life.

Perhaps most importantly, Eddie built bridges, listened to everyone, and found common ground. He never let any struggle or disagreement dehumanise him, and always remained committed to his values, the people around him, and the idea that academics, Wits University like all South African universities had a hugely important role to play in steering the world into a better future. Hundreds and hundreds of messages have poured in from scholars, activists, unions and workers' organisations, workers, students, colleagues, friends, and admirers from around the world.

The world will never be the same without Eddie, but he would want us to continue fighting for the values that shaped his life, and in particular a university that is ethical, engaged, and committed.

Go well our beloved Madala, our colleague, mentor, teacher, and friend.



Photo: Sociology Emeriti Professors Eddie Webster, Jackie Cock, Leah Gilbert, and Roger Southall, March 2023



On behalf of the Wits Sociology Department:

Bridget Kenny,
Ben Scully,
Christine Bischoff,
David Dickinson,
Devan Pillay,
Johannes Machinya,
Kezia Lewins,
Lorena Nunez Carrasco,
Mbuso Nkosi,
Michelle Williams,

Nirvana Pillay,
Obvious Katsaura,
Samuel Kariuki,
Shireen Ally,
Sriya Roy,
Tatenda Mukwedeya,
Thabang Sefalafala,
Josephine Mashaba,
Makhawukana Kwinika, and
Ingrid Chunilall

Sociology Department Associates:

Sarah Mosoetsa, and
Ran Greenstein

Emeriti Professors:

Roger Southall,
Leah Gilbert, and
Jackie Cock

— — — — —

Prof. Bridget Kenny
Department of Sociology
Wits University

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For Eddie Webster,

It has taken me a few days to believe that all that energy has left the world. I have known Eddie Webster for nearly 30 years. He was my boss at SWOP, the Sociology of Work Unit (later becoming the Society, Work and Politics Institute) at Wits from 1997 to 2002, and when I moved to the department of sociology thereafter, my Head of Department. He was my colleague, my co-author, and my friend.

He was a sounding board and a guide. He taught me how to be a teacher, how to be a sociologist (as I wasn't one). What he called 'critical engagement' was central to his approach to both. I came to South Africa with an interest in the labour movement. I found my way to SWOP after a few years at the Industrial Aid Society, a worker advice office, about when I might have quit my PhD. Instead, I was thrown into an active and heady research space in the late 1990s. We were identifying labour market shifts and explaining how labour processes were changing through the contradictions of democratisation and trade union buy-in, 'globalisation' and neoliberalism.

This was to become pathbreaking work, bringing together detailed studies of workplaces with shifting and, indeed, emergent working class politics. It remains grounding research for much later work on precarious employment. Not only did Eddie take our work seriously, but it influenced his own thinking and the questions that he turned to. This was an enduring quality of Eddie: as much as he taught his students, he was also always learning from them. He listened attentively, asked questions, challenged and very often got excited

about a connection with what he was engaging across the vast terrain of his own scholarship. In so doing, he treated us as fellow thinkers, together in pursuit of showing up inequalities and finding (for him, always) solutions. He was driven by boundless curiosity, ferocious intelligence and a kind of compassionate confidence that his way was correct.

Sometimes we fought with him, but he allowed that too. I fought a good deal with Eddie in these years, mostly around differing views on the effects of the changes we were documenting on worker and trade union capacity to have a meaningful 'voice' (a buzz word at the time). He always encouraged me to make my arguments. Anyone who sat with him in his office in SWOP would encounter his style of discussion about one's work. He would jump up, pull a book off his bookshelf, and open it to a specific page and paragraph—point to it, shoving it toward you and indicating, 'This is it!'. I've often wondered what it must have felt like to have been an unasked-for father-figure to so many people.

Eddie's energy led multiple projects and connections with trade unions in South and Southern Africa, and across the world. He reconfigured many activist-academic spaces, such as RC44, the labour movements section of the International Sociological Association, where he worked to refocus attention to labour and work in the global South, to expand its membership to younger and more diverse scholars and to reconfigure its programme to include informal, casual and precarious labour, and most importantly, for him, to track how workers and their collective organisation and movements fought back. The first conference I ever attended was the 1998

ISA in Montreal, where we presented in RC44 our paper, 'Eroding the core', an examination of these phenomena in South Africa and an argument about the implications for trade union and labour politics. In this meeting, he was elected to the RC44 board as secretary, becoming president in the next term, which ushered in an incredibly vibrant period of growth, debate and transnational connection for the section.

At the same time, he was a lecturer in sociology and teaching his 3rd year course, the Sociology of Work. He brought me into his course to teach some of it. I would take over the course later when I got a job in the department. His influence remains over it even as we changed much: on how to engage students, on how to think through contemporary issues, and on how to always hold dear the stakes in question: what is the significance of understanding changing forms of work and labour and how does this site of interrogation open up historical questions of colonial violence, enduring issues of capitalist reproduction and deepening contests of life, belonging and future worlds imagined.

In the early 2000s, Wits restructured, and its Senior Executive Team and then-VC proposed to outsource the cleaning and maintenance staff. Already working on precisely the issues of outsourced labour, several of us from SWOP and colleagues from sociology, politics and history formed a concerned academics group and offered a report critiquing the strategy of outsourcing, an argument put forward by a consultancy firm hired by several universities at the time. These events occurred around the time that the Urban Futures conference happened at Wits, which debated the Johannesburg Metro's own plans for restructuring, including privatisation of services and outsourcing of jobs. Some will remember this is also when the Anti-Privatisation Forum was formed. There were big protests at Wits, bringing together these conjoined issues. Two of us younger staff members protested, raising the ire of the VC. Eddie told us this story later: The VC called Eddie to rein in his staff, threatening that he would bring us up on disciplinary charges for protesting. With the force

of moral certitude that so characterised Eddie, he defended us and our academic freedom.

This was a difficult moment for him. Much was going on, including university pressure on SWOP's future. He was also trying to engage management behind the scenes. It was not easy, then, when his staff chose their own avenues of critique, but he never wavered, always principled and always absolutely firm on where he stood – to defend our right to engage the university around its policies and actions and our right to protest. He had a long history of such interventions, testifying to and defending workers and students right to contest injustices on campus and beyond.

When I looked back through emails and messages from him over the last few years, there are quick notes and reminders for lunches in Norwood, and streams of Eddie sending me links to articles and references that he thought I would enjoy or should read. There are concerned queries about students who he continued to mentor, and congratulations to me for pieces that I published. He always kept up with what was coming out, and made note of it and broadcast others' work, always keen to keep up debate and discussion and always engaged with his own constantly evolving questioning. We co-wrote a second piece twenty years after our first article for the first volume of a new journal, *Work in the Global Economy*, making the rather cheeky claim (at least in South African debate) for 'The return of the labour process'. We charted the developments of those intervening years through so many great colleagues' and students' work to the present, where he and his collective at the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies (SCIS) critically engage work on the gig economy, new technologies and the future of work, coming full circle back to his classic study of technology change, skill, race and labour in *Cast in a Racial Mould*. For Eddie, his first book as much as his studies of informal labour and his recent work on digital labour, always centred how these shifts in labour process, work organisation and labour market dynamics related to working class efforts to combat forms of exploitation and wider oppressions. This was his life's work.



Eddie, I can only say that I would not be the lecturer or scholar that I am without you. I may have gone in some different directions – he once read a piece of mine and said, ‘you were always a bit “literary” weren’t you,’ and smiled at me with wry twinkling eyes. In the last WhatsApp conversation we had, he asked me to send a photograph to him with both my daughter and his grandson at a Johannesburg Free Palestine/Ceasefire in Gaza protest, marching over Mandela Bridge.

He has built a future through so many now. Thank you for allowing me into your life, Eddie, and for all the good fights that you continued.





Dr Thabang Sefalafala

GLU and Department of Sociology

Wits University



Tribute to Prof. Eddie Webster

Dear Prof.

I was heartbroken and overcome by a great sense of disbelief and grief at the news of your sudden passing last week Tuesday, 5 March 2024. I received a forwarded WhatsApp message at 18:12 from one of the groups, asking me if I knew if it is true or not, immediately, I called your number but it did not go through, then I called one of my beloved colleagues, who later confirmed and we burst into tears over the phone. It was the saddest, saddest news.

I first met you officially at SWOP in 2011, after writing to you seeking for a supervisor for my Masters research. You were, at the time, running the decent work cluster program in SWOP and Guy's Standing's book, the precariat had just recently come out. We sat in your office (SWOP office) one afternoon talking about the precariat; who they are and how to develop a social portrait of the precariat in the global south. You tasked me with identifying a sector, and after a few deliberations we settled on the private security industry and explored the nature of working conditions and lived experiences of private security guards in Johannesburg, which later became a jointly written journal paper (*Working as a Security Guard: the Limits of Professionalisation in a Low Status Occupation, South African Review of Sociology*).

We had also been part of a reading group that met once a month at your house. The reading group was called; Evening of the book. How it worked is that a book title and chapters were selected, and then SWOP would buy the copies. You selected for the night (26 July 2011) a reading of the introduction and the Chapter 14; the independent woman which made for a wonderful evening of discussion, drinks

and lots of laughter. The reading group was largely made up of SWOP fellows at the time working on various projects. They were: Themba Masondo, Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, Musa Malabela, Asanda Benya, Crispin Chinguno, Tatenda Mukwedeya, Kathrine Joynt and others. Visiting your house, that is when I first met your partner, the renowned historian and biographer of Oliver Tambo, Luli Callinicos.

Fast forward, after completing my Masters, SWOP offered me a PhD fellowship where you and Prof. Dunbar Moodie jointly supervised me. As I recall when you were appointed in the department of Sociology in the 1970s, Dunbar was in the department at the time. He later left for the U.S where he stayed until his retirement. The supervisory meetings were formative for me, often you and Dunbar would engage in a debate, from which I would learn a lot about labour history and research. I was so privileged to work with two great South African intellectuals.

You always had impressionable aphorisms and phrases that you shared; you encouraged students undertaking research to 'live with a puzzle', by which you meant research is like a big jigsaw puzzle which the researcher is tasked with assembling. You saw research as a journey full of surprises. The other one was 'acre by acre' that one advances towards ploughing a whole field (a goal) by ploughing an acre at a time. Another one was 'what you see depends on which side of the mountain you stand', this one referred to one's position in relation to the struggle against social injustice.

You saw Wits University as the intellectual home of the left, as it was here that Nelson Mandela studied in the 1940s, and Robert Sobukwe taught, it was here that the new labour relations system for South Africa was designed through the Centre for



Applied Legal Studies (CALs).

Prof. Eddie, you were a foremost South African sociologist, a brilliant scholar, mentor, colleague and a confidant to me and others. You had a big heart, and most importantly, you were a good human being. You dedicated your life to the struggles of the oppressed since the apartheid days, the Durban strikes of the 1970s. You studied and collaborate with the labour movement, the unemployed, the informal workers, and most recently, platform workers in the gig economy. You collaborated with your students. You approached your work through an approach you called 'critical engagement', which requires the researcher to remain committed to a social science rooted in social justice while avoiding being drawn into the politics of organisations that one is studying (i.e. trade unions, political parties etc.). Your approach was not only local, or continental, it was global; you were an internationalist (new internationalism, a transnational activist, a rooted cosmopolitan) in the truest sense.

You were an institution builder, and remained loyal to Wits where you worked for over 45 years. You really put your energy and heart into building institutions and publications focusing mainly on the struggles of workers and the labour movement. You and others founded the Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP), the Chris Hani Institute (CHI), and the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies (SCIS), and you also played a part in establishing programmes such as Global Labour University (GLU) and publications such as the South African Labour Bulletin (SALB), Global Labour Journal (GLJ) to name a few. I believe the institutions, programmes and publications that you built changed the face of Wits University and placed it at the 'coal face' of international struggles for social justice. You were driven by the vision to build interdisciplinary projects around a given subject (labour, inequality etc.) and to create a space for 'critical engagement' in the world around us. Eddie believed in building networks across the global south drawing on people from South America, South Asia and Africa to come together in a spirit of collaboration.

Prof. Eddie worked extremely hard, and he was very organised (always carried a diary, and taught me to make it a habit of my own), and meticulous in everything that he did. He published a lot. But, what remained central to Eddie was us (his students across different generations) to whom he generously gave his time, energy and ideas. Your dedication and commitment to helping others is your enduring legacy. One always felt seen, heard and valued by Eddie Webster.

Madala, I would not be where I am today (scholar and lecturer) if it was not for you. The belief you had in me, the understanding, patience, care and love you so generously gave carried me through all these years. You were my No. 1 cheerleader. Your impact on my intellectual development and my life is immense and permanent. I am a proud 'Websterian'; a beneficiary of your ideas, wisdom and vision.

Last year, you had two big Jamborees. First, in October, it was your Present As History Workshop, which was later followed that same evening by the launch of your latest book with Lynford Dor, *Recasting Workers' Power: Work and Inequality* in

the Shadow of the Digital Age. In November, we celebrated SWOP's 40th Anniversary at Hofmeyer house where SWOP breakfasts were ordinarily held. As one reflects back on these events, you actually gathered all your close associates across different generations to celebrate with you. When I looked around the room, I saw many faces that had played a pivotal role in my journey at Wits, and I realized, I knew them because of you, you shared your networks.

You left us when we least expected Prof, but you

played your part and laid a strong intellectual foundation. In my heart, I believe you finished your race. What is left for us is to reflect on what you worked on, to reflect on what you meant, and to realize that we are armed to continue building on the foundations rooted in the struggles of the working class.

Thank you for everything Prof.

Rest in Power, our beloved Sociology Madala.

Yours truly, Thabang Sefalafala

Prof. Imraan Valodia
Pro Vice-Chancellor and
Director of the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies (SCIS)
Wits University

OBITUARY: The 'Sociology Madala' who shaped the way we think about the world

Eddie Webster was the ultimate socially engaged academic who played a key role in the labour movement

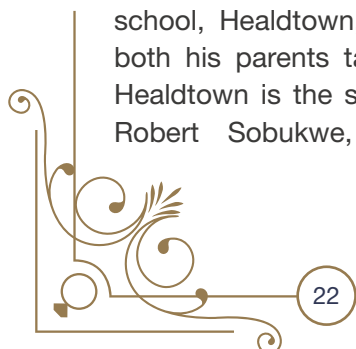
I heard of Eddie Webster's passing shortly after 5pm on Tuesday March 5. Until that moment, though he was at almost 82 by far the oldest member of the staff at the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies (SCIS) at Wits University, it had not once crossed my mind that he would not be with us forever. He was that sort of person: always effervescent, always intellectually curious, always engaged in the university, always engaged in social change, never quiet.

Edward Webster was born on March 29 1942 and spent his early childhood at the famous Methodist school, Healdtown, in the Eastern Cape, where both his parents taught just after World War 2. Healdtown is the school where Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, Archie Mafeje and other

luminaries of the struggle were educated. Eddie's father resigned from Healdtown in the early 1950s, but this upbringing influenced his own trajectory into education and liberation politics.

My own connection to Eddie, indirectly, goes back to my childhood, and another intellectual giant – Rick Turner. Foszia Fisher, Rick Turner's then partner, is my cousin. I have vivid memories, as a young child, of Turner being at the Valodia family home in Greyville, Durban. In the early 1970s, a white man at our Indian family home was not an everyday occurrence.

My dad had a very special relationship with Foszia and Turner's murder by the apartheid state in 1978 had a huge effect on our family. However, it was only when I was a student in the early 1980s, and drawn into supporting workers' struggles in Durban, that I began to fully understand the significance of Turner's work and the importance to SA's future trajectory of the intellectual group that cohered around him and Foszia.



Eddie was a key player in that milieu, which not only saw the possibilities for challenging apartheid and creating a new society, but also acted on the imperative to build organisations of workers to reshape the workplace, and the social and economic fabric of SA. Eddie and I spoke endlessly about the importance of what he called “the Durban moment”.

The 1973 Durban strikes, the rise of the trade union movement and, somewhat associated with it, the connections to Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement, were important turning points in SA history. It was a period in which Eddie was a key actor, and which he brilliantly captured in his writings.

My first real engagement with Eddie was in the late 1980s, when I worked at the Trade Union Research Project (TURP) at the University of Natal. TURP and the Sociology of Work Programme (SWOP), which Eddie had formed and led with distinction at Wits University, provided research and other technical support to the nascent trade union movement. I was at the time doing some work for the unions on the casualisation of work in the retail industry. Extended and Sunday shopping had just been introduced and the unions were grappling with retailers’ use of casual labour for extended and Sunday shopping hours (yes, there was a time when retailers closed at 1pm on Saturdays and only opened at 8am on Monday!).

Being a young economist, I presented my research, emphasising the empirical

data. Eddie, whose task it was to comment on my paper, reprimanded me for not having a theory and promptly drew a sketch on the chalkboard to give me one. It’s a lesson I have never forgotten and one which I am sure all his students will identify with.

One of Eddie’s greatest and most consistent contributions is his insight into power — not just who has it and who does not, but more important, how it may be possible for those without power to reshape the balance of power by collective organisation and action. This goes all the way back to his first book, *Cast in a Racial Mould*, on deskilling in SA’s metal industry. It goes all the way forward to his last book, *Recasting Workers’ Power: Work and Inequality in the Shadow of the Digital Age*. And it’s found in all of his work outside the

university too — from the early formation of trade unions to working with Uber drivers in the digital age.

It was a life’s work that not only sought to understand how politics, economics, technology and skills shape the workplace, but also how collective action by workers can shape and reshape wider economic and social trajectories.

A second hallmark of his work was his ability to use our context in SA and in what has become known as the Global South to understand social and economic power in our world, and to shape how others, including the North, understand power in the global economy. For Eddie, academic research was not about replicating work done in the leading institutions in the North, and adapting it to our context.

The Southern Centre for Inequality Studies
Mourns the passing of Prof Edward Webster

We at the SCIS are deeply saddened by the passing of Professor Edward Webster. Affectionately known at SCIS as Sociology Madala. Professor Webster was a distinguished academic, notable activist, dedicated mentor, and friend to many. He played a central role in the establishment of the SCIS in 2017 as our first Interim Director. In subsequent years, as distinguished research professor, he continued his work as an indefatigable academic, teacher, and colleague. Even well into his formal retirement, Prof. Webster brought tireless enthusiasm, curiosity, and energy to his work at the SCIS, and he will be very sorely missed by us all.

Prof Edward Webster, 1942-2024

WITS UNIVERSITY

SOUTHERN CENTRE FOR INEQUALITY STUDIES

Rather it was to use insights from our own context to shape global challenges.

A third feature of his life's work was his deep appreciation of the university, and the links between academic rigour and advancing economic and social rights. He was the absolute exemplar of a socially engaged academic.

All of these features of Eddie's work and intellectual leadership, shaped the formation and research agenda of SCIS, where he spent the last nine years of his more than five decades at Wits.

Eddie, who on social media had taken on the title "Sociology Madala", had a highly productive 82 years. But, sadly, two projects remain uncompleted. First, his next intellectual project was to deal with how we understand the SA nation. In his usual provocative way, it was to answer the question: when does a settler stop being a settler? Second, he stopped working full-time in December 2023 to spend more time with his beloved life partner and collaborator Luli Callinicos. That was just two months ago. He left us much too soon.

Hambe Kahle Sociology Madala.

Prof. Michael Burawoy
Sociology Department
University of California – Berkeley

MY TIMES WITH EDDIE WEBSTER

I first met Edward Webster was in 1968. It was in the playground of King David's School – a Jewish school in the Northern suburbs. Its teachers were known for their dissenting voices. Eddie was a new teacher and I was staying with another teacher at King David's – Luli Zampetakis as she was then, now Luli Callinicos – the famous social historian, author of popular working class histories of South Africa and renowned biographer of ANC leaders.

Eddie and I got to be good friends. I so loved his company and I thought he loved mine. But I was wrong. He kept on visiting me because I was staying with Luli. It was Luli he was interested in. I was the excuse! I now like to think that I became one conduit of their remarkable relationship, lasting nearly 60 years: Eddie the turbulent windmill, Luli the quiet voice of reason. A perfect complement. I love them both.

But let me return to 1968. I had just graduated from university in England and I had found employment

as a near illiterate journalist in Johannesburg at the Verligte magazine, Newscheck. Even in those days, long before he was a sociologist, Eddie had a taste for crazy escapades. I remember how he led me to the "Republic of the Transkei" – at that time a showpiece Bantustan. After an unsuccessful attempt to talk with political leaders, Eddie strode through Umtata at night, knocking on their doors, and we had some interesting nighttime conversations. This must have been the beginning of his critical engagement. I never laughed so much as when I was with Eddie.

I was lost in South Africa. After six months I left. Eddie dropped me at the Great North Road to hitchhike to Zambia where I would spend the next 4 years. Over the subsequent 20 years I would see Eddie first in the UK and then in the US. In that way I kept up with his relations to Rick Turner, his participation in the Durban strikes, his move to Wits, the formation of SWOP, his battles in the university as well as his immersion in the trenches of the burgeoning union movement.

I would not return to South Africa until 1990 when the ANC boycott was lifted. Blade Nzimande, then a budding sociologist, invited me to address ASSA (Association of Sociologists of Southern Africa). That was a fateful visit. South Africa was shifting into transition mode, Mandela had marched into freedom. I went with Eddie and Luli to witness a celebration of the unbanning of the SACP at a mass rally in Soweto, the unveiling of their underground leaders. His articles of the time captured the dilemmas of exiting from apartheid, exiting without a plan. Though he did have an inordinate faith in the labor movement.

It was Eddie who showed me what sociology could be. He inspired me and many others to redefine the meaning of sociology, giving it a political engagement, but without losing its integrity as an academic enterprise. Eddie led SWOP – a major support for rising South African labor movement, the founding of the South African Labor Bulletin, entering into the great registration debate, the training of shop stewards, the monitoring strikes during the Emergency of the 1980s, the launching of SWOP breakfasts. And so much more.

Eddie visited me in California in 2000. Hearing of my depressing exploits in Russia, he insisted I return to South Africa. And so I did. I watched Eddie, negotiating the complicated terrain of postapartheid South Africa – holding, for example, onto a stance between Anglo American, funding research into the Deep Mine Project, and his community of researchers revealing the underside of this capitalist behemoth. And he had a rare capacity to help us all understand the significance of our work, running, for example, with Sizwe Phakathi's discovery of "planisa" the Fanagolo word that miners used to express the necessary adaptation to the uncertainties and dangers of mining. Suddenly Eddie had fun discovering Planisa in every corner of South African life.

Driven by an insatiable curiosity, Eddie would accompany his students to their field sites – something I would never dream of doing – a true partner in their research. When, for several years, Eddie invited me to come to Wits to work with PhD students, I naturally followed his method, accompanying Sepetla, Maria, Kezia, Tamuka, Khayaat and others into former Bantustans, townships, universities, traveling as far as Zimbabwe.



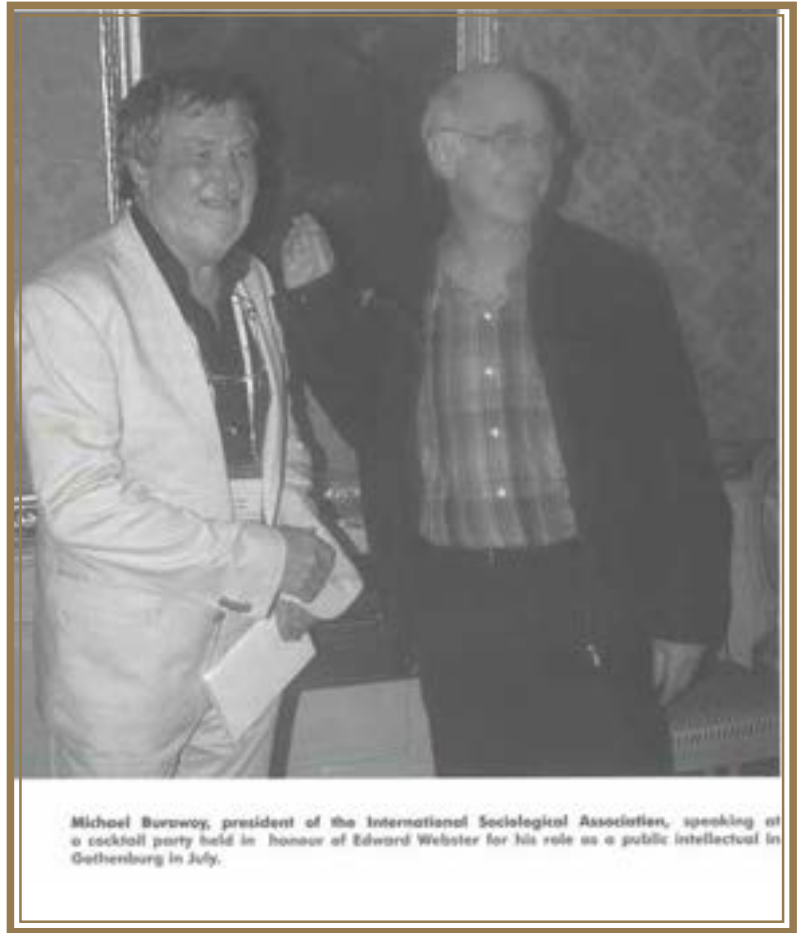
Eddie embraced allcomers – he always opened his door to Berkeley students – Gay Seidman, Mona Younis, Michelle Williams, Marcel Paret, Jeff Sallaz, Zach Levenson. He showed them the same enthusiasm and insatiable curiosity about their work as he did for his own students. Working with Karl von Holdt and his devoted and lifelong friend, Jackie Cock, and such students as Sarah Mosoetsa, who went on to greater things, SWOP became a global center of engaged research. Eddie became a global figure, leading the expansion of global labor studies through his participation in the International Sociological Association and founding the thriving Global Labor Journal. In these last few days tributes to his influence have ricocheted across many continents.

Turning to the present. Last October many of us witnessed the glorious launching of his last book, again a collaborative venture. It harked back to *Cast in the Racial Mold*, continuing his pioneering research into the ties between labor process and labor movement. Ruth Castel-Branco reminded me of the question, just a few months ago, that was consuming him - when is a settler no longer a settler. He was thinking of himself and his own family history, raising the question in his own

mind's eye – as he continually did – of his own place in South Africa. Eddie never stopped. His heart beat faster and deeper, until it simply couldn't keep up with him.

Eddie had many friends – he had the gift of making everyone feel that they were so very special. I think of him as living out the dilemmas of communism in a capitalist world, creating devoted communities around him, including his family, demanding that we keep up with him, whether it was his over-stimulated mind or his jogging body. He was an inveterate and instinctive optimist; his sociology of hope carried us through what often seemed to be hopeless times. He taught us, there is always a way forward. I can't imagine the world without Eddie. He was a permanent fixture. He has now left us with an impossible task – to fill the void he has left.

Michael Burawoy, March 13, 2024



Professor Edward Webster
29 March 1942 - 5 March 2024





Society, Work and Politics Institute

Wits University (SWOP)



Dear Colleagues, Students, Comrades, and Friends

Celebrating the Life of Professor Edward Webster. .. Mourning our Loss, Embracing our Inheritance

Last Tuesday evening we learned of the passing of Prof. Edward Webster (Eddie to many of us). It seemed unreal. It was certainly unexpected ... untimely ... We had just celebrated 40 years of the life of SWOP (the Society, Work and Politics Institute) with Eddie in November last year ...

In 1983, as a member of the sociology department at Wits, Prof Edward Webster led the establishment of the Sociology of Work Programme, a research group in which SWOP's roots lie. This was ten years after the 1973 Durban strikes, a significant moment in Eddie's intellectual life and in the development of a tradition of scholarship that came to shape the study of labour in sociology, and the strategic orientation of political struggles in South Africa. While the industrial workplace and the trade union sat at the centre of Eddie's early research and imagination of struggles for social change, this would transform over time to grapple with the changing character of work as a result of neoliberalisation and technological developments, related shifts in the trade union movement and forms of organising amongst workers, and new possibilities for

change thrown up by new struggles in South Africa and globally. Reflecting recently on SWOP's research Eddie wrote that "rooting the sociological endeavour in the struggles of working people was an essential source of analytical strength" for the institute and "an expression of the research team's commitment ... to a more egalitarian society".

Across his rich and immense body of work, Eddie mobilised an approach he called "critical engagement". Insisting on the autonomy of the researcher, it at the same time called for a self-reflexivity on their part. This would prove to be increasingly important as lines of political allegiance blurred and relationships produced in and by the process of knowledge production became more contested and questioned over time. Eddie's research also made experiences in South Africa part of a global research endeavour and conversation alongside making significant contributions to the development of sociology as a discipline and teaching in its global community. In this, his commitment to students was remarkable, with many playing leading roles in different sectors of society today. This speaks also to the commitment demanded by Eddie (of himself and others who worked with him) to ensure that knowledge produced does not remain in the academic space nor is it to be conducted solely for the purposes of study in this realm, but that it should translate across and between multiple arenas, including policy and legal processes, as well as developments within movements and other groups fighting for change ... to indeed understand the world in order to change it ...

This is our collective inheritance ... a debt to embrace ...


Fikile Masikane
SCIS and Dept. of Sociology
Wits University


A letter to Madala

Madala... this is painful. Our last meeting on the 26th February 2024 was very heavy. Firstly, you had confirmed that we meet at 9am since you will go for a swim in the morning and have family responsibilities in the morning. We both arrived at Bootleggers before 8am. Without even noticing we carried on with the meeting/catch up session. You expressed your annoyance with the fact that Ba Pita had closed, in our meeting over the years you enjoyed the outdoor space and the fresh Laffa from Ba Pita. "I suspect Bootleggers moving here, put them out of business." We began with our usual life update and the progress that I am making on the PhD. Finish, and move on to other things. Four hours later, we concluded the revisions of the article. In classic Eddie style, you told me where the records of all our work is kept and the books to note; cutting you off, I say "hai Madala", you are not going anywhere, we still have a good ten years with you. After this meeting I was drained. This was unusual. Fast forward to Friday the 1st March 2024, you write to me, "thanks for the catch up session, please see the article revisions, we have made significant changes from what it was before. Contact Karin, for some editing and send it to Uma by the 8th March, okay? Little did I know that this would be our last conversation.

I have worked with Eddie over the past four years on the Food Courier project. A research position that was always filled with Sociology lessons, in the office that we shared. To much of your shock at times, when I did not know certain readings: what were you learning in Sociology, followed by a lecture with notes written on the white board. "You are at the beginning of your career, and I am at the end of mine..." you always reminded especially when I had missed a deadline or two.

Eddie was sure the comedian. The transition in 2020 during Covid frustrated him immensely. Social beings, we are social beings! Isolation is not good for anyone.

We disagreed, a lot! The different views on several things, the story of the bell, lived experiences, Fanon, many, many things, yet you always allowed me space to express my thoughts and ideas, even though you did not agree. It is good to have different views, encouraged, just always remember to voice them out in a way that will allow you to be heard, that is the point, right?

Thank you for all the lessons, countless lessons and stories. A great sociologist that has cultivated us to become great sociologists. Eddie, you saw me, you heard me, and you gave me endless opportunities. What a privilege. At the end of the research report on the gig economy you said: "Fikile....I am going to make you famous, we laughed at this but true to your word, you did. The radio interviews, the presentations, podcasts, forums, interviews: to which you always cared to share and update with the SCIS communications office under the subject title: "Fikile becomes famous".

Above all, Madala you became a friend to me. The trip to Hogsback, on your 80th birthday was sure the highlight of this friendship. An unforgettable adventure it certainly was.

I am comforted by this poem that you always read:



Keep Ithaka always in your mind,
Arriving there is what you are destined for
But don't hurry the journey at all,
Better if it lasts for years, so you are old by the time you reach the island,
Wealthy with all you have gained on the way,
Not expecting Ithaka to make you rich,
Ithaka gave you a marvellous journey,
Without her you would not have set out
She has nothing left to give you now,
And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.

Wise as you will have become, so full of experience you'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.



You gave us everything you could with the time we spent with you. We are full of experience and memories that we never forget. We have all gained a powerful ancestor, who will always advocate for us.

Siyabonga Madala! Lala uphumule, uwfezile umsebenzi wakho!



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Warren McGregor
GLU Wits Programme Coordinator
Wits University

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Hi Prof,

It is a testament to your skill, kindness, humanity, and no lack of genius that such have been the tributes paid you thus far. My effort here will be inadequate in attesting to the incredible impact you have had on me.

Most importantly, I do hope that your family – Luli, your children, grandchildren and descendants yet to come, may read this and find some small comfort in these words. To you all, I offer my most sincere condolences. Your Eddie has lived a life most extraordinary – a loss we share and mourn deeply, but an example which we must and will continue to celebrate and strive to emulate, as impossible as that seems.

Since 2013, my introductions of you, Prof, to our 10 GLU Engage short course cohorts and their subsequent graduations, left you lamenting that they sounded like obituaries. You were, however, a living archive of incredible knowledge and praxis. As such, every single word of praise and acknowledgment therein had been richly deserved. It now feels so painful writing these. However, rest assured that your memory and influence will not be lost to future student groups.

Many others have known you for longer, more intimately and

collegially. They have spoken to your work and life. The tsunami of tributes that have flooded social and formal media, institutional websites, print and emails are testament to the most amazing impact you have had on the lives of countless individuals – labour activists, students, academics – worker organisations, political groups and University-linked research groups globally.

I had the privilege of working side-by-side with you for a decade, studying you intently as the most engaging classroom operator I have ever experienced. Your ability to convey complex sociological concepts, many of which you created, in ways so accessible to non-academic

ears was truly life-changing. Why use 100 words, when a simple phrase of five effectively directed would do just as well...indeed. Our alumni still recall with the most fondness you removing their shoes to explain the nature of the globalised economy! And then...my favourite part of your class...before a break or close of day, you'd leave us, quite dramatically, with a conundrum to ponder – one which would leave the class roaring with their desire to want to continue their seminar and conversation with you.

I was devastated to have heard the news of your passing. I only hoped that you had not suffered much pain, and that you



were with a loved one. It has been heart-breaking returning to the Wits office this past week. Visions of your steadfast gait, you purposefully moving from one meeting to another, one seminar to the other, lead to a sad nostalgia (is nostalgia ever not, in the final analysis?). However, you will continue to grace these corridors for as long as they exist. You are its modern foundation, after all!

I just wish I had more time to learn from you.

You taught me to think deeper, more clearly and empirically. To be generous with others. I loved nothing more than our meetings, and any chance to veer off topic and ask you for your thoughts, direction, stories. To listen to you was exhilarating. I differed from you ideologically, but such was your generosity, you were one of the only colleagues who seriously engaged my anarchist-syndicalist root. That you, of all people, took the time to actually listen to me, will continue to shape the way I would like to engage with others – with honesty, empathy, integrity and critically.

You have helped shape my working life. Bloody hell, Prof, I doubt I would be doing this amazing work, if it wasn't for you. It was the idea of our Transfer trade union and alumni research projects you created and we developed over 10 years that has allowed me the most amazing experiences working with unions and labour activists on our continent and abroad. Did I ever convince you about naming the approach

“Power Mapping”? Oh well...at least I got to write an article with you. This was a singular honour, and something I will always be so very proud of.

Most importantly, you focused my desire and capacity to work with workers and their organisations. Your influence has only deepened my utter belief in the working class and their agency. You have taught me to be led by what takes place within organisations of the class and the mechanics of the work process. Your work ethic was astounding, and is unmatched. Yet, as daunting as emulating you would be, you have taught me to trust myself and the abilities I have. I just hope to contribute what I can and must as a Wits Industrial Sociology alum, and live up to this wonderful challenge you, above all else, moulded.

This tribute, hopefully not too maudlin, began in tears, but, as with all my interactions with you, Prof, it has left me energised and striving to meet your example.

I thank you, so so much, for the immense contributions you have made to improving the lives of the most exploited and oppressed, here at home, and around the world.

Your student and with greatest respect, gratitude and admiration,

Warren





Dr Ruth Castel-Branco

SCIS

Wits University



It has taken me several days to process Prof Eddie Webster's sudden and untimely passing. This month, he would have turned 82. There was so much he still wanted to do – including spending time with his beloved wife Luli Callinicos, watching his grandchildren grow up, and embarking on a new area of research, inspired by ongoing debates on the national question in South Africa and a desire to connect these to his own heritage in the Eastern Cape. “When does a settler cease to be settler?” he would ask, with a mischievous glint in his eye, “Are you a settler?”. Yes, he was masterful at shopping ideas around.

Eddie worked up to the very end. Indeed, today we were slated to launch our themed issue in *Work in the Global Economy* on digital labour platforms and emerging worker struggles in the global South. Among his many contributions, he played a critical role in developing the Future of Work(ers) research agenda at the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies - which he helped found - published almost fifty articles with over thirty collaborators between 2020 and 2024 and the book “Recasting Workers’ Power: Work and Inequality in the Shadow of the Digital Age.” The spike in his citation index did not go unnoticed.

The book's title was evocative of his first manuscript, *Cast in a Racial Mould*, which posed a challenge to Braverman's deskilling thesis. But rather than focusing on male wage-workers in South Africa's foundries, as he had initially done, it moved beyond the industrial workplace to explore how technological innovation was reshaping the labour process, conditions of work and workers' struggles in the formal and informal economy across the African continent. By focusing on where work was being done and struggles were taking place, he challenged millenarian predictions of the end of labour and reminded us that technological innovation is a contested terrain, the outcome of

which is neither linear nor predetermined.

Eddie was particularly interested in what workers could do to strengthen their bargaining power, whether through traditional trade unions or other forms of organization. Perhaps it is for this reason that he was so drawn to the Power Resources Approach as a heuristic device. He got some flak for this because the focus on workers' agency tended to overlook the structural limitations imposed by capital. But then again, in the absence of revolution this “it's not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters” approach may not have been entirely unwarranted - and as Eddie always reminded me, he was ultimately a social democrat.

Despite his long-life commitment to the South African labour movement, Eddie was an internationalist at heart, who overcame South African exceptionalism. He collaborated with labour scholars and workers' organizations across the globe, preferring to carve his niche in global labour sociology rather than area studies. He published in multiple languages and even wrote one of the most insightful analyses of the Mozambican trade union movement that I've ever read! He continued to conduct fieldwork until last year, when we went to Kenya together, at the invitation of the Transport Workers' Union.

As the myriad of beautiful tributes highlight, Eddie is a living legacy. Driven, generous, curious, and courageous he was a role model for so many generations. I will miss our catch up drinks in Norwood. But I will carry forward the many lessons he taught me about how to craft a meaningful academic life: from the imperative of critical engagement, to the benefits of collective fieldwork, to the value of answering emails promptly and following through on commitments.

Hamba Kahle Eddie. And I hope that the university leaves your email account open ;)



Karl von Holdt

Senior Researcher, Society Work and Politics Institute

Wits University



Edward Webster: South African intellectual, teacher, activist, a man of great energy and integrity, and the life and soul of any party. One of the pioneer scholar-activists at Wits. <https://k54.pl/8ORRI5h>

Eddie Webster (82), sociologist and emeritus professor at the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, who died on 5 March 2024, lived a huge life, applying himself to many different arenas with great energy and insight.

His achievements are quite extraordinary. He was an intellectual, a teacher, a leader, an activist for social change, a builder of institutions, a rugby player and jogger, a man of great energy and integrity, and the life and soul of any party.

As an intellectual and activist he was always independent and critical, and always engaged, whether working with trade unions or with South Africa's new democratic government. It was important to get your hands dirty working for change, he always said, but as important to retain your autonomy and intellectual integrity. This held for the university itself, an institution to which he was wholly committed but at the same time found deeply disappointing when it came to social justice. His life was shaped by these kinds of tensions.

Eddie was one of that pioneering generation of scholar-activists at the university, white academics who identified with and supported the black resistance movement, and who saw the world in new ways and pioneered the production of new knowledge: his close colleague, feminist and environmental sociologist Jacklyn Cock, anthropologist and democratic activist David Webster (assassinated in 1989), and distinguished historian Phil Bonner.

Eddie inspired generations of us with his vision and practice of critically engaged scholarship – not only in South Africa, but across the world.

Independent streak

In 1986, believing that the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) was out of touch with the majority of South Africans, he drove an investigation called the Perspectives on Wits with his colleagues. They explored the views of trade unionists and community activists about the university. The university had agreed to fund this investigation. But it was unhappy with the results. These revealed that the institution's own narrative about its liberal opposition to apartheid was not shared by black South Africans, who saw it as serving white and corporate interests.

A few years earlier, at a time of great repression of unions, he and Phil Bonner had attempted to set up a worker education programme on campus. But the university refused to let it happen. The university's main funders, such as Anglo American, would have been greatly displeased by such a programme – a nice illustration of the point made in the Perspectives document.

A decade later the indomitable Eddie was able to establish a branch of the Global Labour University at Wits, and bring trade unionists into the heart of the institution. He was not someone to give up easily.

Insatiable curiosity

Eddie worked closely with South Africa's emerging trade union movement in the mid-1970s. At the time black workers were a tightly controlled source of cheap labour for South Africa's booming industrial economy, and the unions were not recognised

legally and suffered severe repression by employers and the state together. Eddie believed that a strong trade union movement democratically controlled by workers would be a powerful force for change.

He contributed to educational programmes for trade unionists, advocating for the recognition of the unions whenever he could. He co-founded the South African Labour Bulletin, which served as a forum for the interaction between academics and trade unionists, and the Industrial Education Institute with his comrade Rick Turner and others. Turner was assassinated by the apartheid government in 1978.

Eddie went on to support the unions, and conduct research with and for them, his entire life. Generations of union shop stewards and organisers knew him through his support, teaching and research, and he was widely loved and revered as “comrade Prof”.

As an intellectual Eddie was insatiably curious about the world and how it worked and about new possibilities emerging for progressive change. While the sociology classics were a foundation for his thinking, he kept up to date with new literature and ideas.

He founded Industrial Sociology at Wits and established the Sociology of Work Unit (now the Society, Work and Politics Institute SWOP) as a research unit in the early 1980s as a way of stimulating labour research and deepening his work with unions. The unit organised and financed research, held seminars and workshops, provided a home for students, and increasingly collaborated with colleagues at other universities and overseas.

Eddie loved working with others, whether students or colleagues or trade unionists. He knew that ideas arose from wide reading, discussions and interactions, and frequently said “there is no such thing as an original idea”. For its students, staff, colleagues and associates SWOP stood out as a place of vibrant intellectual exchange and curiosity about each other’s work: it was an intellectual home and a place of comradeship and critique that felt unique in the university.

Academic and teaching legacy

Eddie was also a great teacher, bringing all of his passion for ideas and his vivid sense of history and change and struggle into the classroom, exciting students about the life of the intellect and the life of struggle. At SWOP he established the first internship programme for black postgraduate students to support and encourage them in what they often experienced as a hostile environment.

Eddie regularly undertook large-scale research projects and recruited numbers of students to participate in field research. This was another learning opportunity, where students immersed themselves in the collective quest for knowledge and began to see themselves as researchers.

In the midst of a multitude of projects, Eddie remained committed to his academic work, publishing a great volume and range of articles and books, and achieving honours and recognition globally.

His first book, *Cast in a Racial Mould*, based on his PhD, provided the intellectual foundation for the new discipline of industrial sociology in South Africa, developing an analysis of changing workplace technology and its impact on trade unionism – specifically the workings of race and class. This provided a material basis for understanding the emergence of the new black mass unionism.

His co-authored book *Grounding Globalisation* provided a new account of globalisation and trade unions through a comparison of South Africa, Korea and Australia. Global scholars were inspired by it and it won a major prize from the American Sociological Association.

His most recent book, *Recasting Workers’ Power*, written with Lynford Dor, returns full cycle to the themes of his first book, exploring the impact of technological change on the nature of work in the gig economy, and drawing lessons from forms of worker organisation and collective action that have been emerging across Africa.



Each of these books extends the boundaries of our knowledge by exploring the cutting edge of social change – in a sense helping us see the future and, indeed, helping to make it.

A great love for life

It is impossible to think about Eddie without thinking about Luli Callinicos, historian and biographer, and the great love of his life. Indeed, she was the rock on which he built his achievements. I remember with great fondness the Greek Easter feasts shared at their home, and the many other gatherings with family, friends and colleagues.

Michael Burawoy, the great American sociologist and lifelong friend of Eddie, once told me that he had never laughed as much as he did when he was with Eddie and his colleagues from SWOP. Eddie enjoyed people and was deeply generous; he was a great raconteur, he loved being alive. Three weeks ago he was celebrated for his 200th Park Run in one of Johannesburg's large parks. Whatever he did he did fully, heart and soul. He was not bigger than life, he was big with life.

In later years he introduced himself as “a living ancestor”. Now he is simply our ancestor, one who has given us a huge legacy, a living legacy. It is time for us to reflect on his inspiration, burn imphepho, slaughter a cow and pour out the wine.



Prof. Devan Pillay

GLU Wits Chairperson and Dept. of Sociology



Reflections on my encounters with Eddie Webster

As Alexia, Eddie's daughter, said to me over the weekend, Eddie was a force of nature. He was someone I looked to as a lodestar, on a number of levels – not least his indefatigable energy, which went along with a fitness regime (regular running and swimming) I could only look at with awe, as I approach retirement. I was told that I ought not to try and emulate Eddie, as he came from a peculiar rugby-playing English stock, and was like a Duracell battery that will run forever. Nonetheless, I always thought that as long as Eddie, almost 20 years older than me, could keep so fit, then I too could look forward to a long and healthy life, as long as I maintained a reasonable fitness regime. Eddie, in other words, was not meant to leave us. Not so soon, anyway. But, shockingly, he has.

Eddie and I used to play squash, and while we were closely matched, he always just beat me. He was such a determined player that he once crashed into the wall, and some blood splattered on the floor. I cannot remember where the blood came from, but we wiped it off, and we carried on. I loved those games we had, and indeed it was during one such game that Eddie convinced me to leave my government job, take a massive pay cut, and join the Sociology department in 2001. He promised me that the freedom to work your own hours, travel to conferences, and of course to teach, read, write and think, would more than make up for the cut in salary. I was convinced.

Eddie tried to recruit me before, soon after I got my PhD in 1989. I immediately joined the SA Labour Bulletin as a staff writer in 1990, and Eddie was an ever-present board member (although we had met before). We travelled to Zimbabwe together,

and wrote a joint article on the ANC and SACP, amongst other things. After a failed attempt to join the Sociology department in 1992 (which he was very unhappy about), he hired me to become the deputy director of SWOP in 1993. I however was also recruited to become the Director of the Social Policy Programme at UDW, and was in a dilemma. I dare not turn Eddie down, but the UDW position, at a university that promised to be a home for the left, was too attractive. I decided to take the UDW job, but chickened out by asking Vishnu Padayachee, who was part of the recruitment team at UDW, to please speak to Eddie. This was a wrenching experience, as I knew that I let him down. However, Eddie was gracious enough to agree to become an external examiner for us, and when I joined the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) as head of Research in 1997, we embarked on a joint research project with SWOP. I then went into government, but somehow kept close contact with Eddie by amongst other things playing squash, and he eventually he made me an offer I couldn't refuse. And the rest is history....

There is so much more to say, of course. Eddie was pivotal in bringing the Global Labour University (GLU) to Wits in 2006/7. After retirement he continued to work with us, and teach in our Engage South Africa programme, which involves trade unionists from around the world. The students loved him, as he brought humour, energy and an ability to bring abstract concepts to life. I have learnt a lot from him, and he will be sorely missed.

Go well, my friend.....



Pulane Dithlake

Programme Administrator, Global Labour University Programme

Wits University



Before I met Prof Eddie Webster I heard of him from my uncle Boichoko Dithlake who was his Masters student at the time. My uncle, an activist spoke very highly of Prof saying 'he's a white man worthy of our people's respect'. High praise! Then I joined GLU in 2010 and got to hear about his role in the formation of the Programme and thus began

our relationship. I enjoyed each of our interactions, particularly how he was open to ideas, hearing what others thought. I enjoyed his storytelling and was in awe of his triumphant view of navigating the Wits systems. What a winner! Also the only man to ever burst into my office and hand me a rose on Valentine's Day, I will miss you, Prof. Go well.



Christine Bischoff

GLU Wits Committee, Dept. of Sociology

Wits University



Eddie you were my Sociology lecturer, the Director of SWOP when I worked there and the GLU Chair when I was the GLU coordinator. There are many fond memories of our together to Brazil and Germany for various GLU activities.

Closing the Representation Gap, was a survey, a PowerPoint presentation, a mapping exercise, a Working Paper and then a journal article but importantly a successful collaboration between some of the GLU alumni at the time, all in the

space of 18 months in 2008-2009. More recently in 2021 we worked with the Swedish Workplace Programme on their train the trainer approach with Numsa where we presented our work on worker participation. We were invited to the Swedish Embassy for a Union leadership symposium where this picture was taken.

Thank you Eddie for your mentorship and for a great research partnership!



Frank Hoffer (Germany)

International GLU Steering Committee



“If you want to get something done, ask the busy people. There’s a reason why they’re busy. “

This was an advice I once received from Eddie Webster

Eddie was always a very busy man, and he got an incredible amount of things done. He did it because he worked incredibly hard himself, while inspiring many others to get involved in the many projects he spearheaded.

I first met Prof. Webster in 2005 when I was working at the International Labour Organisation. We came to Johannesburg to discuss the idea of creating a global network of labour scholars and labour activists, of universities and trade unions, in short, a Global Labour University (GLU). It is hard to imagine how the GLU would have gone from a vision to a reality if Eddie had not enthusiastically embraced the idea. His outstanding academic reputation convinced other academics at Wits and around the world to join the network. Having been an ally of labour for decades, he was instrumental in overcoming union scepticism about an academic Masters programme for union activists. His southern perspective ensured that the GLU did not become a Geneva idea preaching northern concepts of social dialogue to the rest of the world. He always emphasised that the world is not flat and looks different depending on your perspective and your location on our planet.

Most importantly, however, was his unrivalled ability as a teacher. Eddie was always curious about the ever-changing world of work. He taught students that there are no ready-made answers, but that you have to find answers by engaging with people, their concerns, their hopes and their contradictions. Eddie’s approach shaped the spirit of GLU: loyalty to the cause of labour and intellectual integrity.

After less than two years, Wits became the second of the six GLU campuses in 2007. Getting a new degree programme approved at a university in such a short time was a miracle that only Eddie could pull off, thanks to his academic authority, charm and determination to get things done.

Eddie was also one of the innovative researchers who managed to operationalise the ILO’s decent work concept by focusing on the decent work deficit. We had much debate in the ILO about what exactly should be understood by decent work. Eddie has turned the debate on its head. With the vast majority of informal and precarious workers failing to meet even the most basic requirements of decency and respect in the workplace, he felt it was far more productive to think about steps to address the decent work deficit rather than discuss a definitive definition of decent work. By using the idea of decent work creatively, Eddie combined radicalism and pragmatism in his typical way.

At an age when others were already thinking about retirement - a concept that was completely alien to Eddie - Eddie helped set up the newly founded International Centre for Development and Decent Work (ICDD) at the University of Kassel, the German GLU campus. In 2009/10 he became the first professor to hold the Ela Bath Professorship at the ICDD. For many years he was an invaluable intellectual mentor for a new generation of PhD students at the ICDD. He always emphasised that students should never stop thinking too soon and should not jump to simple conclusions when the reality is so much richer and more complex.

Over the past twenty years, Eddie has been a friend and a source of intellectual inspiration. I will never forget his commitment to the cause of the labour movement, his openness, clarity and honesty and of course his great sense of humour.



Professor Kate Alexander
University of Johannesburg



My friend and mentor Professor Eddie Webster died on Tuesday following a severe heart attack, aged 81. He was South Africa's most influential sociologist for a generation, but he was much more than this.

In 1973, he was at the forefront in establishing the Institute for Industrial Education, which provided support for African workers in the wake of the 1973 mass strikes, with this eventually leading, in 1979, to the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions, which was committed to workers' control. The following year he helped start the South African Labour Bulletin, which championed the workers' struggle that was central to the overthrow of apartheid in 1994. In 1975, he was arrested under the Suppression of Communism Act.

Eddie was an independent thinker, and over the years became increasingly critical of the ANC government. In 1999 he made a seminal contribution, showing how South Africa's problems were rooted in a 'double transition' where the adoption of neo-liberalism was combined with the onset of democratic rule.

In 2000, when we set up the Centre for Sociological Research at the University of Johannesburg, I immediately turned to Eddie for advice. He was able to draw on his long experience as Director of the Sociology of Work Programme to give the help I needed. He provided a series of squiggles, which I saved, showing how funding was related to projects, institutional backing and research support for workers (undertaken especially through the programme's frequent seminars). It did not matter to him that I came from a neighbouring university which, at some levels, was in competition with his own – we were academics who shared a common vision of developing young researchers and supporting workers.

In 2012, I was sitting next to him when Marikana workers revealed that cadres of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) had shot and, as they thought at the time, killed two strikers, possibly their own members. His immediate response was to say: 'now we'll have to start all over again.' Together we drafted a statement on the massacre signed by many academics. Although this was principally a protest, he confided that it would help protect me because I had become exposed by revealing the role that union leaders and Cyril Ramaphosa, later South Africa's president, had played in the massacre. I offer this anecdote as just one example of the way he attempted to protect his students and colleagues.

He has already been lauded in an obituary by Blade Nzimande, former general secretary of the South African Communist Party and now Minister for Higher Education; and I assume that Gwede Mantashe, a former student of Eddie's, ex-General Secretary of NUM, National Chairperson of the ANC and Minister for Mineral Resources, will have his say. Eddie, though, was cut from different cloth to these politicians. He was principled and fully committed to workers and South Africa's enormous population of poor people, mostly unemployed.

I remember sitting with him chatting over a drink in one of the bars in Johannesburg's Melville district. He suddenly jumped to his feet. The local businesses were replacing the area's informal car guards with those from a company they sponsored. Running across the road in his flip flops he physically blocked one of the new guards from beating one of the old ones, who would lose his livelihood.

Eddie was, though, a sociologist through and through. He was key to building the University of Witwatersrand's sociology department into the best on the African continent, and, as President of the

International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Labour Movements he advanced a pro-worker stance within industrial sociology, and was able to foreground South Africa's most important contribution to world sociology. When our South African Sociological Association (SASA) presented him with a unique lifetime achievement award, the citation was not only for his intellectual impact but also for his ongoing contributions to SASA, which persisted long after most senior sociologists had faded away.

In terms of publications, his favoured forte was edited collections, for which he organized funding, led teams and brought coherence through his

skill as an editor. Monographs can be over-rated and collaborations are especially valuable when they promote empirical research at the level of international comparison and theorization. Eddie's great strength was in asking the best, most relevant and current questions. This is reflected in his most recent book, published at the end of last year, *Recasting Workers' Power: Work and Inequality in the Shadow of the Digital Age*.

Condolences to Eddie's family, especially his life-long partner and comrade, the historian Luli Callinicos, and to his closest friends, notably Jacklyn Cock. Eddie has died, but he leaves a powerful legacy and a place in the hearts of many.

Prof. Lucien van der Walt
Neil Aggett Labour Studies Unit (NALSU)
Rhodes University

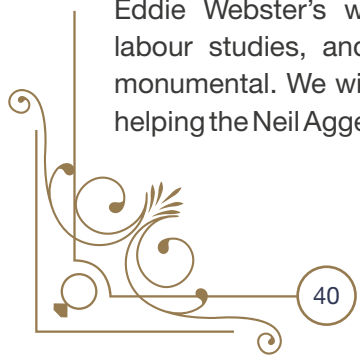
Eddie Webster has left us. The hole in the world that he left is large indeed. He passed away yesterday of a heart attack, at the age of 81. More than anyone else, Eddie Webster remade the field of industrial sociology in South Africa, but his impact was not just in academia, but in the workers' movement, and not just here in South Africa, but globally.

I first encountered Eddie Webster as an Industrial Sociology undergrad and postgrad at Wits, the University of the Witwatersrand. Later he was my HoD at that, my alma mater; when I became an associate of what was then the Sociology of Work (SWOP) unit, my director; when he initiated the Africa wing of the Global Labour University (GLU), my coordinator.

Eddie Webster's work in fostering the field of labour studies, and the labour movement, was monumental. We will always appreciate his role in helping the Neil Aggett Labour Studies Unit (NALSU)

at Rhodes University, and we recall with admiration his remarkable Neil Aggett Labour Studies Lecture 18 months ago, given at our Vuyisile Mini Workers School. Here, he engaged people from the popular movements, including at a memorable dinner with Mazibuko Jara, Warren McGregor, Russell Grinker, the late, great, lamented Ayanda Kota, and I.

In 1992, I started Industrial Sociology 2 at Wits, unsure what to expect. I still vividly recall the first class with Eddie Webster. The great man walked to the lectern, battered copy of "Das Kapital" in hand, and read out: "we therefore take leave for a time of this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men, and follow them both into the hidden abode of production... Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is produced. We shall at last force the secret of profit making."



Legendary. Legendary! And, as soon became clear, he was never a man to stay on the surface of anything. Open-minded, he was an eclectic thinker who embraced new ideas, and (re) shaped the whole field in doing so. He was influenced by Marxism, but was far more than any label can capture. He was a master of applying, adapting, creating, and transmitting new approaches.

Much of his work was literally globalised, that is, his theory from the South had a huge impact elsewhere in our world, but also, in the North. Three generations of scholars, who today include VCs, heads of national research units, and academics nationwide, and countless trade unionists, across Mzansi and across Africa, and beyond, were taught and mentored by the man.

It would not be right or complete, in recalling this remarkable figure, to fail to mention his role as an organiser. He successfully founded and built more institutions, than scores of people do in their combined lifetimes. He had a keen eye for finding, and remarkable skill in resolving, problems. I saw him fix, with bold strokes, issues that wracked our department: he tackled these in startling ways, which I privately used to think of as “Websterian solutions”; he had that rare ability to cut the Gordian knot, i.e., to find unexpected, decisive, solutions.

And no reflections would be complete without noting that Eddie Webster embraced differences of opinion. Although he and I never quite saw eye-to-



eye on quite a few issues, you know what? He told me what mattered was to do good work, to collaborate, to be collegial, and to be sincere. That debate was a good thing, and decency, even better. This, let me tell you, was incredibly important to me as a young man. So, while

I chose not to do my PhD with him, he was always a voice in it, and in my later work, despite our differences.

That is the man I recall. Go well, travel safely, Eddie.



Dr Drissa Tangara
Global Labour University (GLU-Wits)
alumnus (Mali)

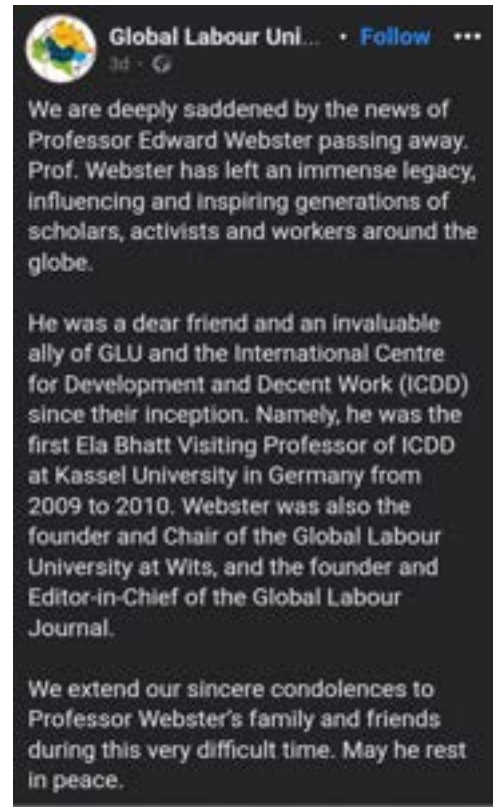
Tribute to Emeritus Prof. Eddie Wester

You have been an Icon for the sub-Saharan working class for years!

Because of you, the African Academic World recognizes the important of scientific work on the dynamics of Trade Unions in Africa. You left this instable and troublesome world, but your legacy will keep our commitment to hang the flag of Union and labour activism.

To Luli and the GLU-WITS family, our deepest condolences.

Rest in Power, my Prof. Edward Webster.



The GLU Engage SA class of 2023

**WE MOURN THE EXIT OF EDWARD WEBSTER:
A PROFESSOR, AN ICON, A COMRADE,
REVOLUTIONARY LEADER, ROLE MODEL,
MENTOR**

It is hard to say goodbye to a comrade who had made several contributions to the development of workers' rights and struggles and the emancipation of workers' mind from mental slavery through his leadership role and years of offering academic opportunities to trade unionists, activists and students of sociology across Africa and the world at large.

You will be remembered for your immense contribution to the fields of Sociology, Politics, Economics and Labour and your rich and subtle way of transferring knowledge, skill and breeding

a generation of scholars and unionist through the Global Labour University.

We are resolute that death can only take away your physical self, but your ideals, vision, philosophy which have spread across board like wild fire will continue remain with us and shall keep burning.

Comrade Emeritus Professor, on behalf of Cohort 10, GLU ENGAGE South Africa programme, Class of 2023 at University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, we wish your soul finds eternal rest.

We send our condolences to your family and love ones, particularly the GLU family; we wish them the fortitude to bear the irreparable and irreplaceable loss.

Comr. Mwijuka Jesca (Uganda) and Comr. Sunday Adeniran (Nigeria)

Ismail Bello (Nigeria)

GLU-Wits alumnus

ADIEU PROFESSOR EDWARD WEBSTER

I first met Professor Eddie Webster at a conference on union transformation in Berlin organised by the FES in 2016. His elucidation of the power resource approach and his lively application of daily social experiences to explain complex theories and concepts drew me to pay special attention to this outstanding thinker and scholar.

His mercurial style of teaching and captivating interaction with his audience was quite uncommon. His simplified approach to research makes learning and research easy for Activist Scholars.

I remembered his lively exchanges with our course group at the 2019 GLU Engage at Wits. The delivery, the passion, and the erudition of the graduation lecture in 2019 were a testament that Eddie was a “rooted Cosmopolitan”.

Your sudden death has robbed the global labour movement and particularly in Africa, of a resource box that you had become to generations of scholars and Activists around the world.

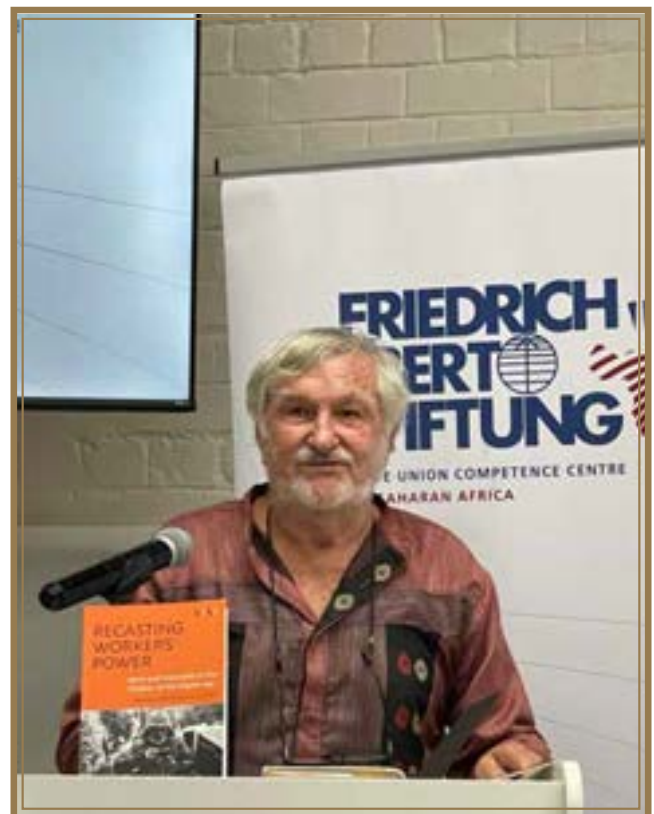
I will remember Eddie Webster for his incisive contributions to the understanding of the challenge and the imperative of union transformation in a world driven by globalisation and digital transformation.

His profound thoughts and research on the intense precarity unleashed by digital capitalism will continue to shape research, intellectual discourse, and union action on labour rights, decent work, and digital employment.

Adieu, Eddie Webster, the teacher of teachers, the profound intellectual, a true friend of the working class, and a great humanist.

On behalf of myself and my colleagues of the extended GLU family in Nigeria, we extend our heartfelt sympathy on the sudden exit of this giant scholar and activist to his immediate family, Wits and the GLU family around the world

Rest in power, Prof.





Dr Carmen Ludwig (Germany)

International Secretary

German Education Union



To Luli and Eddie's family

I am still so shocked and sad about the sudden death of my teacher, friend and Comrade Eddie Webster. Words are failing me to really express the depth of the loss. Since 2011 we continued to work together on projects and publications and to spent time together at Wits University and union meetings. I've learned so much from him. We only spoke on Friday before his sudden death about his book tour in Germany in April and May, which he was looking forward to. He was energetic as always.

Eddie always remained so excited about discussing the changing world of work and engaging on workers' power. In each discussion he would find something appreciating, interesting, challenging or surprising. Excitedly he would say, this is a puzzle! Or he often asked after meetings, 'what did surprise you?' He liked that kind of exchange of sharing thoughts and working collaboratively. In our conversation on Friday when we started preparing the inputs for the book tour, he mentioned that these kinds of exchanges are good to just toss around thoughts.

I liked to work with Eddie so much and we continued our cooperation after I left South Africa and even after I left academia to work full time as the international secretary for the German Education Union. He would always come up with another good idea or plan to which I couldn't say no. I felt very honoured when he asked me to join his last book project on 'Recasting Workers' Power' and I still am.

Eddie was an incredible source of knowledge. Once when we were working on an article, he remembered a piece from the 1970s that we could refer to. He would just turn around to the bookshelf in his home and immediately take out the right issue of the South African Labour Bulletin.

Eddie was also a very kind and generous person, warm-hearted and interested in others. I appreciate each minute I spent with Eddie and Luli at their welcoming home and our conversations. Both Eddie and Luli, not only represent South Africa's turbulent history, but also bravely helped to shape it. Thank you both.

Eddie's curiosity, deep commitment and inviting way of engaging encouraged and inspired so many students and trade unionists in South Africa and around the world to study labour but to also become involved as activists. "For the workers" – that's what Eddie unwaveringly stood for in his many contributions to building the labour movement. It is hard to imagine a world without Eddie and I will miss him sorely. Hambe kahle.

I am wishing Luli, their children and grandchildren about whom Eddie always spoke so much a lot of strength and all the best.

In deep gratitude and solidarity,

Carmen

Sharon Ekambaram

Manager: Refugee and Migrant Rights Programme

Kutlwanong Democracy Centre

I worked with Comrade Eddie together with Comrade Mazibuko Jara and others, when I was Project Officer of the Chris Hani Institute back in 2005. We were just setting up the institution and Comrade Eddie was on the Board.

He was pivotal in contributing to defining the legacy of Comrade Chris Hani. He made an incredible contribution to setting down the building blocks of this institution, rooted in values of non-sectarianism and workers power.

His work and writings on workers in the informal economy – locating power rooted in organisational forms, have left an indelible mark and we are richer as a society in our struggle against the ills of global monopoly capitalism.

Hambe Kahle, Comrade Eddie, may your soul rest in peace. Forward comrades!

Sophie Chitenje

(Malawi)

GLU Wits alumna

Dear Eddie,

I knew that a day like this one will come one day, but what I didn't realise is that it will be so soon. Prof. Eddie as you depart from our midst, just remember that you personally sharpened my future and I am indebted to you.

"Prof. Eddie, Rest Well As We Celebrate Your Life And Enjoy The Fruits Of The Knowledge and Skills You Passed on to Us" 🌸🌺🌻🌼🌽🌾🌿🍀. I shall always remember all the memories during our interactions.





Jesse Wilderman (USA)

GLU Wits alumnus



Such sad and terrible news about the passing of Prof Eddie. My heart goes out to his family and all of his colleagues and comrades. Thank you for sharing our thoughts and condolences with his family; he will be sorely missed by all of us who were so touched by him. I miss you all and hope otherwise you and your families are well.

Prof was my thesis advisor for my masters work on the farm worker uprising in the Western Cape at the Global Labour University, and then he brought me on as a fellow at the Chris Hani Institute where we worked on several projects together, particularly around how (vulnerable) workers were organising and exploring new (and sometimes old!) forms of resistance. Prof also helped me turn my thesis work on farm workers into a chapter for a book that he edited.

While my several years with him were short compared to so many who he impacted over a lifetime, I look back with the awareness that he really helped shape who I am as a trade unionist, activist, and human being. I remember sitting in his office at COSATU house or meeting up with him after a talk and he was always so interested, challenging, and willing to share. Given his incredible story and profile, I remember feeling almost shocked that he was interested in what I had to say, in my work and path, and that he was so willing to commit his mind and time to helping me grow and explore. After so many years in the struggle, he was not cynical, always imagining a way, keeping his faith in the workers to find a way, and figuring out where we could contribute. He had this amazing way of looking backward-- a willingness to learn from and understand the past-- while looking forward-- being willing to innovate, challenge, push our thinking-- at the same time. And he seemed to be having fun, with a slightly devious nature-- how to make sociology fun and devious should be taught around the world!

His relentless determination to bring academia together with activists-- to bind the labor movement with a deep and critical understanding of power, organising, and social change – was so inspiring to me as I returned to my work as a trade union leader in the USA and now in the global labor movement. I will never forget when he called me up and told me had something he wanted me to review for my work and I should meet him after a talk he was giving at Wits-- a somewhat mysterious phone call. After the talk, he handed me a small, very old looking book that had been published by the Institute for Industrial Education about the Durban Strikes of 1973 (the researchers did a survey of the workers but at the time were unable to publish under their own names, hint. . .), in which he had highlighted sections about power and organisation that he wanted me to think about for my work. It was a small thing, but it was so emblematic of Eddie and his generosity: he had taken the time out of his busy schedule to think about and challenge me on my work because he thought it was important and had looked to the workers themselves, the similarities and differences in past and present in how they were challenging power.

After not having spoken to Eddie for a number of years, I saw, just a few months ago, a notice about a launch/talk about his new book, and at the same time a South African comrade told me how Eddie Webster was a mentor and inspiration to him. I took it as a sign to reach out and share my goings on and see how the Prof was doing. We had an exchange, and he told me about his work and life and – while expressing some disappointment in the current state of affairs – he explained his latest project, where he was excited about and finding hope in workers organising. Besides his humility, his willingness to listen and invest in others, I think this is the biggest inspiration I take from Eddie: his completely unflinching belief in workers and his conviction that there is a way forward if we

listen and search, challenge, innovate, and keep organising.

Sorry about the long-winded sharing, but I think they broke the mould once they made Prof Webster and he will be sorely missed, while his inspiration carries so many of us forward in our work and lives.

Rest in Power Prof. Presente!

With Love and Solidarity to his family, comrades, and friends,

Jesse



Crecentia Mofokeng

Regional Representative (Africa and Middle East Region)

Building and Wood Workers International (BWI)



TRIBUTE FOR PROFESSOR EDWARD WEBSTER: A LIFE WELL LIVED!

BWI Africa and Middle East mourns with great sadness the passing away of Professor Edward (Eddie) Webster, who passed away on 5 March 2024. Professor Webster was 81 years old and dedicated his entire life to the field of sociology, economics, labour, and politics. He successfully bridged the gap between labour organizations and educational institutions, emphasizing the impact in promoting dialogue and understanding the power resources in improving workers' living conditions.

He resisted the crushing of apartheid policies in the academic arena by creating programmes enabling activists to access higher education to further their education. His commitment to understanding the complexities of labour dynamics in South Africa earned him widespread respect and recognition beyond the borders.

Eddie contributed immensely to collaborating on publications, articles, and reports that contribute to a better understanding of the intersection between labour movements and academic research, showcasing the importance of such collaborations. He was a Research Professor at the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, and worked with

many upcoming researchers, His research interests focused on labour and inequality.

He co-authored many books including *Grounding Globalization: Labour in the Age of Insecurity*, which earned the prestigious American Sociological Association award for the best scholarly monograph published. His most recent book, *Recasting the Power of Labour: Work and Inequality in the Shadow of the Digital Age*, is useful to the workers and trade unions to phase the challenges of change.

His leadership in spearheading joint research projects that bring together experts from both Global unions and academia, such as studies on labour rights, worker conditions, and social justice issues are well documented. A life Well Lived! He will always be remembered!

Many trade unions and trade unionists benefitted and were uplifted from his role in conferences, seminars, and dialogues that facilitated meaningful discussions and knowledge exchange between representatives from labour unions and academic institutions.

Eddie Webster's advocacy efforts in influencing policy decisions by leveraging the combined knowledge and expertise of Global unions and

academia to address key labour-related challenges on a global scale. With the help of international organisations fighting for workers' rights, and tackling Multinational Companies, he played an important role in establishing educational programs or initiatives that bridge the gap between theory and practice, equipping both union members and academics with the tools and information needed to create positive change in the labour Market.

BWI is indebted for the leadership role he played in the development of the Global Labour University offering academic opportunities to many trade union activists across in the region and the world.

BWI sends its deepest condolences to the Webster family, his colleagues, comrades and friends. May his soul rest in peace!

Long Live the Spirit of Eddie Webster Long live!

Amandla!



Alex Beresford

Associate Professor in African Politics and Director of Research
and Innovation for POLIS
University of Leeds



To me, Eddie was the embodiment of activist-scholarship. This meant working with unions, including workers' education and the establishment of worker-focused publications, such as the influential South Africa Labour Bulletin. Indeed, the tributes that have poured in from representatives of the labour federation, COSATU, as well as left-wing activists and journalists alike are testament to this critical element of Eddie's reach beyond the walls of the university.

As captured brilliantly by his colleague, Andries Bezuidenhout (University of Fort Hare), "Eddie was an institution builder par excellence" and this was reflected in the role he played in the formation of the Sociology of Work Project (SWOP) at the University of the Witwatersrand and later the Global Labour University for trade unionist education.

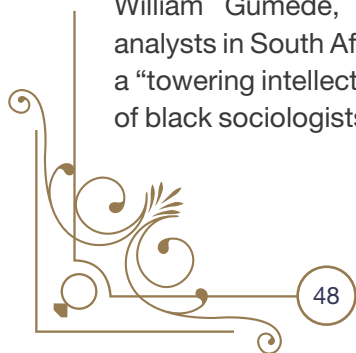
William Gumede, one of the leading political analysts in South Africa today notes that Eddie was a "towering intellectual" who "nurtured generations of black sociologists" through the founding of such

institutions. As Bezuidenhout observes about Eddie's work in this regard, "To build institutions and movements, you have to build people, and this is maybe the most radical thing anyone can invest their time in."

Eddie's activism was also reflected in his engaged approach to supporting fellow academics. As labour scholar Carin Runciman (Edinburgh) notes, "There are hundreds, possibly even thousands, of us who benefited from his engagement, mentorship and guidance to undertake critical work in the service of labour and social movements."

Indeed, my own experience of him was of a welcoming, generous and compassionate scholar committed to building a wider institutional architecture that created spaces for others to grow.

It was a commitment Eddie sustained beyond retirement. I recently enjoyed lunch with him where he reflected on his latest book, *Recasting Workers' Power: Work and Inequality in the Shadow of the Digital Age* in which he once again demonstrated



his prowess in marrying detailed empirical insights into the ever-changing world of employment relations with thoughtful theoretical interventions in global labour debates.

This continued desire to engage and lead debates was built into the DNA of his profile as an activist scholar who remained active into his final days – as has been noted widely on social media in response to the shock at his passing.

On a personal level, Eddie’s work was an inspiration to me through my studies and beyond. I believe Eddie coined the term “Social Movement Unionism” (SMU) to denote the significance of the strategies and tactics employed by COSATU back in the struggle against apartheid. He recognised that SMU reflected an important understanding of workers in South Africa that their struggles for

justice and emancipation in the workplace could not be divorced from the wider political struggle against the apartheid state. This helped spark global debates about SMU and union revitalisation in an era of neoliberal globalisation – a debate that Eddie remained central to in his extensive body of work.

It is a debate that remains perhaps as salient as ever today. Workers in South Africa, like their counterparts elsewhere, confront the challenges posed by the fourth industrial revolution and the transition to low-carbon economies. These will generate the most significant social, political and economic upheavals in recent history. It calls upon all students of labour to sustain the traditions of activist scholarship so brilliantly personified by Eddie.



Mattia Dessi
University of Leeds



I first discovered Eddie’s work as a Masters student when I was initially considering the idea of focusing on South Africa. It would not be an exaggeration to say that his work played a great part in my decision to pursue that path. The way which he was able to present to the reader rigorous analysis of dynamic social processes has been, I believe, a great source of inspiration not only for me but for many other young students of different generations.

Eddie’s ability to combine theoretical insights with detailed empirical evidence has always been one of his many academic skills, and there is no better book, in my opinion, where this transpires than the classic *Cast in a Racial Mould* (1985). The book encapsulated Eddie’s talent as a qualitative researcher while also showing his knowledge of international theoretical debates. But most of all, it showcases a recurrent theme in his work: the

attempt to connect international scholarship with the rich tradition of South African labour studies. A connection that was made, however, not from the position of someone passively adopting theoretical concepts crafted elsewhere, but instead based on the awareness that a critical reevaluation of these theoretical debates from a South African viewpoint was necessary.

I visited South Africa for fieldwork at the end of 2022. Eddie’s work has shown, among other things, the importance of interviews and participant observation as a necessary part of a researcher’s attempt to understand the world, but it also showed the difficulties that this process sometimes involves. It was not long after I landed in Johannesburg that I started to feel pessimistic about the possibility of gathering the data I was looking for. Until that point my correspondence

with Eddie had been limited to a few email exchanges and interactions at online conferences, yet he showed no hesitation when I contacted him asking for help. Despite being officially retired by then, we had lunch together and he asked a lot of questions about my research, never stopping from writing down notes, while also explaining what his current research interests were. The same afternoon he had already put me in touch with people who could help with my fieldwork.

I was glad to see him at a following Southern Centre for Inequality Studies seminar where I presented

some preliminary results of my fieldwork. Needless to say, he wasn't short of questions and comments.

It was with great sadness that I discovered on Wednesday 6 March that the seminar was the last time I enjoyed his intellectual brightness. For young scholars like me, and I'm sure for many more to come, he will always be a source of inspiration. Not only for his academic work, but also, and perhaps even more, for the way he selflessly put his knowledge at the service of the labour movement.



H-South Africa

H-Net network on South and Southern Africa history and culture



H-SAfrica is very sad to inform its readers of the death of Eddie Webster, Professor Emeritus at the University of the Witwatersrand. A lifelong intellectual-activist, Eddie made an enormous contribution to sociology and labour studies in South Africa and comparatively. He will be sorely missed.

<https://rb.gy/4z37o7>

For appreciations of his life and work, see:

- <https://rb.gy/gj5zk5>
- <https://rb.gy/e3k3nz>
- <https://rb.gy/6vrkm8>
- <https://rb.gy/vclagl>



Eddie Webster: an obituary by Review of African Political Economy



It is with great sadness that ROAPE marks the passing of Eddie Webster last week. Eddie was a giant of both South African labour sociology and global labour studies. Alex Beresford and Mattia

Dessi offer some brief reflections on his influence on them as international researchers of labour politics.

Ethan van Diemen

Daily Maverick

<https://rb.gy/vclagl>

Professor Edward Charles Webster, who died at the age of 81 on Tuesday, 5 March, was a towering figure in South African sociology. His commitment to understanding the complexities of labour dynamics in South Africa earned him widespread recognition.

Born in 1942, Edward Charles Webster dedicated his life to understanding and advocating for the rights of South African workers. His academic journey began at Rhodes University, followed by studies at Oxford and York universities.

He earned a PhD from the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), where he would later become a Professor Emeritus. He was also the founder of the Society, Work and Development Institute (Swop) at Wits.

Edward Webster was a colleague and friend of the late Rick Turner and his partner Foszia Turner-Stylianou at the University of Natal (Durban) in the early 1970s. They established the Institute of Industrial Education and the South African Labour Bulletin. In December 1975 Eddie was arrested under the Suppression of Communism Act and acquitted a year later for, inter alia, calling for the release of Nelson Mandela.

He was the Distinguished Research Professor at the Southern Centre of Inequality Studies and the founder and past director of the Society, Work and Politics Institute (SWOP) at the University of the Witwatersrand. He was the author of seven books and more than 120 academic articles. He was a Senior Fulbright Scholar at the University of Wisconsin (Madison) and the first Ela Bhatt Professor at the International Centre for Development and Decent Work (ICDD) at Kassel University in Germany. His co-authored volume, *Grounding Globalisation: Labour in the Age of Insecurity*, was awarded the American Sociological Association award for the best scholarly monograph published on labour.

Webster's impact on South African academia is undeniable and he is widely credited as being the pioneer of the country's sociology of work and labour studies. His seminal work, *Cast in a Racial Mould*, remains a cornerstone text, analysing the intricate relationship between the labour process and the evolution of the South African labour movement.

Beyond his scholarship, he was a passionate advocate for social justice. Webster actively participated in the South African Sociological Association and he co-founded the South African Labour Bulletin, a platform for critical analysis of labour issues.

Speaking to Daily Maverick on Tuesday, sociologist and Wits University Professor Karl von Holdt described the late Webster as "an extraordinary force actually in the field of sociology. He was one of the main founders of industrial sociology in South Africa."

"He always was an institution builder," said Von Holdt, "although he was already effectively at pension age, he basically built two other institutions, the Chris Hani Institute, which is



based at Cosatu, and then the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies at Wits. He had this incredible energy for building institutions and bringing others in with his energy and vision.”

His dedication, however, extended well beyond academia as he actively engaged with policymakers and trade unions, bridging the gap between research and real-world application. The Human Sciences Research Council has said of Webster that “he is credited with influencing several generations of sociology students at Wits, transforming the sociology curriculum at

the university, and producing a new generation of black sociologists.”

The author of seven books and more than 120 academic articles, Webster’s contributions were also recognised internationally, including the prestigious American Sociological Association award for his work *Grounding Globalisation: Labor in the Age of Insecurity*.

Professor Webster leaves a legacy of intellectual rigour and a deep, unwavering commitment to social justice. He is survived by his wife Luli Callinicos, children and grandchildren.



South African Sociological Association



Notice to the South African Sociological Association on the heartbreaking news of the passing of Professor Eddie Webster

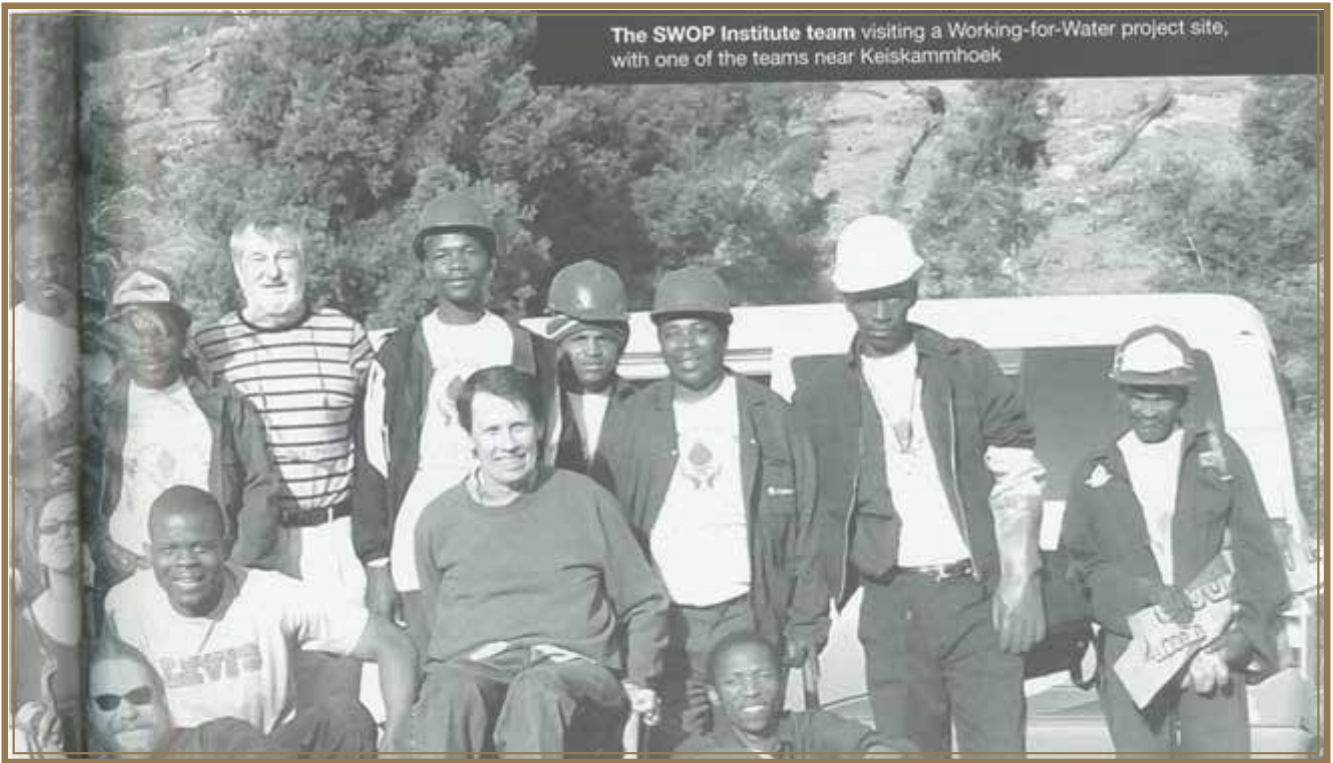
It is with utmost heartbreak that we share the news of the passing of umadala wethu, Professor Eddie Webster, on March 5th, 2024. As the South African Sociological Association, we extend our most heartfelt condolences to his family, colleagues, students, comrades, and friends during this difficult period. Prof. Eddie was a towering figure of wisdom, a ‘gentle intellectual’ and a dedicated critical scholar-activist whose commitment to radical social change had immense impact across the world for decades.

Writing on Prof Eddie, Burawoy states that “What mark’s Webster’s sociological practice is not just hyper-activity, but the intimate connection between his academic and his public lives: the one inseparable from the other.” (2010:2)

His scholarly writings as an Industrial Sociologist grounded theory in practice, illustrating an intentional effort towards tangible justice for all those who were around him. From his student years to his late career academic roles at various institutions, Prof. Webster remained loyal and

committed to the advancement of the public good. At the University of the Witwatersrand, his efforts led to the establishment of the Sociology of Work Programme, as well as the establishment of the Society, Work and Development Institute. Within the South African Sociological field, the depth and reach of his contributions are immeasurable as he was a mentor, colleague, and friend to countless individuals some of whom he had never met in person. Through his countless public engagements and publications, with the most recent being the co-edited book *Recasting Workers’ Power: Work and Inequality in the Shadow of the Digital Age*, he continued illustrating various continuities and struggles within the sphere of labour.

In July 2019 at our annual SASA Congress he was bestowed with the lifetime achievement award which contained isidanga, a blue beaded necklace often worn amongst amaXhosa elders as a symbol of respect for their work. Indeed, for us Prof. Eddie was umadala with a big heart and a sharp intellect, a distinguished research professor with a hard to miss passion. Prof. Webster radically changed the South African Sociological Association and effectively altered the discipline of Sociology and progressive trade unionism across the world.



This is a profound loss for the intellectual community, his family, friends, colleagues, and the workers and community members with whom he shared the most genuine relations for decades. As resounding lament across the discipline and the world continues the wake of the news, we can only hope that gratitude for the life and work of Prof. Webster resound louder. In tribute, the Association will share an initiative of his that he had intended to have occur at the upcoming South African Sociological Association Congress in July 2024.

Iwile imbewu enkulu bantu bethu! Kubhlungu sithi makaphumule ngoxolo umadala.

(The great tree has fallen our people! It is heartbreaking yet we say may madala rest in peace.)

Sincerely,
 Nomzamo Portia Ntombela
 SASA Secretary




Juha Vauhkonen (Finland)
 Head of International Operations
SASK


Dear Cde Warren, with a heavy heart I received your message. My condolences to all of you comrades and loved ones of Eddie.

I met him only twice but he was an inspirational comrade with dedication.

I try my utmost best to attend virtually, but my presence may be needed in the streets of Helsinki. As you can see in my WA-messages, it is an existential fight for TU movement here in Finland. But I know prof. Webster would have appreciated it.

In solidarity!



Prof. Vishwas Satgar

GLU Wits Committee and Dept. of International Relations

Wits University

Rest in peace Prof and Cde Eddie Webster.

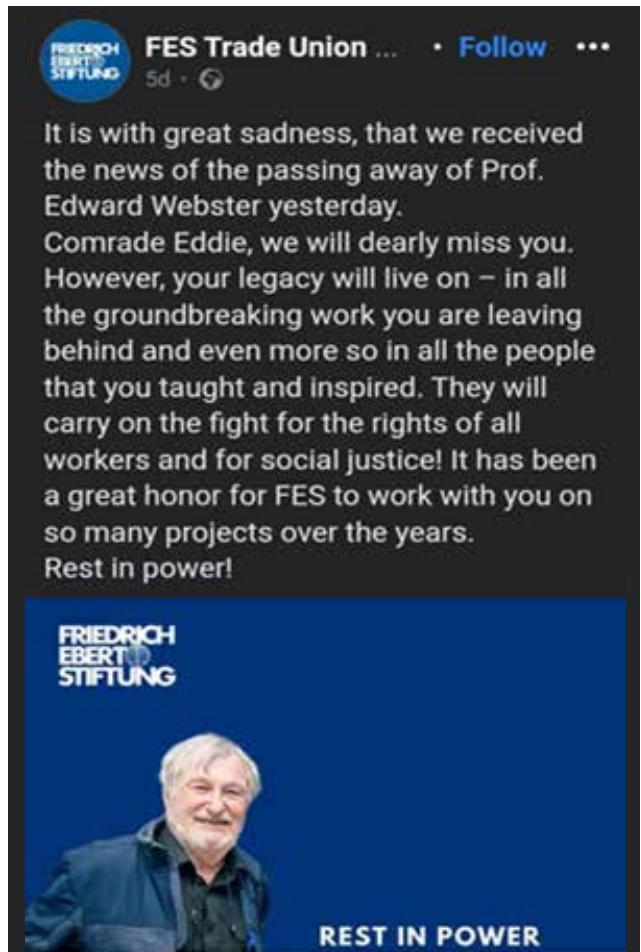
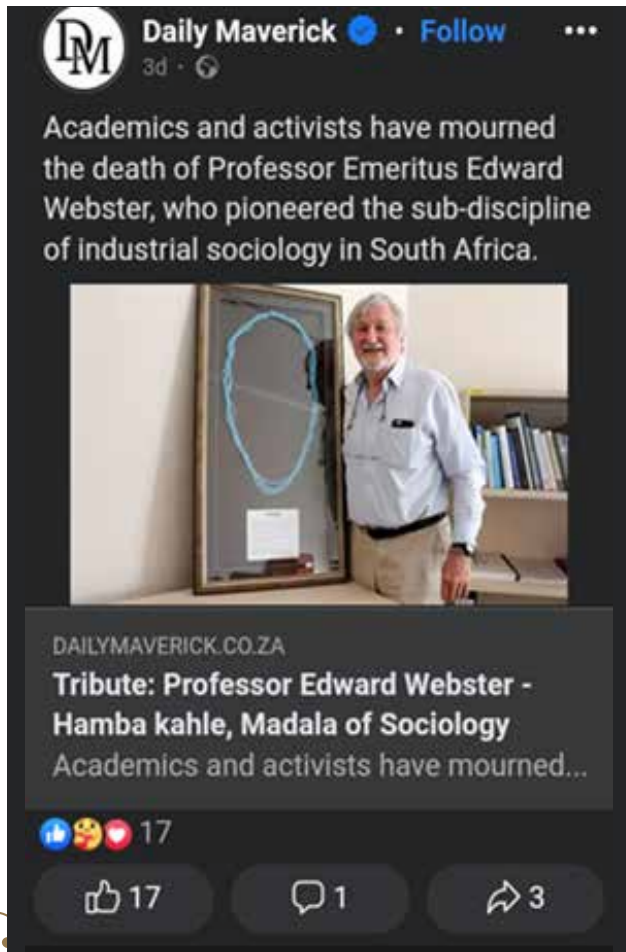
South Africa has lost one of its best sociologists

The resurgence of black trade unionism in the 1970s threw up the likes of Eddy. He was part of the Rick Turner generation and stayed the course till the end.

Your contribution to Labour Studies, strategic unionism and critical engaged sociology was pathbreaking. The next generation has a lot to learn from in your work and to build on.

The next volume in the Democratic Marxism series: The Other Side of Digital Capitalism- Technotopia, Power and Risk has a great co-authored chapter by Eddy on digital platforms, labour process and resistance. This demonstrates Eddy's ongoing concerns with the nature and future of work under capitalism.

Strength to Luli and your family!





FES Trade Union Competence Centre

Sub-Saharan Africa



In Memoriam - Professor Edward Webster

Comrade Eddie (March 29, 1942 – March 5, 2024)

In honour of the inspiring life and enduring legacy of activist-scholar Eddie Webster, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung pays tribute to a remarkable individual whose passion for social justice and tireless dedication to transformative change have left an indelible mark on society. His loss is deeply felt by family, comrades, students, and all those whose lives he touched with his wisdom, compassion, humour, and firm commitment to the betterment of society.

At Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Eddie was not only a valued partner and collaborator on labour issues in South Africa, on the African continent and globally, but he was a dear friend. His unwavering commitment to dialogue, inclusivity, and solidarity aligned with our mission to promote social democracy and advance the cause of social justice.

Throughout his career, Eddie emphasized the importance of worker solidarity and collective action in achieving meaningful change. He worked to foster unity among workers from diverse backgrounds and sectors, recognizing the power of collective bargaining and mobilization in advancing the interests of the working class. Eddie embodied the very essence of activism. His tireless advocacy for the rights of workers, the marginalized, and the

oppressed served as a guiding light in the pursuit of a more just and equitable world.

His legacy of empathy and activism will continue to inspire generations to come. Eddie's activism extended into the streets, where he stood shoulder to shoulder with the marginalized and disenfranchised, advocating for their rights and dignity. His courage, compassion, and unwavering determination served as an inspiration to us all. As a scholar, educator, and mentor, Eddie's impact was profound. His innovative research and insightful analysis enriched our understanding of labour dynamics, social movements, and the complexities of democratization.

Through his work, he empowered countless individuals to challenge the status quo and strive for a fairer society. He played a pivotal role in nurturing the next generation of leaders, instilling in them a sense of purpose and a commitment to social transformation. As we reflect on Eddie's life, let us honour his memory by continuing the struggle for a world free from injustice, inequality, and oppression. In gratitude for his profound contributions and with deepest sympathy to his family, friends, and colleagues, we bid farewell to a beloved activist, scholar, and friend.

Your legacy will endure, and your spirit will guide us.

Rest in power, Eddie.



Jane Lombard

6 March 2024 at 03:06



A truly awesome man. I will always remember his warm and cheering presence at Wits, where such traits are not exactly in abundance.

Spencer Eckstein

6 March 2024 at 07:24

As an Industrial Sociology graduate from Wits I was taught by Eddie, his was an amazing intellectual and gifted teacher, whose influence has stayed with me throughout my career. Hamba Gashle!

John Matisonn

6 March 2024 at 09:12

He was a great South African. Eddie will be sorely missed.

Pitso Tsibolane

6 March 2024 at 20:09

What a great human being, what a scholar, a leader of society until the very end. Your lifetime struggle for better employment conditions and a better society has been exemplary. Your legacy shall live on. Thank you for being so giving of yourself. FAIR WORK IS DECENT WORK!

Sam van Coller

7 March 2024 at 14:39

It was my privilege to interact with Eddie over many years. What a wonderful human being – humble, no ego to get in the way and a deep commitment to those who had to struggle in life. He helped me to understand how workers and trade union leaders see the world through their eyes. This has been a great help to me not only in my working years but in my daily life. I am so grateful to him and hope that his contribution will benefit students of Industrial Sociology at Wits for many years.

Cape Flats

7 March 2024 at 17:17

Respect!



Congress of South African Trade Unions

<http://rb.gy/4gegcu>

#COSATU conveys its heartfelt condolences to the family of Prof #EddieWebster, who passed on today.

Prof. mentored many workers on labor studies at Global Labor University.

May his soul rest in peace 🙏

@GlobalLabourCol @GlobalLabour @ILOACTRAV @ILOAfrica #HambaKahleEddieWebster



Photo: Eddie in regalia with the first GLU Engage South Africa class, at their graduation in 2013



COSATU mourns the passing of revolutionary Professor Eddie Webster

March 6, 2024 | <http://rb.gy/0z7jx2>

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) mourns the passing of Professor Edward ‘Eddie’ Webster. It is with great sadness that we bid farewell to a comrade who contributed so much to the development of workers’ struggles and our progressive labour laws and through his voluminous research and collaborations with the labour movement.

COSATU sends its deepest condolences to the Webster family, his colleagues, comrades and friends.

Born on the 29th of March 1942, Professor Webster dedicated his entire life to the field of sociology, economics, labour and politics. The cultivation of his knowledge included many qualifications from various institutions.

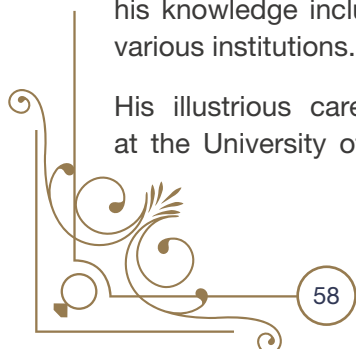
His illustrious career included his many years at the University of the Witwatersrand where he

served as Professor Emeritus in the Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP) for almost 40 years until his passing.

Professor Webster was passionate about research in particular the evolving labour landscape and left an indelible mark in the study of the sociology of work and labour in South Africa.

Throughout his time at the University of the Witwatersrand, as the Head of the Department of Sociology, in 1998 -1995 and in the year 2000 to 2002, he spearheaded the transformation of the curriculum and the empowerment of staff, particularly that of African scholars. He played a significant role in the introduction of disciplines in this field, which have produced numerous key industrial relations scholars.

His work earned him widespread international recognition, including through his seven books and over 100 academic articles. In 2004, Professor Webster was rated top sociologist in South Africa by the National Research Foundation.



The Federation appreciates his contribution towards the importance of decent work, having served as the first Ella Batt Visiting Professor of Development and Decent Work at the International Centre for Development and Decent Work in Germany. His devotion to workers, the trade union movement and the liberation of South Africa saw him leave an indelible mark on those who crossed his outstanding career.

COSATU and its Affiliates are particularly indebted for the leadership role he played in the development of the Global Labour University offering academic opportunities to many trade union activists across the world as well as the Chris Hani Institute as a resource for the Federation and the South African Communist Party.

We will forever be grateful for the mentoring, guidance and expertise he provided for countless members of COSATU and the trade union movement until his very last days.

He will be remembered as one of a unique generation of young white university students in the darkest days of apartheid, who not only refused to allow universities to continue on the path of white privilege but sought at considerable risk to their careers and lives, to place their skills at the disposal of the trade union movement experiencing the most brutal suppression by the state. His peers included such labour struggle icons as David Webster and Glen Moss.

His was a life well lived and he was proud that he dedicated it to workers' struggles. May his impeccable works and indomitable spirit continue to inspire workers and guide our labour laws for years to come.

Hamba kahle comrade Professor Eddie Webster.

Issued by COSATU



Prof. John Keith Hart (England)



I was invited in 2007 to spend a month as visiting professor at Wits. Eddie soon integrated me into life at SWOP. Whenever I sent him something to read after that, I could count on his encouragement. When the School of Development Studies at UKZN decamped to Wits, my first port of call in Johannesburg became SCIS, where my warmest welcome again was from Eddie. I have worked in 24 countries and, as a former classicist, I sometimes identify with Odysseus. I jumped at Eddie's warm invitation to visit him and his wife in Ithaka, but alas left it until this coming summer. His passing is a savage blow, coming so soon after losing Vishnu and Bill. The world is a much less hopeful place without these great specimens of humanity.



The South African Broadcasting Corporation



VIDEO: SABC – Tributes pour in for Professor Edward Webster

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVGfVAAHcOk>



Sean Jacobs 3d · G

The eminent sociologist Michael Buroway writes in [Africa is a Country](#) on the legacy of another eminent sociologist, the South African Eddie Webster (1942 – 2024). Webster, a professor at Wits University in Johannesburg, was an activist-scholar par excellence and a prodigious researcher. Among others, he helped revive the black trade union movement in South Africa, was active in resistance politics, and, after apartheid, taught many trade unionists at the Global Labor University. In 2021, the HSRC's Gregory Houston appraised Webster's long academic career: Webster was "credited with influencing several generations of sociology students at Wits, transforming the sociology curriculum at the university, and producing a new generation of black sociologists." RIP.



LHR Lawyers For Hum... · Follow 5d · G

Hamba kahle, Prof Webster. 🙏 You made an incredible contribution to the crisis of social production and [#UnpaidWork](#), and issues of [#dignity](#) and working conditions for informal workers. We celebrate your legacy! 🌟



DAILYMAVERICK.CO.ZA
Professor Edward Webster, pioneer of the study of labour in SA, dies at 81
 Professor Edward Charles Webster, wh...

Amandla! Media · Follow 4d · G

Obituary: Sad news as we say goodbye to Edward Webster, a true visionary who founded and built more institutions than most of us could even dream of. His legacy will continue to inspire future generations.
[#EddieWebster](#)
[#Visionary](#)



AMANDLA.ORG.ZA
Hamba kahle Eddie Webster: The labour movement will miss you - Ama...
 Eddie Webster successfully founded an...

Crispen Chinguno
1d · 🌐

A great tribute by Karl on Prof Eddie Webster.....Eddie has indeed transitioned to become our ancestor.... rest in Power our ancestor....



THECONVERSATION.COM
Edward Webster: South African Intellectual, teacher, activist, a man of ...
Eddie Webster inspired generations of ...

Alex Mohubetšwane Mogale
Mashilo is feeling sad.
5d · 🌐

We encountered a sore loss. Mentor, great teacher, Distinguished Professor, Edward Webster. A monumental loss occurred today in the afternoon when he passed way. He had just reminded me of our over 17 years relationship dating back to when I was in the trade union movement, a student he taught, researcher he supervised, an overseas academic fellow he guided, etc. In the end, a relationship involving the family.



Aif Gunvald Nilsen
@aifgunvald

Eddie Webster, who sadly passed away today, was many things: intellectual giant, institution-builder, and committed socialist.

He was also very kind to younger scholars, and showed his kindness through interest in and engagement with their work.

I'll miss him. Go well, friend.



8:55 PM · Mar 5, 2024 · 4,140 Views



South African Federation of Trade Unions



SAFTU Mourns the passing of professor Edward Webster

We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, his many students and colleagues.

We celebrate his life which has resourcefully contributed to the working-class struggle in many ways and left an indelible mark on the working-class movement and its activists.

His contribution to the struggle

In the 1960s, Eddie Webster was already contributing to the struggle against injustice as a student activist in the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). Not only does this show his earlier interest in the movement to fight for justice but begins his activism against capitalist injustice for the working class.

Like many white compatriots, he chose to confront a white minority regime. He had a choice to enjoy all the privileges the apartheid regime offered to white South Africans but chose to stand with the oppressed black majority.

He was part of the students who contributed to the revival of black trade unionism in South Africa, which had suffered setbacks due to clampdowns by the apartheid government through laws and violence. Indeed, out of such courageous initiatives came trade unions like the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), which amalgamated with other allied unions to form the National Union of the Metalworkers of SA (NUMSA). Due to this connection through MAWU, Prof Webster has arguably contributed to the existence of SAFTU. In fact, the democratic trade union movement owes its very existence to the contributions made by Professor Webster and his generation.

The reorganization of black trade unions inside the country became a subjective factor that combined with objective economic factors to unleash the workers struggle of the 1970s, marked famously by the Durban Strikes. These strikes were a watershed moment, in that, upon their ruins current trade unions were built. This is because the strikes resulted in the process that led to the legalisation of black trade unions and forced a change to the Industrial Conciliation Act.

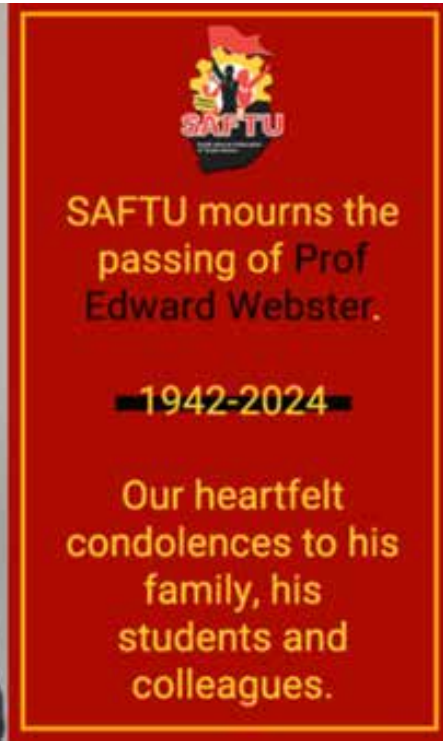
Eddie believed strongly in the power of organised workers and was a proponent of the factory floor and the shop steward being at the centre of the trade unions. He abhorred business unionism.

He remained part of the trade union movement since then, even though he joined the university to contribute to the body of knowledge of workers, the working class, and sociology as a whole.

Intellectual and episteme contribution

He placed the study of the black working class and its independent trade unions at the center of sociological studies. Arguably, he is the founder of South Africa's Industrial sociology. Amongst some of his initiatives to develop the industrial sociology episteme, was the foundation of the Society, Work and Politics Institute (SWOP) and the Southern Centre for Inequality Studies (SCIS) at Wits University.

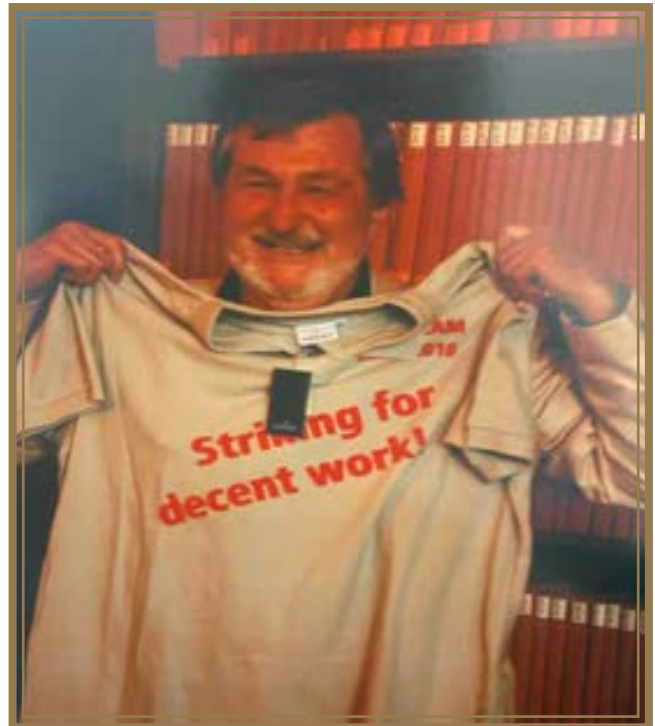
He did research and contributed to building the research capability of trade unions across all federations. The research capacity building he was devoted to in trade unionism, was aimed at helping trade unions to formulate policy, debate with their counterparts and to improve the position as labour, its power, and living conditions of the entire social class of toilers.



He bridged access to the universities for ordinary working-class activists, particularly providing access to the most prestigious Wits University for many generations of black trade unionists and community activists. He set up Global Labour University (GLU), which is focused on giving activists, overwhelmingly from the labour movement, education on industrial trends, labour policies and globalisation, and how these impact on the nature of work, rights of workers and their livelihoods.

He taught many modules in the Wits GLU programme, as well as on GLU's other campuses globally. This and his work with the late Rob Lambert to establish SIGTUR (the Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights) in the late 1980s, reflected his commitment to workers' education across borders and working class internationalism.

SAFTU will remember Eddie Webster as a patriot of the working class, which he devoted his life to until his last breath.





Armani Césaire @ghinsthar · Mar 7

...

A sad week for the academy indeed, the loss of Prof **Edward Webster** is a great one, but so was his life; and we ought not to lose sight of that in this moment of grief & mourning.

Fly high Madala, in our hearts you will always live. Rest in perfect peace comrade ❤️

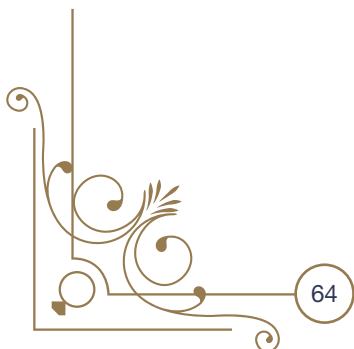



Wits University @WitsUniversity · Mar 6

It is with great sadness that we learnt of the passing of Prof. Edward (Eddie) Webster (82), who passed away yesterday after a short illness.


We extend our heartfelt condolences to Prof. Webster's family & friends during this difficult time....

[Show more](#)





Minister Blade Nzimande
Dept. of Higher Education
Govt of the Republic of South Africa



On the passing of Professor Edward Webster

<https://shorturl.at/mGJOU>

06 Mar 2024

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Professor Blade Nzimande is deeply saddened by the passing of Professor Edward Webster.

Prof Webster is one of our country's most distinguished sociologists, a progressive intellectual, an academic and labour activist, and leading scholar on the history, sociology, and politics of labour from the Marxist tradition of radical scholarship.

Prof Webster was amongst a group of young white left intellectuals and academics, who exploited the explosion of the 1973 Durban strikes, and moved in to actively support and rebuilt the progressive trade union movement, under the banner of what later became the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU).

In 1985, most of the FOSATU trade unions, together with other progressive trade unions, became part of the founding of the giant Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

Prof Webster, together with his comrades, were part of the very bold progressive left that dared the apartheid regime and threw their weight fully into supporting the efforts of the organised working class, and some of their contemporaries, like Rick Turner (an academic at the then University of Natal) were brutally murdered by the apartheid regime.

Prof Webster held various teaching and research positions in some of our country's leading universities and in other parts of the world.

One of his significant contributions was his Sociology of Work research programme at Wits University which, since the 1980's, had trained several generations of left-wing scholars, many of whom are now leading academics, Trade unionists, researchers, and policy analysts.

Over his long and illustrious career, he published several books, over 100 articles and numerous research reports. He also pioneered a number of progressive research projects, including the research project titled 'Hidden Voices: Left thought under Apartheid', at the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS).

Prof Webster, together with his colleague, Prof Ari Silas, and his student Prof Sarah Mosoetsa were central in the founding of the NIHSS which I established in 2013, to support the strengthening of research and scholarship into social sciences and humanities.

Prof Webster was highly regarded and recognised locally and internationally. He was awarded various honours for his scholarly contributions, including recognition by the National Research Foundation (NRF) in 2004.

He was also the first Ela Bhatt Visiting Professor of Development and Decent Work at the International Centre for Development and Decent Work (ICDD) at Kassel University, in Germany.

In addition to his illustrious academic contribution, he helped found a number of local and international bodies and publications.

These include being a founding member of the South African Labour Bulletin and cofounding the first workers college in South Africa, the Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) in 1973.

Between 1984 and 1987, I had the pleasure of serving with Prof Webster on the board of the South African Labour Bulletin.

I further had an opportunity to work closely with Prof Webster in the late 1980s, when I became President of a broader association of sociologists, and other progressive social scientists, the Association for Sociology in Southern Africa (ASSA).

ASSA's annual academic conferences became the premier internal left wing and Marxist debating platform on, amongst others, the struggles against apartheid at the time.

Comrade Eddie, as we called him, continued, until his death, to play a key role in providing intellectual support to the progressive trade union movement, especially FOSATU in the early 1970s through to COSATU from 1985.

He was also the founder and Chair of the Global Labour University at the University of the Witwatersrand and founder and Editor-in Chief of the Global Labour Journal.

He also served as President of the Research Committee on Labour Movements of the International Sociological Association and was a member of the Human Resources Development Council of South Africa (HRDC), under the leadership of the Deputy President of the Republic.

Professor Webster also contributed to the production of many young and Black post graduate students and scholars, in total about 42 Master's and PhD graduates.

I have known Professor Webster in different capacities over many decades, as external examiner of my own doctoral thesis, as a fellow sociologist in labour research, and as a comrade on the Left of the political spectrum.

In one of his sentences in evaluating and endorsing my PhD thesis as the external examiner, he said though he may not agree, but he found my thesis a 'very sophisticated defence of the theory of colonialism of a special type' - a true scholar who was generous in engaging with all left and progressive intellectual traditions, but never compromised on his demand for intellectual rigour and thorough analyses.

He was not just a distinguished scholar and intellectual whose work enhanced our understanding of sociology, labour, work, capital, inequality, and political economy.

He was also an unwavering patriot and socialist internationalist, whose scholarly and activist pursuits were fuelled by an irrepressible commitment to social justice in South Africa and the world.

Like many who were deeply influenced by his thought, I will miss his distinctive voice, personal charisma, and compassion for the interests of the working class.

On behalf of my Departments of Higher Education and Training, and Science and Innovation, and on my own behalf and my family, I wish to convey my heartfelt condolences to the family, friends, and colleagues of Professor Webster.

In particular, I wish to convey my heartfelt condolences to his long standing companion, fellow activist and historian, Luli Callinicos, who shared his vision of a non-racial, democratic, and socialist society.

An academic giant has indeed fallen! May his soul rest in peace.

Issued by: Department of Higher Education and Training





Knowledgebase.land @KnowledgebaseL · Mar 6

Eddie Webster leaves a legacy of advocacy for social justice that transcends academia



From dailymaverick.co.za



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♡ 2

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Ferial Haffajee @ferialhaffajee · Mar 6

Eddie Webster leaves a legacy of advocacy for social justice that transcends academia



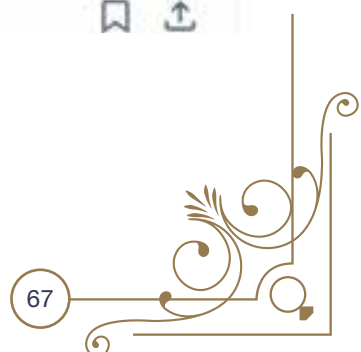
From dailymaverick.co.za

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Erick Aimé Kotchy (Côte d'Ivoire)

GLU Wits Alumnus



My most respectful tributes to Professor Eddie and all the members of his family!

May his soul rest in peace!

He sowed many seeds in the garden of social justice. I am one of them. I hope to grow as he wished, so that he can be proud of his seed!

Go in peace Prof, you fought the good fight.

Sincere condolences to the family!

.....



Peter Maher

Director of Alumni Relations

University of the Witwatersrand



Dear Alexia,

Please accept my condolences. The University is in shock today for your loss, and of course our loss of such a beloved colleague. Eddie touched the lives of countless people and we are extremely proud of his legacy.

I am very sorry my office lost contact with you and sadly it is only due to this tragedy that we became aware of you and the remarkable career you have had as a photographer. Your article in The Guardian, Tracing Lives is incredibly moving and poignant, not to mention the final image of your mom and dad dancing.

With warm regards,

Peter





Kally Forrest



It was only in the last three years that I worked with Eddie. He had previously submitted articles to the South African Labour Bulletin when I was editor and so we had had regular contact. But in the last few years we work intensively together and it was a real pleasure. I had entered academics late in life previously working in the trade unions and writing books on trade union histories, and Eddie was immensely encouraging and interesting to work with. We wrote a number of articles together chiefly on labour in the informal sector, and we were also commissioned by the ILO to write an extended paper on the importance of bargaining in the informal economy in an attempt to persuade the ILO that the state, and not only employers and trade unions, was an important negotiating partner in the provision of facilities for informal

workers – and we argued that they were workers too. Together with other researchers we wrote on the experimental nature of bargaining with the state in the informal economy, and the importance of acknowledging that street traders and waste reclaimers were important bargaining partners as South Africa's economy declined and retrenched workers turned to the informal economy. As we worked we chatted a lot about Eddie's past – his family, his love of his children and grandchildren, his colleagues in South Africa and scattered across the world, the Eastern Cape where he grew up, and his love of running and swimming. We became firm friends and I valued his companionship and wonderful sense of humour enormously. His going has left a huge gap in my life.



Alex Callinicos



I first met Eddie Webster, who died yesterday, when we started as undergraduate students at Balliol College Oxford in October 1969. He was older than me, a 'Senior Status' student reading PPE as a postgraduate. It was a good time for Marxists at Balliol (thanks in part to the supportive presence of Christopher Hill, Steven Lukes & Alan Montefiore). Among Eddie's fellows was Erik Olin Wright, who would become the most important contributor to Marxist class analysis of our generation, and there were also the economists Ben Fine and Simon Mohun. Eddie and I were both from Southern Africa - he from the Eastern Cape, I from Salisbury (now Harare) . He mentioned that his girlfriend (later

wife) was also called Callinicos. This was Luli, later a major historian and biographer of the liberation struggle. Our families come from different ends of the same small Greek island, Ithaki. My uncle Tony had been friendly with Luli's mum but she married another Callinicos. I met her - a beautiful old lady - at Eddie's retirement do at Wits University in Johannesburg 15 years ago. In between he and I met from time to time (twice at the University of York, where he had been a student and I taught for a long time) as he became one of the main theorists and supporters of the new Black workers' movement in South Africa. Its rise sounded the death knell of apartheid and in the 1980s and

1990s we debated how it could end not just racial oppression but capitalist exploitation. Alas, this hasn't happened yet. But it was in Ithaki that we resumed contact these last years. We were sitting in a bar in Vathy, the main port, when someone familiar walked past. I said: 'That 's Eddie Webster' - and it was! We met up several times there, usually in Kioni, where Luli's family comes from. The last time was in August. We sat on the beach while my

daughter played and Eddie talked about his new book about precarious workers in several African cities. He was always studying the empirical contours of the working class, from his classic first book *Cast in a Racial Mould*, to this new research - always in a measured but politically committed way. Goodbye, Eddie - we'll miss you a lot. Love and condolences to Lu li and your family.



Niren Tolsi



Was chatting to Rafs Mayet and he has this beautiful story of trying to meet up with Eddie in downtown Durban last year around the anniversary of the Durban Moment Conference organized by Omar Badsha. Eddie wanted to visit Rick Turner's grave which he had never been to and asked Rafs to be his guide...

Rafs is waiting at Emmanuel Cathedral but can't get hold of Eddie at the appointed hour. Keeps trying. Keeps trying. Eventually Eddie picks up and says: "Just hold on Rafs, my phone was stolen but I'm dealing with it and I'll see you now."

Rafs waits.

Twenty minutes later Eddie rocks up in a cop van. There is a hulking man in the back. Seems Eddie was walking from his beachfront hotel to Emmanuel Cathedral when his phone was stolen

by a "brute of a man" who Eddie, at 80-odd years old, figured it would be worth hunting down on the Durban streets.

"As a former rugby player I couldn't just let my phone go," says Eddie to Rafs by way of explanation.

So he gives chase and tackles the thief, bringing him down like one of those farmer rugby boys who tackle oxen for fun. He is grappling with this guy when a patrolling cop van drives past and stops to assist.

Eddie gets his phone back and a lift to Emmanuel Cathedral with Rafs and the cops. They spend a beautiful time paying their respects to Rick....

Eddie. Always up for it. 🌐👏❤️❤️



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Prof. Zachary Levenson (USA)
University of North Carolina

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I first encountered Eddie at a Global Labor University conference, or maybe it was at an International Sociological Association meeting? Honestly, I can't recall the first time I met the guy, most likely because he was always such a presence in South African sociological spaces – whether he was actually in the room or not. Yes, he'll be remembered as the key figure in radicalizing South African industrial sociology, but I'll remember him for something slightly different: the breadth of his curiosity and engagement. The first time I actually chatted with him at any length, he had just finished debating Mazibuko Jara on the Indian welfare state in a seminar room at Wits – this was probably 13 or 14 years ago now. Or the time he asked Shannon Walsh and Bridget Kenny to explain Lauren Berlant's theory of "cruel optimism" to him over a conference dinner at UJ. He was a careful listener, Eddie, which is an admittedly rare quality

in senior academics. I always found him so eager to engage!

I had the distinct pleasure of conducting a recorded oral history with Eddie a little over a year ago in conjunction with the sociologist Marcel Paret. I was taken by his life trajectory, sure, but it was his vision of sociology that really got to me: the role of intellectuals in relation to social movements and labor struggles. Countless academics talk about this relationship in the abstract, but Eddie lived it, carefully drawing upon and molding the institutional resources of the university in the service of workers' struggle. He was truly a model for us all. What role can the university play – what role can sociology play – in supporting and incubating social struggles? That's the question I'll remember as "the Eddie question." Hamba kahle, comrade.

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Mametlwe Sebei
President
General Industries Workers Union of South Africa

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Issued 10 March 2024 on behalf of GIWUSA

South Africa.

In relation to Eddie Webster, it is not an exaggeration to say this marks the end of the era in relations between the workers movement and the University intelligentsia as well as sociology as a science in

This is the man who single handedly placed the study of the black working class and its independent trade unions at the centre of sociology, he is most certainly the founder of the SA Industrial sociology.

But he just didn't study the workers movement. He engaged and participated actively in building it even if it was from the university.

He did research and contributed to building research capability of many unions not only on policy issues, but most importantly on question of organising, campaigning, and education.

He bridged access to the universities, the most prestigious University of Witwatersrand for many generations of black trade unionists who could never have dreamt of setting their foot there. I owe my second chance in academic advancement to the Sociology of Works Programme he set up and the Global Labour University he brought there.

He might not have been committed to Marxism as we are. His ideas approximate a social democracy, but not a treacherous social democracy in its degenerate form. He was an old-fashioned social democrat who based themselves on the working class, and its organised power to bring about meaningful changes and reforms in improving

workplaces and the lives of the working class people.

To this task, and the cause of the emancipation of the working class, he devoted his entire life. It is not only his activism, but his lifelong academic project that makes this abundantly clear. In his writings, black workers are not just object of study. They're a living subject of history. You hear their voices, thoughts, struggles, dreams, and hopes as well as their disappointments in their quests for a better life, and power. His writings are a tribune from which workers speak to themselves, the workers movement and society.

I have no doubt he will live long in his writings, for generations after this fateful passage we will have to revisit the treasure trove he left us to find the voices of the workers on every question of our age, from trade union education, organisation to their thinks on the political strategy of their movement.

So long Cde Eddie. Hamba Kahle Qabani.

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Prof. Bridget Kenny and Dr Ben Scully

RC44 Research Committee

International Sociological Association



Edward ('Eddie') Webster, Professor of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, passed away on 5 March 2024 at nearly 82 years old. Eminent scholar of the labour process, work organisation and the labour movement in South Africa, he has impacted generations of students, labour activists and colleagues. He was elected as Secretary of RC44 in 1998 and served as President (2002–2006). He was an active member of RC44 ever since. He helped to expand the section's focus to the global South, encouraging debate around informal and precarious labour organising and founded the Global Labour Journal. His book *Grounding*

Globalization: Labor in the Age of Insecurity (2008), with Rob Lambert and Andries Bezuidenhout, was awarded the American Sociological Association's Labor and Labor Movements Section distinguished scholarly monograph prize in 2009. His most recent book, published last year, *Recasting Workers' Power*, with Lynford Dor, details the effects of technological change on work and labour, including in the gig economy, and examines new forms of worker organisation and power. He is the author of over 100 academic articles, as well as numerous research reports. Hamba Kahle, Eddie! Rest in Power!

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Bastian Schulz (Germany)

Resident Director

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Kenya Office

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There are so many things one has to say about Eddie and there are so many things I myself would like to say about Eddie - a mentor, a role model, a companion, a constant source of inspiration and motivation, an ally, a teacher and most importantly, a true comrade and friend. I could spend at least 5 pages on how much he contributed to my personal life but even those 5 pages would not be enough to describe how much I miss him and how much he will be missed by so many people all around the world.

Eddie, you made me a better a better trade unionist, a better social democrat and most importantly, a better human being. I thank you for this with all my heart.

I'm not sure if a parkrun already exists where you are now but if not, you will definitely start one. Rest in Power, my friend.

Bastian Schulz and family (Franziska, Hector & Tuvi)



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The Financial Sector & Allied Workers Union of S.A

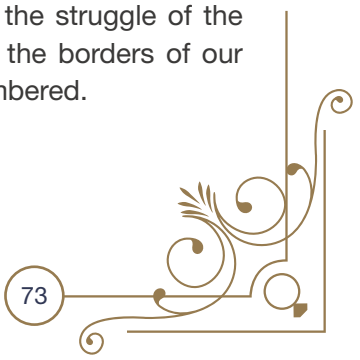
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Issued on 11 March 2024

Tribute to the late Professor Eddie Webster

It was with much dismay to learn about your passing on Tuesday, the 5th of March 2024.

Your immense contribution to the struggle of the workers in Africa and beyond the borders of our continent will forever be remembered.



Whilst much emphasis and recognition is given to the struggle heroes who fought in the trenches such as APLA and Umkhoto-wesizwe, it is without doubt that your struggle through academia equally contributed to the workers struggle.

To Prof Eddie's wife, Luli Callinicos and friends, his demise is not a loss to you only but to the organized labour and the entire academic fraternity (WITS University in particular). His legacy of advocacy for social justice shall be remembered for many years to come.

“What you leave behind is not what is engraved on stone monuments but what is woven in the lives of others” – Pericles

Rest in power Prof Eddie as you join your like-wise heroes such as Mandela and Joe Slovo.

Hamba kahle madala!! Onkabetse Moagi on behalf of FAWUSA Leadership & ENGAGE 2020 Cohort



Johnson Massaquoi (Liberia)
Gold Diamond Miners' and Energy Workers' Union of Liberia
and GLU Wits alumnus



With heavy heart, we stand together in a moment of reflection and homage to celebrate the life of Prof. Eddie Webster, a truly extraordinary soul whose journey among us was a tapestry woven with love, insight, and an unwavering zest for life. Although words can hardly encapsulate the depth of our emotions, they offer a glimpse into the remarkable life Prof. Eddie Webster led and the profound legacy he leaves behind.

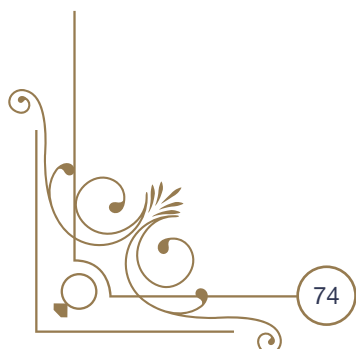
As I recount the many interactions encountered with Prof. Webster while I was participating in the GLU Engage 2023 Program, there is one I can't forget in my entire lifetime. Among the many participants, he had keen interest in knowing about my country (Liberia).

As we bid farewell to Prof. Webster, let us not only grieve his absence but also celebrate the

richness of the life he lived. Let us honor his memory by embodying the virtues he exemplified – by living each day with purpose, by nurturing the relationships we cherish, and by making a positive impact in our own ways.

Prof. Webster, your physical presence will be profoundly missed, but your spirit remains a guiding force in our lives. Your legacy of love, wisdom, and kindness is a treasure that we will carry forward. In our hearts, your memory will forever resonate with love and gratitude.

Rest in peace, Prof. Webster. You have left an indelible mark on our lives, and your spirit will continue to inspire us for all our days as we live in this trouble world.



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Chris Tilly (USA)
University of California, Los Angeles

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Sending my condolences on your loss, which is a loss to all of us. It is a little hard to picture the world of global labor movement studies without Eddie, who always seemed to have something to say, and half a dozen projects in process. I hope we can do a decent job of carrying on his legacy.

In solidarity,
Chris

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South African Communist Party

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Thursday, 07 March 2024

Message of condolences to Professor Eddie Webster family

Solly Mapaila, the General Secretary of the South African Communist Party (SACP), conveys sincere condolences on behalf of the SACP to the family of Professor Edward Webster (82). This message extends to the University of the Witwatersrand, the Chris Hani Institute, the academic community, including those involved in research, education, and scholarship. Equally significant, our condolences are expressed to the working class. Professor Webster, affectionately known as Eddie, passed away on Tuesday, 5 March 2024. "This is a monumental loss for the working class, particularly labour" said Mapaila on Wednesday, 6 March 2024 at the SACP headquarters in Johannesburg.

Eddie's body of research is extensive, encompassing various areas, including public policy. Nevertheless, labour studies have held a

prominent position in his research for decades, dating back to at least the 1970s. His examination of the Durban workers' strikes in the 1970s proved to be influential. In the subsequent decade, in 1985, Eddie published *Cast in a Racial Mould*, a remarkable work delving into the labour process within foundries and radical trade unionism. A focus on the labour process, in the hidden abode of production where capital not only produces but is itself produced as Karl Marx found in *Capital* (Vol. 1), played a key role in Eddie's labour studies approach.

As part of his research work, Professor Webster played a key role in shaping the Decent Work Agenda in South Africa and making decent work a focal point in both labour and policy studies. Among the roles he played, he served as the Director of the Chris Hani Institute, established jointly by the SACP and the Congress of the African Trade Unions. This culminated in *The Unresolved National Question in South Africa: Left thought*



under apartheid and beyond, published in 2017. As part of his contribution to the book, he edited it together with Karin Pampallis.

As the University of the Witwatersrand stated in its message of condolences on Wednesday, 6 March 2024, Eddie published many research reports, books and over 100 journal articles. Eddie co-founded the Institute for Industrial Education in 1973, marking the inception of the first workers' college in South Africa Eddie. The following year, 1974, he played a pivotal role as a founding member of the South African Labour Bulletin. In the year that followed, 1975, Eddie was arrested and tried under the Suppression of Communism Act for his activism against the apartheid regime.

In the 2000s, Eddie founded and chaired the Global Labour University at Wits, a global initiative by the International Labour Organization. This initiative links universities in Germany, India, South Africa, and Brazil.

Among others, Professor Webster's research work covered the important question of workers' power. This culminated in his final book, *Recasting Workers' Power: Work and Inequality in the Shadow of the Digital Age*, published in 2023.

In the book, Professor Webster directs his focus towards workers' power, examining it through the lens of "The Power Resources Approach". This perspective is anchored in identifying the sources of workers' power and how workers experiment, build and strategically exercise their own power in the workplace and the economy in the struggle to resist exploitation and fight for policy changes. The "Digital Age" in the book's title draws attention to the examination of the state-of-the-art digital technological revolution, its implications for work and workers now and in the future, and their responses in the Global South.

Together with professors Rob Lambert and Andries Bezuidenhout, in 2008 Eddie published *Grounding Globalization: Labour in the Age of Insecurity* examining the impact of neoliberal globalisation,

focusing on the white goods industry in three Global South countries, Australia, South Africa and South Korea. This book earned the prestigious American Sociological Association award for the best scholarly monograph published on labour in 2008.

In honour of Professor Edward Webster's memory, the SACP is committed to enhancing its research efforts for the betterment of the working class. The goal is to strive towards social emancipation and progress towards a society free from the exploitation and oppression of one person, class, or country by another. Deepening, expanding, and defending non-racialism stands as a crucial pillar of this commitment, alongside the imperative to eliminate gender inequality.

Issued by the South African Communist Party,

Founded in 1921 as the Communist Party of South Africa.

Media & Communication Work Department: MCW
Department Dr Alex Mohubetswane Mashilo,
Central

Committee Member

National Spokesperson & Political Bureau
Secretary for Policy and Research



Mirko Herberg (Germany)

FES Head of Project: Global South

GLU International Network Members



I would have wished I had another reason to get back in touch with you.

It is such an incredible sad day, and there isn't anything else in my head really today than Eddie's passing. Just yesterday, I was preparing an event with him in Berlin to share his "Recasting Workers Power" with a German audience. How much I was looking forward to having him here with us again and to continue our "Trade Unions in Transformation" discourse and open a few eyes around here.

As he had opened my eyes and added a new dimension to my understanding of organized labour. So it is the combination of personal and professional gratitude to Eddie that I will carry with me for the rest of my professional work. When we celebrate 20 Years of GLU on 30 April we shall surely commemorate Eddie's life, work and contribution to GLU.

I hope you are holding out strong. Be well, dear Michelle, as I send you greetings of solidarity from Berlin.





Prof. Christoph Scherrer (Germany)
University of Kassel



Dear all, Yes, what a great loss. Just last week I received an email from Eddie listing his affiliations for the list of contributors to the book on decent work that Madelaine, Marcel and I are co-editing. We will dedicate the book to him and his inspiring intellect and activism.

With much sadness

.....



Prof. Hugo Dias (Brazil)
State University of Campinas



Dear all, Very very sad to hear. He was a huge inspiration for generations of Labour Sociologists - myself included. He will be sorely missed.

.....



Dr Edlira Xhafa
Executive Director
Global Labour University (GLU) Online Academy



Dear Comrades, the grief and emptiness that we are all feeling these days are the greatest testimony to the monumental role that Eddie has played to generations of labour activists in the labour movement across the world.

Sad as they are, these feelings are also an inspiration for living a meaningful life - a life, whose legacy lives on well beyond this time and dimension.

With very best wishes for peace and comfort to the family all the comrades whose lives have been touched by Eddie in so many, beautiful ways.



Robson Chere

ARTUZ Secretary General

Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe



ARTUZ is mourning the loss of Professor Eddie Webster, a revolutionary figure who played a significant role in advancing workers' struggles and progressive labor laws. His research and collaborations with labor movements benefited many, including ARTUZ members like Moreblessing Nyambara, Christine Kayumba, and Solukhuhle Ndlovu. The union extends its deepest condolences to the GLU, Wits, Webster family, comrades, and friends.

Professor Webster's passion for studying the sociology of work and his leadership in the Global Labour University left a lasting impact on the labor landscape in South Africa. His legacy will continue to inspire and guide labor laws for years to come. ARTUZ is proud to have had the opportunity to benefit from his expertise and mentorship, and his dedication to workers' struggles will not be forgotten. Rest in peace, Professor Eddie Webster.



Petunia Mpoza

GLU Wits alumna



Good day fellow colleagues and Cdes.

Thanks Comrade Warren,

To the Family, Friends, former Students and Colleagues of Prof Eddie Webster, I hope this message finds you surrounded by strength and compassion. Prof is loved and respected by many. He shared himself and his knowledge with all.

May his spirit rise in power, the loss is deeply felt by many.

Let us continue to celebrate Prof, his wealth of contributions, and memories.

Dear Prof, you will always be in our hearts 🌻



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GLU Wits Alumni Trade Unionist

Facebook Group

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COMMENTS

Rezoanul Haque Azom (Bangladesh)

Indeed a great loss for the working class. May God award the professor's good deed.

Susanta Kumar Sahoo (India)

RIP Prof.

Wamai Jacqueline (Kenya)

Rest in power!

Rabecca Butau (Zimbabwe)

My heartfelt condolences, may his soul rest in peace.

Rhoda Nyadundu (Zimbabwe)

Go well Prof. A great loss indeed.

Kasonka Benjamin Yombwe (Zambia)

RIP Prof. Eddie 😞 😞 😞

Srey Sereyvothana (Cambodia)

Please rest in peaceful, Prof. 🙏🙏🙏

Onkabetse Isaac Moagi (South Africa)

Oohh my!! This is sad indeed Comrades

This is not only a loss to Prof Eddie's immediate family but to the GLU at large. Lucky are those of us who crossed paths with him and enjoyed his wealth of knowledge and wisdom. May his soul rest in eternal peace 🙏

Sameer Pandey (India)

Rest in Peace Professor Eddie 🙏🙏

Simbarashe Kutwayo (Swaziland)

A great loss to the humanities fraternity in its entirety. MHSRIEP.

Mabu Molele (South Africa)

May his soul rest in perfect peace. 🙏

Babedi Juliah Kebonang (Botswana)

Rest in power Cde Eddie Webster 😞

Nhlanhla Mabizela (South Africa)

Rest in power Prof.

Dyke Munetsi (South Africa)

RIP comrade Eddie Webster

Jimson Kemoreile (Botswana)

The Labour guru, we will miss him.

Mwansasu Nice (Tanzania)

It's real sad that a giant madala has fallen ...

Kakulu Manyelela (Botswana)

😞OMG!

This is sad indeed, let's be comforted cdes. MHSRIIP, he was a true cde to everyone. Some of us had that privilege to be nearer to him.

Sam Msibi (South Africa)

You maybe gone but you will never be forgotten, go well Prof.

Ruth Manjawira (Malawi)

Our Dear Madala and transitioned. May he rest in peace.

Kizito Faradase Mupunga (Zimbabwe)

RIP Prof Eddie

Pule Malapela (South Africa)

My sincere condolences. I will never forget prof Webster in 2023.

Vivian Perose (Kenya)

Very sad news, my deepest condolences, Go well Professor Eddie.

Kambwali Katenga (Tanzania)

Farewell Prof.

Syaduzzaman Mithu (Bangladesh)

I would express my deepest condolences.

Samson Kioko (Kenya)

My sincere heartfelt condolences the family and entire GLU fraternity. RIP Pro. Eddie Webster.

Edward Aden Tswaipe (Botswana)

Go well Cde Eddie Webster. What a great loss to the working class. But he multiplied himself many, many fold.

Etta Ziwa (Zambia)

Oh nooo Prof. My condolences to the family

Jane Mwaka (Kenya)

Rest in peace prof.

Hilda Boke (Kenya)

RIP to a great teacher.

Stephen Tembo (Zambia)

My sincere condolences to the family and the whole labour fraternity

Lawrence Ombiro (Kenya)

Condolences.

Asad Memon (Pakistan)

RIP

Milagros A. Paz (Peru)

So sad news. Professor Webster presente 🙏

Marcelo Schmidt (Brazil)

A dear teacher in LPG 6 Germany 2009 and in our class 2015 in SA; his ideas had a significant part in my PhD in France 2018, what a sad loss for GLU, for us and for the working class struggle.

Fundizwi Sikhondze (Swaziland)

The fall of a big tree is felt near and far. Go well comrade Professor Edward Webster.

Toekie Mamodula Lebodi-Kgabo (South Africa)

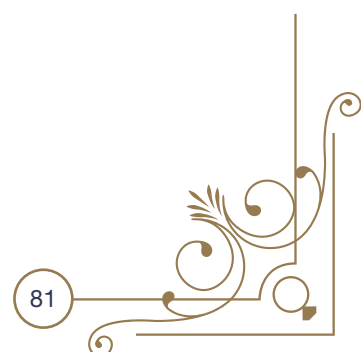
May his soul rest in peace ❤️

Jokoniah Mawopa (Zimbabwe)

Mhsrip.

Mwijuka Jesca (Uganda)

Gone abrupt when we have just known him, so hurting. May his soul rest in peace eternally.





Southern windmill:

The life and work of Edward Webster [1]



Michael Burawoy

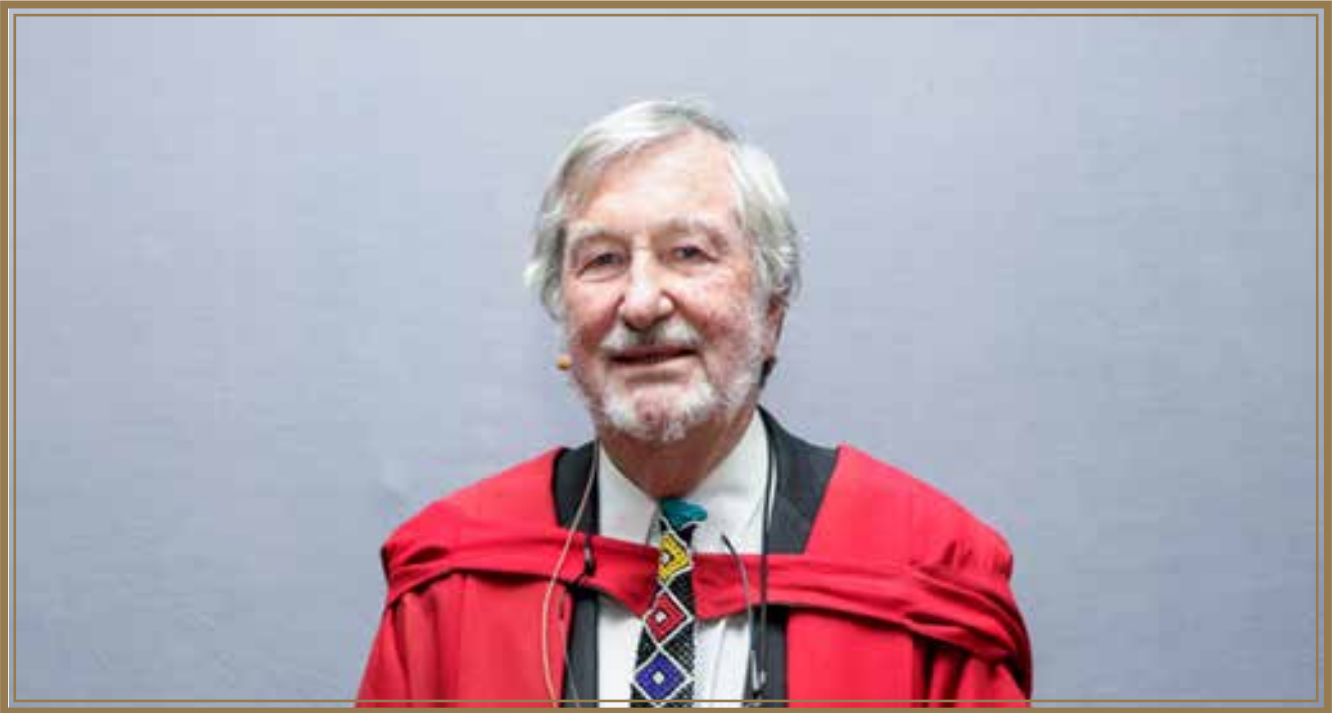
It is exactly 50 years since C Wright Mills (1959) penned his rendition of the sociological imagination as the interplay of biography and history, or, more actively, as transforming private troubles into public issues. Given the currency of Mills's pithy formula, one might expect sociologists to be all the more conscious of the connection between their own biography and history, or between their own personal troubles and public issues. Yet sociologists can be most obtuse about their position in society, silent as to how their ideas are an expression of the world in which they live, and, thus, naïve about the limits and possibilities of changing that world. So often, it is as if their ideas soar above the context in which they are produced, as if their creativity is a unique and ineffable quality divorced from their own social worlds. Sociologists are guilty of what Alvin Gouldner (1970) once called methodological dualism – that sociological analysis is for the sociologised not for the sociologist who miraculously escapes the social forces that pin down and constrain everyone else.

This asymmetry applies to C Wright Mills himself who harboured all manner of illusions about his self-defined isolation at the margins of academia, unshaped by the forces he described. Moreover, he thought that the analysis of the link between social milieu in which people live and the social structure which shaped that milieu would spontaneously give rise to the transformation of personal troubles into public issues. In other words, he seemed to think that knowledge immaculately produces its own power effects. Although he did have political programmes they were divorced from his sociological analysis. He did not investigate the way sociological imagination has to be connected to political imagination via organisation, institutions, and social movements if it is to contribute to social transformation. In the final analysis, he shared

with the academics he criticised the illusion of the knowledge effect, and thus like them justified his separation and insulation from society.

In this paper I wish to suggest that, because it is a dominated sociology, Southern sociology more easily recognises its own place in society, which sets limits and creates possibilities for sociology's participation in social transformation. Moreover, sociological imagination is no guarantee of social transformation, the turning of personal troubles into public issues, as Mills implies, but this requires in addition a political imagination, forged through collective and collaborative practices with groups, organisations, movements beyond the academy. The expansion of Southern sociology depends on the dialectic of political and sociological imagination.

I will make this argument through the interrogation of the life and work of Edward Webster, one of South Africa's most distinguished sociologists. He is a perpetual motion machine – a windmill. A typical day in the life of Edward Webster might start out with a run on the golf course, interrupted by a conversation with local workers, then a debate on the radio with the head of the trade union federation, moving on to a meeting of SWOP (Sociology of Work Unit that he founded in 1983), and then to a lecture to SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) journalists, who are taking the two week course at the university, to the completion of a scholarly article, to a meeting with NUMSA (National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa) who want him to undertake research on workplace control. Perhaps during the day he will find some time to visit with his grandsons. He gets home late, energised by the day's activities, to be cooled out and debriefed by his wife, the renowned biographer and popular historian, Luli Callinicos.



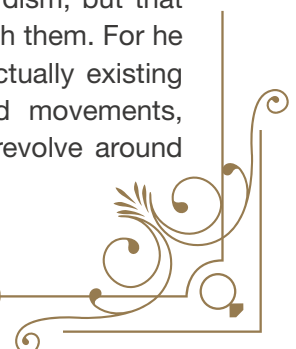
What marks Webster's sociological practice is not just hyper-activity, but the intimate connection between his academic and his public lives: the one inseparable from the other. The Webster windmill takes in the winds of change – social, political and economic winds – and turns them into a prodigious intellectual engagement. As the winds intensify the windmill accelerates, generating ever higher voltage sociology. Sparks fly, igniting the political will as well as the sociological imagination of all those around him, and thus feeding more energy into the windmill. We are not here talking so much about the personal career of Eddie Webster as the way his life comes to be embedded in movements and organisations. While such engagement is by no means confined to the Global South, nonetheless the turbulence of social transformation creates a fluidity between university and the wider society – rarely observed in the North – encouraging deep involvement, often at great personal risk.

Foundations

Any windmill is only as strong as its foundations. The Webster windmill is founded on a moral vision that propels his engagements, early examples of which can be found in his student years at Rhodes, 1961-1965. In a reflection entitled, 'Rebels with a cause of their own', Webster writes about the way he discovered Marxism in the writings of Christopher

Hill and of how he disappointed his 'opinionated and demanding' teacher, Winnie Maxwell, who would tell him, 'Laddy, history is not a railroad and you should beware of simple answers to complex and individual events. This is not a sociology class and we are not socialists' (Webster 2005:100). But it was not Marxism that impelled his moral vision, or at least that would only come later, but the patent injustice of apartheid. One of his earliest protests occurred when he was President of the Rhodes Student Representative Council (SRC) – the demand to lift the ban that prevented Africans from watching university rugby. As he writes, in a self-critical vein, 'We were protesting on behalf of black supporters to watch our rugby not for non-racial rugby teams or the right of all players to participate in the same league' (Webster 2005:104).

He was sowing the seeds of a life of protest not just on behalf of but also in collaboration with the African working class. That deepening engagement, however, was rarely revolutionary in intent but it took the form, as he puts it, of radical reform. In those early years, and indeed throughout his life, he maintained a critical distance from the ANC and the SACP and any sort of vanguardism, but that did not mean he did not engage with them. For he always believed in starting from actually existing institutions and actually mobilised movements, and for Webster these tended to revolve around



labour unions and labour movements. He would take their issues as point of departure if not point of conclusion.²

No windmill can withstand gale force winds without a strong foundation

– in this case an abiding moral vision combined with radical reform – but it also needs a powerful fulcrum for its rotating blades. That fulcrum did not arrive ready-made but was built over time and would eventually in 1983 become The Sociology of Work Programme (SWOP), housed in the University of Witwatersrand. After a stint at Unilever and then teaching history in high school, especially King David's High School, Webster was ready to return to academic studies but now with a new political mission. He was admitted to Balliol College, Oxford, in 1969 to study for an MA in PPE where he imbibed the fashionable Marxism of the time, influenced by among others Steven Lukes, before taking off for York University where he began to develop a dissertation on the so-called Durban riots of 1949 – a dissertation that was intended to bring together Marxism and the pluralist perspectives of MG Smith, Pierre Van den Berghe and Leo Kuper. It was in Yorkshire that Webster had his first engagement with adult education, which anticipated his future connection to worker education.

When Lawrence Schlemmer offered him a position at the University of Natal (Durban), it was natural he would take it and return to South Africa. He arrived in February 1973, just after the Durban strikes which had absorbed the attention of his colleagues, but especially Richard Turner, a young philosopher himself recently returned from the Sorbonne with New Left thinking and a commitment to participatory democracy. At that time Turner was under house arrest, but nonetheless the two became close friends and collaborators. Under the influence of Turner and the changing tide of events Webster turned from his interest in the Durban Riots to the insurgent African working class. The seeds of SWOP were born in Turner's vision of an Institute for Industrial Education (IIE) that would be devoted to advancing the working class movement through workers' education, labour research and a labour journal. The IIE was founded in Durban but Webster would leave for the University of

Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1976 where he would continue the project that would eventually become SWOP. Turner himself was assassinated by the Security Police in 1978 but his ideas lived on in Webster's political vision, even into post-apartheid South Africa (Webster 1993).

SWOP was Webster's brain child and it grew into his 'Modern Prince', advancing the interests of the working class, but from within the relatively protected arena of the university. When formally established in 1983, it already came with its four arms in embryo. The first arm is an expanding research agenda that responded to changing political winds; the second arm is a public engagement, bringing research findings into the public arena for discussion and debate; the third arm is policy work – or, for reasons that will become clear, what I will call principled intervention – for trade unions, and, in the post-apartheid era, for government agencies and corporations; the fourth arm is institution building within the university, most notably SWOP itself and the department of sociology itself, but also beyond the university, he began to redefine the meaning of sociology.

At the core of this reenvisioning of sociology lies the interconnectedness and inseparability of the 4 blades, joined together in SWOP. They whirl around together at speeds determined by the winds of change. Indeed, when the winds are gale force it is impossible to get close to the Webster windmill without being drawn into its vortex, and the participants in SWOP have to hang on for dear life. When a political storm rages, it is hard work to make sure none of the blades break off. As we explore these blades one by one it will become apparent just how interconnected they are. Moreover, their interconnectedness constitutes the political imagination – an interconnectedness rarely found in the North with its entrenched division of sociological labour.

The Webster Windmill

Expanding research programme

We start with Webster's expanding research agenda, ever sensitive to the issues thrown up by engagements with the world beyond. It began, however, with the more remote project of the so-called Durban Riots of 1949 that were aimed

at Indian commerce. Webster's interpretation developed under the influence of both Marxist and pluralist understandings of South Africa. He argued that Indians' access to land ownership, their control of transportation, their facility with English, as well as their ease of movement gave them significant advantages over the emergent African petty bourgeoisie in controlling commerce and services. Through the eyes of Africans, especially the African petty bourgeoisie, Indians were perpetrators of a secondary colonisation, and it was this that lay behind the Durban riots. At the focus of the proposed research was the racial divide within the petty bourgeoisie based on 'differential incorporation' into the apartheid order. The project was formulated in England but Webster was deterred from pursuing this topic when he arrived in Durban in 1973.³ Instead he turned his gaze on the African working class.

Through the 1970s and early 1980s the African working class advanced toward a class for itself, joining with community organisations and the UDF to become ever more militant both at work and in the community. Webster was never far from these struggles campaigning for the recognition of trade unions. Once he arrived at Wits he turned to write his dissertation now on the topic of working class formation. Influenced by the rising interest in labour process theory, that is the transformation of work with the development of capitalism, generated by the publication of Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974), Webster took advantage of the minutes of the meetings of the moulders' union that had been deposited in the Wits archives. Originally a craft union for whites only, its monopoly of skill was retained in the face of mechanisation by appeal to job reservation. Racial solidarity successfully held up deskilling until after the Second World War when slowly jobs were diluted and Africans were deployed as semi-skilled operatives. As the induction of semi-skilled Africans accelerated so the craft union dissipated and in its place there arose an industrial union, explicitly recognised as such when the Wiehahn Commission established the right of Africans to form trade unions. The last part of the dissertation reflects on the burgeoning social movement unionism that united community and workplace struggles against apartheid.

Cast in a Racial Mould (1985) emerged from Webster's dissertation. It made a number of significant contributions, but let me mention two. First, it showed how the labour movement was shaped by the transformation of work. In the labour process literature, with the partial exception of Richard Edwards's *Contested Terrain* (1979), there was little that linked labour process to labour movement over the long durée. Equally in the South African literature there were analyses of working class struggles, such as the classic *Class and Colour in South Africa* by Jack and Ray Simons (1968), but these were not traced back to the transformation of work. Second, whereas the labour process literature has been inundated with critical commentary from feminists who insisted on the importance of gender in the regulation and transformation of the labour process, there has been very little analysis of the impact of racial orders on the labour process. *Cast in a Racial Mould*, therefore, remains a classic in these two respects, reflecting a century of capitalist development in South Africa, seen through the lens of the emerging labour movement in the decade after the Durban strikes.

Absorbed in the labour struggles against apartheid Webster would elaborate different aspects of *Cast in a Racial Mould*. We would have to wait for the end of the apartheid for the next phase of his research agenda which would dwell on the democratic transition, dubbed the double transition, interconnecting democratisation and economic class compromise. With Glenn Adler (Adler and Webster 1995) he would take on board the literature on the Latin American transition to democracy, which focused on pact making among elites to the exclusion of popular participation. In South Africa, at least, the legacy of a strong labour movement would provide the opening for a different path of development. As the 1990s wore on Webster became less optimistic about the transition but he never lost sight of economic development through redistribution, and the creation of the institutions of class compromise (Webster and Adler 1999). His research agenda shifted to the effects of a market driven economic policy that involved privatisation and dismantling protections for labour. Working with Bridget Kenny, Sarah Mosoetsa, Karl Von Holt and others, Webster would refocus his research on the informalisation

of the economy, those expanding sectors of the economy that were beyond the reach of trade unions, and from there it was a short step to the examination of survival strategies of households (Webster and von Holdt 2005).

This led to a fourth phase of his research trajectory – the move into comparative studies. If Braverman (1974) and Richard Edwards (1979) had shaped his approach to the labour process and its connection to the labour movement, and if pact theory and class compromise had framed his analysis of transition, it would be Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (1944) that provided the basis for teasing out the specificity of South Africa's response to neoliberalism. Problematising Polanyi's countermovement of society against the market he, Rob Lambert and Andries Bezuidenhout (2008) compared the responses to neoliberalism in South Africa, South Korea and Australia by focusing on community responses to the restructuring of the white goods industry. Grounding Globalisation studied on-the-ground responses to global patterns of marketisation, responses that ranged from informalisation to building an international labour movement.

Each phase in the expanding research programme was a quite specific response to the immediate political and economic context of South Africa, but it also drew on different strands of theory being developed in the UK or the US. The dynamism of this localisation of theory from the North came less from the pursuit of its internal contradictions and more from the external anomalies, issues thrown up by the context within which he worked. If in the North we have the luxury of developing a research programme, in which its empirical belts are driven primarily by an internal logic, and only secondarily by the world beyond, the appeal of the Southern windmill is the way it develops a research agenda, primarily responsive to emergent public and policy issues. That is why it is impossible to disconnect SWOP's blade of theory from the blades of public engagement, policy intervention, and institution building. That is how the sociological imagination can quickly become a political imagination.

Public engagement

It is difficult to grasp the scope and intensity of Webster's public engagement that ranged

from debates in the media (television, radio, newspapers), to worker education, and the famous SWOP breakfasts. But public engagement can be a life and death matter as Webster would learn very soon after he returned to South Africa. In 1973 Charles Nupen, President of NUSAS (National Union of South African Students), invited Webster to give a paper to a student seminar on the implications of the Black Consciousness Movement for the White Left. Webster (1974) distinguishes three responses of whites: the uncomprehending traditional liberal who responds defensively, reiterating commitment to equality, and non-racialism, arguing for slow assimilation; the despairing liberal who accepts collective white guilt for racism, seeing no way out and so either 'withdraws from the country or joins Anglo American'; the committed radical who adopts a more critical stance toward Black Consciousness, carving out a space for political activism.

While recognising the importance of Black Consciousness and the cultural recuperation that lies behind it, Webster, standing as a committed radical, points to the potential reemergence of a black bourgeoisie that advances its own class interests in the name of race. But his most challenging intervention was to call on whites to examine how their institutions are implicated in the reproduction of racism, and to make white society 'more receptive to the kind of change that the oppressed will force upon it'. Webster drew on black radical thought from the Black Panthers in US to Steve Biko and BCM, on debates about African socialism and neocolonialism in independent Africa, but also derivatively on Frantz Fanon. He directed his concerns at white South Africans, argued that they have to change to meet the challenge of the rising tide of struggles against apartheid. This was as forthright and radical a statement Webster would ever make and, indeed, it attracted the attention of the Security Branch, leading to his arrest two years later, at the end of 1975, under the Suppression of Communism Act.

Webster moved to the University of Witwatersrand in 1976, the year of his trial. George Bizos (2007) one of the defense attorneys, called it the trial of the NUSAS (National Union of South African Students) Five, since with the exception of Webster the accused were all NUSAS leaders.

Among other things they were accused of calling for the release of political prisoners, fighting for the recognition of African trade unions, and advocating the violent transformation of society. Webster defended himself with a lecture on the virtues of institutionalising industrial conflict through establishing African trade unions. Rather than stimulate violence trade unions would minimise violence. 'Trade unions', he said, 'were not the institutions that conservatives fear and that revolutionaries hope for'.⁴ Nonetheless, even if trade unions were not a weapon of revolution, this view – stemming from elementary functionalist theory of conflict – had radical implications simply because Africans were not allowed to form them.

In the United States the same theory was being branded conservative, precisely because it reproduced the social order, absorbing, channelling, and taming class conflict. Indeed, in the US sociologists had developed social movement theory to valorise the transformative potential of non-institutionalised conflict in civil society – the civil rights movement, the student movement, the women's movement, the anti-war movement. They wrote off the labour movement precisely because it was institutionalised. When confronted with violence in South Africa, however, Webster would always underline the importance of recognising actors and organising conflict.

The accused were found not guilty but the magistrate, commenting on the speeches Webster made, was compelled to declare Webster 'an arrogant young man' and in response his father called out, 'And that's no crime!' At the end of the trial Webster had a telling exchange with head of security police, Colonel Johan Coetzee, himself a trained and sophisticated political scientist. Webster approached Coetzee, 'Well, I've been found not guilty', to which Coetzee responded, 'Yes, but you are not innocent'. And, of course, he was right. Webster's address to the NUSAS seminar was far from innocent. It was a radical statement for reform. The fact that the state was so handsomely defeated in the trial showed that charges against intellectuals would not stick in South Africa's law courts with its independent judiciary. If it wanted to quash the spread of ideas hostile to apartheid, then the state would have to assassinate their authors. This is precisely what

happened to Rick Turner, David Webster, and Ruth First, and indeed there were also attempts Edward Webster's life.

Webster may have been found not-guilty but, as Colonel Coetzee intimated, he was a marked man. A lesser man would have withdrawn from public engagement, but not Webster. Nonetheless he had to be more circumspect. As we will see he did turn inward, building sociology within the university, but he also continued his outward orientation with the South African Labour Bulletin and workers' education. The SALB was founded by Turner and Webster among others in Durban in 1974 (see Webster 2004) and it continues to this day. Webster was on the board for 27 years. Widely read in the labour movement, it was host to some of its most important debates. Especially noteworthy was the intense debate over union registration. After the Wiehahn Commission had proposed recognition of African unions there ensued a major debate among unionists as to whether it was better to boycott the new legislation, resisting cooptation by the state, or to register in order to exploit spaces that opened up within the state. Alec Erwin would pose the dilemma in these terms: should one use the state to undermine capital or attack capitalism to undermine the state. Together with the editors of the SALB Webster would come down in favour of registration, another case of hoped-for radical reform. Over the years every major issue affecting the labour movement has been debated in the pages of the SALB.

The other prong inherited from Turner's brainchild, the Institute of Industrial Education, was worker education. The IIE had introduced a diploma course in Durban for which they produced four books that presented a working class perspective on the economy, on society, on the factory and on organisation. The books were translated into Zulu and played a pivotal role in the project of worker education that would bring together incipient unionists, and build a democratic base for unionism within the factories.

After he arrived at Wits Webster and his colleague, the historian Phil Bonner, developed courses in worker education for the new leadership of the trade union movement. Initially, the course was held on campus, but later Wits administration

would ban worker education as political and therefore in violation of the university's statutes. Despite protest Webster was forced to take worker education off campus. The university did not want to be seen as harbouring forces for social upheaval, especially given its close links with business. With the formation of COSATU in 1985 worker education was taken away from Webster and his colleagues, but SWOP would develop other forums of public education. More recently, for example, it has begun annual courses for journalists from the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

In 1992 it started monthly SWOP breakfasts at which SWOP researchers would present their findings and analysis to interested bodies in the community – trade unions, businesses, educators, politicians, journalists and civil servants. This has been one of SWOP's most successful, long-standing and innovative initiatives – a prototype of public sociology in which the researcher and researched meet in public discussion. The researcher reports back to those who sponsored the research as well as to those who were the object of research, and, in the case of work in progress, rethinking its direction. It is much more than a conversation among those immediately involved in research, but involves developing new concepts, new understandings of public issues that are of a broad interest. There is a regular core audience of some 40 people who always appear, and then in addition are those attracted to a particular topic. As recorded in the 2008 Annual Report of SWOP, the topics for that year were:

- Edward Webster and Luli Callinicos, 'Elephant in the Room: a sociology of Polokwane'
- Jacklyn Cock, 'Challenging the "Tyrannous" Power of Iscor and Mittal: the struggle for environmental justice in Steel Valley'
- Sakhela Buhlungu and Andries Bezuidenhout, 'Spaces of Union Organising: the National Union of Mineworkers and the demise of compounds'
- Karl von Holdt, 'The Developmental State in South Africa: an unlikely prospect'
- Malehoko Tshoaedi, 'COSATU Women and the Politics of Transition'

- Devan Pillay, 'Labour and the Challenges of Globalisation: what prospect for transnational solidarity'
- Karl von Holdt, Andries Bezuidenhout, and Khayaat Fakier, 'Precarious Society: work, households and the state in South Africa'
- Andries Bezuidenhout, Christine Bischoff and Kezia Lewins, 'An Evaluation of the Implementation and Impact of the Employment Equity Act'.

The SWOP breakfasts serve multiple functions, generating public debate but also building a network of institutions upon which SWOP can draw in pursuing further research.

What we see, then, over time is the movement from individual initiative to the cautious institutionalisation of public sociology. What is institutionalised, however, is not the recognition of public sociology as a criterion of academic promotion, not incentivising public sociology within a professional career but establishing the means and resources to communicate sociology to broader audiences on a regular basis, contributing to a public sphere of dialogue. Clearly, these outward looking projects are rooted in a research agenda which SWOP manages to translate into the language and concerns of a variety of interested parties whose responses feed back into the research agenda. This organic public sociology is very different from the traditional public sociology in which the sociologist broadcasts his or her ideas via books, op ed pieces, interviews and the like, although of course the former does not preclude the latter.

Above all, public sociology in the South can be a dangerous enterprise that puts lives and not just careers at risk. Even though Webster steered clear of the ANC and the SACP – although he was a supporter of the first union federation (FOSATU) – still he like others was deemed an enemy of the state, all the more dangerous because his critical independence proved unassailable in a court of law. In political regimes hostile to free speech and open debate public sociology, especially the organic variety, can be a potent political force but one that comes at enormous cost. Democratisation has brought greater freedom for public sociology



but also limited its political significance. With the evisceration of civil society and the corporatisation of the university, public sociology is driven in the direction of policy intervention, thereby creating a host of new dilemmas.

Principled intervention

The distinction between policy and public sociology is often difficult to draw. If public sociology aims at broadening public dialogue, policy intervention aims at a particular client, indeed it is often in service of a particular client, accepting parameters defined by the client. If the danger of public sociology lay in alienating the apartheid state that sought to control the limits of public dialogue, the challenge of policy research is to avoid a compromising relation with the client who sponsors the research. Webster has always been careful to avoid being captured by the clients for whom he undertakes research, retaining the autonomy necessary to adopt a critical stance toward the client whether it be union, party or corporation. I call this principled intervention. The following cases, just a few of the many policy projects undertaken by SWOP, illustrate its achievements and dilemmas.

SWOP was originally founded as a policy unit when a group of engineers, known as the Technical Advice Group (TAG) approached Webster in 1983, hoping to deploy their skills and knowledge for progressive ends. This group included people who would become major players in the struggles around work and trade unions – Jean Leger, Judy Maller, Freddy Sitas, Yunus Ballim. As Webster completed his dissertation on the moulders he developed a concern for respiratory diseases, associated with foundry work. One of the members of TAG – Freddy Sitas, a student of medicine – followed this up and later published an analysis of the link (Sitas, Douglas and Webster 1989). Jean Leger would collaborate with Webster on another project concerned with occupational health – mine accidents – which had always been a thorn in the side of mining companies. Leger’s research would take several years and it was done with the support of the new National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). In the end he showed how work organisation, in particular racial despotism, was at the heart of the high number of fatalities. White miners paid on an incentive bonus scheme would drive their

African subordinates to work in the most unsafe of conditions.

The report (Leger 1985) was discussed in 1985 at a most dramatic public event organised by the then emerging SWOP. Webster invited both NUM and the Chamber of Mines to discuss the report on the Wits Campus.

Workers came on foot and managers by helicopter. Webster chaired the meeting of the two sides of industry, pointing out that the university had long supported the mining industry with regard to matters of engineering, but it should also be concerned with the livelihood of African labour. A heated debate ensued in which the representatives of the companies questioned the findings by attacking the methodology used in social research – snow-ball sampling. Webster and his colleagues were able to roll out experts in social science methodology that would justify the method, putting the Chamber of Mines on the defensive.

This intervention on behalf of and commissioned by NUM was relatively successful. NUM would later put out a popular version of the Leger report under the title *A Thousand Ways to Die* (National Union of Mineworkers 1991) and the mining companies would modify their operations underground. But the next project showed just how delicate the relation between sociologist and favoured client can become. It was an investigation initiated by Webster and his colleagues, with the tacit approval of the local branch of NUM, on the causes of HIV/AIDS among mineworkers. The research, conducted in 1988 when there was still silence around HIV/AIDS even as it was already taking so many lives in South Africa, pointed to the system of migrant labour as the ultimate source of the problem. Separated from their wives in the homelands, African miners took on multiple partners – women desperate for income – during their stints on the mines, spreading the HIV virus at alarming rates. In this case the NUM refused permission to publish the research since, from NUM’s point of view, it pathologised the sexual behaviour of Africans, feeding the long history of racist views of Africans as uncivilised – even though the ultimate culprit was seen to be the mining industry’s system of migrant labour. SWOP was caught in a bind as the NUM was trying to censor its research, but

eventually a compromise was reached and the paper written by the researchers – Jochelson, Mothibeli, and Leger (1991) – was published in a foreign journal, the *International Journal of Health Services*.

The clients of SWOP have changed in the post-apartheid period. SWOP now undertakes membership surveys for COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) and for the ANC (African National Congress). It undertook commissioned research for the mining companies such as a study of occupational cultures in deep level mining, and then making proposal for training miners who would work in such conditions. But SWOP was also asked to advise government agencies. In 2007 the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) asked Webster and Buhlungu to make an assessment of the increasing violence in and around industrial plants. The two sociologists first asked their union partners whether to accept the invitation. With union encouragement Webster and Buhlungu made a presentation to the NIA on the importance of having strong unions to channel conflict if violence was to be avoided. This was a familiar argument that Webster had made on numerous occasions, not least as an expert witness in the case of workers indicted for killing scabs (Webster and Simpson 1991). The NIA was so pleased with SWOP's presentation that it would then request their assistance in dealing with specific strikes. Here Webster drew the line, turning down substantial payment in order to preserve the integrity of SWOP – not to be captured by any agency, but particularly one that was hostile to labour.

One might say that Webster's policy intervention was governed by the principle of never crossing a metaphorical picket line, that is to say he insisted on maintaining autonomy in face of client pressure to come over to its side. This is as true for labour as it is for capital. Thus, he can sit on the boards of the Chris Hani Institute, a research arm of the South African Communist Party, as well as of the Southern African Development Bank. The picket line is never clear. It is an imaginary line that Webster continually draws and redraws as he is sucked onto different terrains of conflict, and as the overall political context changes. Like public dialogue, principled intervention translates

personal troubles into public issues, but he always tries to ensure that the link does not back fire, that it does not exacerbate the personal troubles of those whose cause he seeks to defend.

Institution building

At every point the contrast with Mills is stark, but none more stark than in Webster's relation to the university. Mills constituted himself as a lone martyr at the fringes of the academy. He criticised those who would get their hands dirty in policy research or in anything like an organic public sociology. He spoke to his mass society from the rafters of society, condemning its dominant institutions, not least the university. He stood at the fringes of an elite academic world, mocking those who ran it, not taking his teaching especially seriously. How different is Webster's engagement with the world, always trying to build and rebuild institutions that would carry forward his ideas, his research, his teaching.

Before the NUSAS trial (1976) Webster had been following Turner's ideas for the Institute for Industrial Education, embracing research into working class culture that would shed light on the Durban strikes (Webster 1978), developing worker education, and creating a journal that would address the interests of the emergent African trade unions. The arrest and then the trial taught Webster much about the thinking of the police and security forces, and the possibilities of fighting the state on the terrain of law. But he was now a marked man and had to be more cautious in his political engagement. So after the trial Webster turned to the university that had supported him throughout the trial by continuing his employment on the grounds that he was innocent until proven guilty.

Webster set about changing the curriculum in the sociology department at Wits. He transformed the existing course in industrial sociology by drawing on critical theory, largely Marxist theory. Building on that success he introduced an honours programme in industrial sociology which attracted some of the best and brightest students, including such figures as Karl von Holdt, Kate Philips, Jane Barrett, Avril Joffe, Darlene Miller, all committed to a critical engagement with South African society. Many of these students would go on to play a major role in the labour movement but also transforming

sociology in a Marxist direction with a focus on labour.

This was, of course, a period of escalating protest in industry but also in the townships in the wake of the 1976 Soweto Uprising. FOSATU (the Federation of South African Trade Unions) was launched in 1979, after the Wiehahn Commission had endorsed African trade unions, and it was then that Webster and his colleagues Phil Bonner, Halton Cheadle and Duncan Innes introduced their three-week courses for trade union leadership. As Webster was slowly transforming the Wits sociology department he was also working on his dissertation on the history of the moulders. As already recounted SWOP would develop later (1983) out of a group of progressive Wits scientists and engineers (TAG) who had come to Webster in search of a social scientist who might help them with their research.

SWOP was very different from the other group that had emerged at the end of the 1970s – The History Workshop – that was intent on forging a history of South Africa from below. It championed rank and file workers and the marginalised, but many of its key members were less committed to active engagement with society, intent on protecting the autonomy of academic pursuits, but also suspicious of organisations such as trade unions as leading to bureaucratisation of social movements. Despite overlapping membership, the tension between these two academically-rooted organisations became palpable in the 1980s, especially as SWOP became immersed in quite concrete and controversial projects, such as the study of mine accidents and HIV/AIDS.

Webster became chair of the sociology department from 1988 to 1994. As he tells the story he had three agenda: staff development, especially young faculty; curriculum changes, in particular the creation of an MA programme; and building a common vision in what was a deeply divided department. This was a period in which the department expanded and moved left. It was perhaps one of the most vital periods in the department's history, reflecting its engagement in the unfolding transformation of society. It was also a period in which Webster became more active in the Association of Sociologists of Southern Africa

(ASSA), a multi-racial organisation that had split off from the white sociological association (SASOV). Webster would become President of ASSA 1983-1985 and enlarge its size by giving it new energy and direction. In the wider society, this was a period of virtual civil war, signalled on the one side, by the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1983 and COSATU in 1985 and, on the other side, by the declaration of a state of emergency with all manner of repressive counter- moves from the apartheid state. It was in this climate that Webster sought to make ASSA reflective of the growing engagement of sociologists by creating working groups that captured the public issues of the time – education, labour, gender, urban, militarisation, and the state. He brought in figures from other disciplines but also leaders from the labour movement and UDF to give sociology a sense of its public mission. And it was under his reign that ASSA launched its own journal.

The transition brought a new set of problems in some ways more challenging than the struggles against apartheid. How does one transform the university from a bastion of white privilege to a more open and inclusive institution that would cater to new generations of African students. SWOP turned to an ambitious internship programme that would train young black South Africans in the sociology of work and employment relations, attaching them to research projects on the transition. Here it should be said that Webster's teaching style is of a piece with his public sociology, constituting students as a public that comes to the university with its own lived experience, a lived experience he engages, elaborates and transforms. He thinks of his students as themselves teachers, returning to society endowed with new imaginations and a model of how to communicate them to others. As the festschrift dedicated to Webster-the-teacher underlines, he has a rare ability to draw students into a critical understanding of the worlds from which they come, seamlessly knitting together sociological and political imaginations (Mosoetsa 2009).

In training Africans his project, of course, was impelled by the desire to transform the racial despotism inherited from apartheid. This turned out to be a far greater challenge than even he imagined. In many contexts the colour bar simply

floated up, leaving racial patterns intact. Ironically, the university seemed the most intractable to change. Webster turned his sociology onto his own workplace – the chalk face as he called it – just as he had turned it on to the apartheid workplaces of industry. He saw how the University of Witwatersrand could not reform itself easily, facing as it did the legacy of an entrenched white oligarchy. At the end of the 1990s the university system of South Africa as a whole underwent change through amalgamations that were intended to dissolve the divide between the historically black and historically white institutions. Within the university there was a move to absorb the old disciplinary departments into schools, that is inter-disciplinary units. Webster viewed this as a destructive restructuring – eroding two decades devoted to building the sociology department. The restructuring justified an insurgent managerialism within the university, building up the ranks of professional and highly paid administrators.

That was at one end of the university. At the other end there had begun a process of outsourcing low paid service jobs, replacing workers with employment guarantees (and even access to free university education for their children) with contract workers employed by labour brokers. When the plans for outsourcing were revealed members of SWOP organised public support for the displaced workers, much to the chagrin of the then Vice-Chancellor, Colin Bundy, who called Webster into his office to tell him to discipline his troops. Webster refused. Here in his own backyard he could observe the very processes of informalisation that SWOP had been studying in the wider economy. Not only was the wave of neoliberalism flooding back into the university but at the chalk face racial dynamics had an obduracy of their own.

No matter what the frustration and aggravation, the Webster windmill kept on revolving. The work of SWOP and of Webster in particular took a global turn. As early as 1994 Webster had attended the embryonic Research Committee on Labour Movements (RC44) of the International Sociological Association (ISA) and by 1998 he was elected to become its secretary and in 2002 he became its President. Once again he brought new energy and direction to this fledgling group,

building global relations not only among labour sociologists but also between labour sociologists and labour movements, showing casing his own unit, SWOP, but also other units in other parts of the world in which academics had developed partnerships with labour movements. It was at this time that he re-established relations with South African Rob Lambert, now teaching in Australia, who had been building SIGTUR (Southern Initiative on Globalization and Trade Union Rights). Together they injected RC44 with a new vitality and global vision that would crystallize in their collaborative book *Grounding Globalisation: labour in the age of insecurity* (2008) that won the book award from the Labour Section of the American Sociological Association in 2009, marking the influence of SWOP on Northern sociology.

Consolidating this global engagement at the local level is Webster's involvement in GLU (Global Labour University), an ILO project that connects universities in Germany (University of Kassel), India (Tata Institute, Mumbai), South Africa (Wits) and Brazil (State University of Campinas). Trade unions send officials from all over Africa to study at Wits, under the direction of SWOP, for a year and to receive an MA diploma or degree in labour studies and development. This created its own dilemmas and Webster was again caught straddling the exigencies of the life of the union official on the one side and demands of an academic curriculum on the other.

Throughout his career the university has been the base of his principled interventions, public engagement, research programmes. Without this fourth arm the windmill would be uncoordinated and its energy would flag. He has only been able to build SWOP as the fulcrum of his activities because it is grounded in the relatively protected environment of the academy. It is the relative autonomy of the academy that has allowed him to sustain intellectual critique alongside close collaborations and intense engagements with groups, organisations and movements outside the university. The coordinated and interdependent blades of Webster's windmill cut deeply, bringing sociological imagination and political engagement into close connection – the hallmark of the best of Southern sociology.

For a Southern sociology?

The metaphor of windmill captures what is distinctive about Webster's sociology but is there something distinctively South African or Southern about his engagement, his theorising? Can one make any general claims about South Africa or the South that distinguishes their sociology from the one found in the North? To be sure one can characterise Northern sociology as dominated by a division of labour in which sociologists are first and foremost defined by their professional role, barricading themselves within the university, only rarely to venture forth. If they pursue public or policy sociology it is often on the side and subordinated to professional sociology. Their research programmes tend to follow an internal logic impervious to the winds beyond, even those beating down on the university. With the windmill, by contrast, the winds become the source of power, converted by the four blades, each revolving with the other, each inseparably connected to the other. Rather than division of labour, SWOP works with flexible specialization, just-in-time adaptation to the pressures of the moment, or what Sizwe Phakathi called 'planisa' – the spontaneous planning of underground workers, responding to the exigencies of deep level mining. Yet we can find examples of similar engagements in the North, ranging, for example, from Huw Beynon's organisation of the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University to Ruth Milkman's work as head of the University of California's Institute for Labor and Employment to Ramon Flecha's CREA (The Center for Research for Overcoming Inequalities) in Barcelona. Are these, however, more the exception than the rule, an oasis of activity in a desert of professionalism?

Even if we grant a certain distinctiveness to the North can we make sweeping claims about the South? Certainly, many countries of the South are either so poor or so small that the university is overrun by political demands and pressures that make such projects as SWOP untenable. Indeed, that is true of many universities in South Africa. In so many Southern universities faculty are living from hand to mouth, often employed in several jobs to make ends meet. This, of course, is the other side of the Southern windmill where foundations and fulcrum are too weak to withstand the political

and economic storms, too stretched to sustain any coherence. Moreover, in our era of marketisation, Southern research units are more likely to develop outside the university, siphoning off the best talent from the university, separating teaching from research, responding to ephemeral demands of well-resourced clients, often sponsored by international agencies with their own agendas. SWOP, too, has had difficulty reproducing itself in the neoliberal governmentality of post-apartheid South Africa – a climate in which independent political imagination is harder to sustain, in which commitments are more ephemeral and visions more limited. Difficult though it is, only in dynamic developing countries such as South Africa, India and Brazil, can the best universities provide the resources and protect academic autonomy to make windmills feasible.

But what about the sociology itself – simultaneously the ingredient and product of the windmill? Here it is worth distinguishing between 'Sociology in the South', 'Sociology of the South' and 'Sociology for the South'. Sociology in the South is simply Northern sociology, presented as a universal sociology, transferred to the South. Like McDonalds this is a mere replica, usually a poor replica of sociology of the North, using its textbooks, its concepts, its theories as though they applied directly to the South. Modernisation theory was especially well adapted to this transplantation as the gap between theory and reality could be explained away as a mark of inevitable backwardness or the result of a stalled evolutionary process. Sad to say much sociology taught in the South is of this character.

Precisely, because of its ubiquity this Sociology in the South has spawned indigenous or alternative sociologies, a nativist sociology against the North. The most recent version is Raewyn Connell's Southern Theory that starts by dismissing canonical Northern sociology as an arbitrary and artificial construct – whether this be the classical theory of Marx, Weber and Durkheim or the contemporary theory of Coleman, Bourdieu and Giddens – that seeks to universalise and impose on the rest of the world what is quite particular and peculiar. Against a reductionist homogenisation of 'Northern theory' Connell presents us with an array of forgotten or silenced theorists from the South – Africa, Latin America, India, Middle East, and

Asia. Sol Plaatje, for example, is the representative from South Africa but Connell cannot tell us what it is about his writing that was not absorbed and elaborated in the enormous wealth of South African historiography. What purpose would be served by returning to Plaatje?

Apart from having lived in the South it is not clear what makes these thinkers 'Southern', since many were trained and spent much time in the North; or what makes their thinking 'sociological' since many are more clearly philosophers, economists, historians. Even more problematic Connell decontextualises their thinking so that there is no reason to believe that they can become part of any grounded sociological engagement with the realities of the South, whatever those realities might be. The importance of Southern Theory is to reiterate the critique of Sociology in the South – a diluted, text book version of Northern sociology – but Southern Theory is not yet Sociology of the South.

Very different from Connell, Webster's engagement with Northern theory has developed a Sociology of the South. Thus, he has argued that US sociology presents itself as a false universal, which he particularises in two ways. First, he deploys Northern theory in the South to reveal its very different significations. What is conservative in one place may be radical in another. Thus, taking the functionalist theory of conflict and the idea that trade unions manage dissent and limit violence, Webster challenged the anti-unionism of apartheid South Africa, and indeed of post-apartheid South Africa. Second, he has taken Northern theories and shown that they are false when applied to South Africa. Thus, his critique of transition theory pointed to the limitations of the theory of pacts that political scientists had applied to Latin American transitions to democracy and instead underlined the importance of class struggle and class compromise.

But Webster has done much more than particularise Northern theory. He and his colleagues developed new theories of the relation between work organisation and working class mobilisation. The concept of social movement unionism was debated in South Africa long before it was reinvented in the United States. Webster and his colleagues

advanced novel theories of the double and then the triple transition, the links between formal and informal economies as specific responses to globalisation. More than that, as I have been at pains to underline, they have developed a methodology of research and theorising that is not simply grounded in but deeply engaged with the local.

This is, indeed Sociology of the South but it is not yet Sociology for the South. Particularising and even expanding Northern theory is not the end of the road, but a necessary step in the development of Sociology for the South – a sociology which is not content with a particular sociology of the South, but makes its own move toward universality. It is a theory that binds the South to an emergent counter-hegemony that presents the interests of the South as the interests of all. We have examples of this in the broad appeal of dependency theory that emerged from Latin America or subaltern studies that originated in India, each of which incorporated a theory of the North, but from the standpoint of the South. Here too Webster and his colleagues have innovated. In its investigation of the specific responses to marketisation in different countries Grounding Globalisation takes a major step toward theorising the place of the South within a world order dominated by the North, addressing the North as well as the South. Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout's Polanyian framework, bringing together market fundamentalism, fictitious commodities and counter-movement through historical and cross-national comparisons, provides the basis of a sociology for the South – a sociology that selectively embraces theories from all regions of the world, that dissolves the blunt reifications of North and South, a sociology that can excite sociologists from Europe and North America as well as from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but a sociology that never forgets its political origins and its political context.

Of course, it's never easy and there are downsides to the Southern windmill. It is so continually in motion that it is difficult to find time to consolidate insights, deepen partial theories into something of more general applicability. The wind blows eternally, and the blades turn relentlessly. Research is driven frenetically from topic to topic. The foundations of Webster's political imagination

reside in his sustained collaboration with students, colleagues, subjects of research – can such collaboration, even with Northern theorists, offset the continual pressures to meet the turbulence of the moment? Indeed, Latin American sociologists, no less embedded in society than their South African colleagues, were able to forge all sorts of synergies with the action sociology pioneered by Alain Touraine and his Parisian team.

Across the planet a destructive combination of marketisation and governmentality is transforming the university – corporatising its management, auditing its output, and commodifying its knowledge. We are searching the world over for models of how to contest the often surreptitious onslaught against the academy. SWOP is one such model. It emerged under the exigencies of the South but it has universal relevance. It provides a vision that defends the integrity of the university, not as a retreat into the ivory tower but as an advance into the trenches of civil society, that sees the sociological imagination and political engagement not as antagonists but as partners. The life and work of Edward Webster, institutionalized in SWOP, must command the attention of us all.

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Notes

1. This paper was first presented at the Colloquium in Honour of Professor Edward Webster (June 27, 2009). It is based on a 40-year friendship and a series of interviews I conducted in July, 2008, as well as extensive reading of his papers. Still, it only scratches the surface of his public and academic engagements. Thanks to Siri Colom, Eddie Webster and an anonymous reviewer for their comments.
2. In similar fashion, another great South African sociologist, Harold Wolpe, also insisted on taking the priorities of movements as point of departure if not point of conclusion. But, unlike Webster who forged on-the-ground collaboration with labour movements, Wolpe was of the view – perhaps not surprising since he was in exile – that ‘consciousness’ should be left to the liberation movement. See Burawoy (2004).
3. For a subsequent rendition of what had been the intended dissertation see Webster (1977).
4. These quotations are from my interviews with Webster in July, 2008.

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