

In Memoriam – Bill Wedderburn

On Friday 9 March 2012 one of the Titans of comparative labour law left our midst. Professor Lord Wedderburn of Charlton – ‘Bill’ Wedderburn to his friends, and the enigmatic ‘KWW’ of numerous notes and comments during a long and illustrious academic writing career – died in London at the age of 84, after a long and painful illness.

A pre-eminent figure in the fields of both company law and labour law, Bill Wedderburn made his mark as a practising lawyer, an academic, and a tireless political campaigner in the United Kingdom House of Lords, following his elevation to the peerage in 1977. With seemingly boundless energy, quickness of thought, and a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, he was instrumental in raising the discipline of comparative labour law to its zenith in the late twentieth century. His particular ability to present challenging analyses and propositions with clarity and lucidity was admired by students and fellow scholars alike, and, indeed, he devoted much of his effort in later years to combating what he perceived as a steadily declining quality of statutory draftsmanship in labour law and related fields.

As a successor to the scholastic tradition established in the United Kingdom by Otto Kahn-Freund, Bill Wedderburn traced his labour law roots back to Hugo Sinzheimer and Continental traditions for regulating the world of work. He always evidenced a keen eye for innovation and trends in countries very different from his own, and showed himself a stern critic of a variety of developments witnessed at the European level in the name of ‘social policy’. Like many of his generation of comparativists, he developed his linguistic skills with a view to gaining access to original materials free from translation ‘nuance’, with a particular fondness for the Italian language – and, indeed, the delights of Pontignano and the warmth of the Tuscan sun.

It was, however, as a member of the Comparative Labour Law Group – along with Benjamin Aaron, Xavier Blanc-Jouvan, Gino Giugni, Thilo Ramm and Folke Schmidt – that he will be best remembered in his comparative scholarship pomp. That group set ‘the gold standard’ for comparative method and for innovation in labour law research. With publication of the fruits of three major projects, the group demonstrated how cross-cutting perspectives on carefully focused issues, argued out intensively over substantial periods of time

spent together, could illuminate similarities and differences against the rich backcloth of cultural and legal diversity brought to bear through the national optics of the group's members.

Bill Wedderburn was a member of the International Advisory Board of *The International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations* since its inception in 1985. His incisive – and, on occasions, delightfully humorous – contributions have graced the pages of this Journal over the last quarter of a century. We mourn his passing, and offer our grateful tribute to one of the noble Greats of our field.

Alan C. Neal (Founding Editor)