

DR RICHARD CROUCHER

Professor Dr Richard Croucher, who was only 73 when he died on 16 December 2022, was a colleague and friend, an expert on a wide range of employment relations and human resource management issues, particularly with an international angle, a great supporter of this journal and someone who will be much missed by many people.

He was a gentleman and a scholar. In the UK, we say that a gentleman is someone who knows how to play the bagpipes – but doesn't. I don't think Richard did play the bagpipes, but he certainly was a highly knowledgeable and talented man who wore his talents lightly – he didn't take himself too seriously: unlike perhaps [is it OK to say this in this kind of paper?] many of our colleagues in academia. I imagine Richard met many people who, after an evening in his company, had no idea he was a University Professor: he wouldn't hide it, but it wasn't something particularly worth mentioning.

Although he put on no airs and graces and didn't take himself too seriously, he took his work very seriously; if he had faults (and who does not?), one of them was believing deeply in the work that he did.

Richard came from a well-educated and respectable family and it was no surprise that he went to University and took a degree in history at the University of Warwick in the English Midlands. Like many students in those days, Richard was 'radicalised' by the experience and went on to take a Master's degree in Comparative British and American Labour History, the first formal academic indication of his lifelong interest in international issues and wrote a doctoral thesis about communism and shop stewards in the engineering industry between the World Wars and, indeed, during the second world war. A resultant book, *Engineers at War*, came out in 1982.

He became a tutor/organiser in the Workers Educational Association, a voluntary body that provided education to workers in the UK and then spread to other countries, although it always suffered from, or enjoyed, straitened financial circumstances and political debates about its meaning and purpose. Like many on the left of politics, he had a deep belief that education offered a way to improve society and believed that the fact that so few people had access to top-quality education was one of the things preventing society from being better. He believed in the adult education work of the WEA; it taught him many valuable lessons, most importantly perhaps that there is very little correlation between social status and qualifications and intelligence.

Richard was involved as an educator and researcher in the trade union movement in the UK and, using his linguistic skills, in Germany and continued to research and

write throughout his career. His first move into ‘academics proper’ was at Cranfield School of Management. It was hard to get him in. Like many business schools that work with post-experience students and make a lot of money from in-company courses, Cranfield wanted their faculty to look like successful businesspeople, to be in-your-face confident and to sound like “experts” who knew what the answers were. That was not Richard – but we persuaded the hierarchy that he could work with our (to be a bit in-your-face myself) rather successful Trade Union programmes. These were built on the notion that trade unions are multi-site, multimillion-pound businesses and need to understand strategy, marketing, and finance – we didn’t talk to them about industrial relations – they knew more about that than we or any academics could ever teach them -- we talked to them as senior managers of their organisations. And they found that immensely valuable.

From the start, we offered such courses to any English-speaking unions and got in several unions from the Nordic countries too. Some of the officials went off to Brussels or Geneva or other places to run international trade union bodies and we followed them there. Richard, with his language skills and international curiosity, was a great strength there and became one of the world’s experts (no air commas needed on this occasion) on such bodies.

I should also say that at Cranfield, Richard was not confined in our rather fun little trade union ghetto: the Cranfield students were not as dumb as the faculty – they quickly realised that although Richard was not as flash or as good at ‘Edutainment’ as some of the other teachers, he did genuinely want to educate them – and he knew what he was talking about – so he successfully taught HRM on the MBA courses too: even if a more critical version of it than they may have expected.

In 2005 Richard moved to Middlesex University as a Professor of Comparative Employment Relations, and then also as Associate Dean of Research. He won impressive research grants, published in many of the top journals and encouraged and supported many now well-known scholars. He maintained connections with other universities in the UK and around the world and enjoyed travelling – often taking the opportunity to go walking, for which he was also an enthusiast.

Richard was an excellent scholar. He believed fervently that “facts matter”, and he was always led by the evidence. I have a feeling that some of our academic colleagues start with what they believe and then look for the facts. That was never Richard’s way. For him, the facts were sacrosanct. That meant that he was often prepared to challenge the received wisdom and to make arguments that might not be popular.

He was a prolific author and a joy to write with. Usually writing with others, he wrote about employment practices in a wide range of countries (Korea, Bangladesh, Norway, Niger, Mauritius, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, as well as Britain and Germany); he wrote generic texts looking at developments in

Eastern Europe, or Europe more generally; and he wrote thoughtful pieces on low pay, unemployment, flexible working practices and about applying a Rawlsian perspective to core labour rights. His most cited work is *Global Unions. Global Business* examined the international trade union movement.

Richard was a great colleague – challenging us, making us think, cleverly and skilfully reminding us that what we were doing was not the kind of thing that would last or that would lead to people creating monuments to us, so we might as well not become unduly stressed about it. He was also a lot of fun: I remember numbers of truly enjoyable nights out in foreign cities where Richard, with his typically quiet and understated humour, encouraged us all to enjoy the lucky situation we found ourselves in.

He was a gentleman: there is an old phrase used in England (it is from the 18th century: I looked it up) used to commend a noble spirit – that someone is “a gentleman and a scholar”. Richard Croucher was truly a gentleman, and he was truly a scholar.

Richard was a former editor of *Management Revue* (from 2004–2006) and a long-serving member of the Advisory Board. Here too, he will be much missed.

Chris Brewster
2023