

Obituary: Rut Hammarstrom

This symposium on Nordic industrial relations is dedicated to the memory of Rut Hammarstrom. Rut was a great advocate of Nordic cooperation to which she greatly contributed through her work in the cooperative movement. Rut also helped to foster links between Australia and the Nordic region.

The death of Rut Hammarstrom, who perished on the ferry Estonia when it sank in the Baltic recently, is a loss felt by many in Australian and the Nordic countries. Rut and her husband, Olle, made a remarkable contribution to public life for nearly twenty years in the fields of workplace and industrial relations reform.

The Hammarstroms first visited Australia in 1976 when Olle was the Swedish Labour Attache as the result of an exchange initiated by the Whitlam Government. In this role he worked closely with Ian Macphie, then Minister for Productivity in the Fraser Government, providing advice based on the Swedish experience of labour market co-operation and workplace reform.

The family moved to Adelaide and very quickly Rut began to make her own uniquely warm and wise contribution through her work with the Unit for Industrial Democracy established by the Dunstan Government. In all that she did, Rut Hammarstrom brought a wonderful capacity to be simultaneously clear-sighted, tough-minded, fun-loving and compassionate. All those who met her felt inspired by her commitment, both to friends and the community in general.

Following their return to Stockholm in 1977, the Hammarstroms continued their contribution to Australia by organising, whenever asked, study programs for a wide range of groups from academic, union and employer areas. Perhaps none was more significant than the work they did to support the ACTU study mission to Europe in 1986. The publication "Australia Reconstructed" owed much to the insights provided by the Hammarstroms on the relevance of Nordic and European experience for Australia.

Their love for, and commitment to, Australia was further demonstrated and enhanced when Rut and Olle returned to live in Sydney in 1990-91. During this period they both worked at the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Teaching (ACIRRT) at Sydney University. In

addition, Rut, who had become a senior vice-president for human resources in the Swedish co-operative insurance company Folksam, provided advice to both the GIO in NSW and SIO in Victoria, as well as to the Finance Sector Union.

Rut died while returning from Estonia with a Nordic group which had been helping to rebuild the co-operative movement in the newly independent Baltic countries.

Russell Lansbury
(University of Sydney)

and

Neil Watson
(Workplace Australia)