

State Funeral of Ed Broadbent Remarks by Jonathan Sas & Luke Savage | Discours funéraire d'État d'Ed Broadbent par Jonathan Sas et Luke Savage



Jonathan Sas & Luke Savage are co-authors of 'Seeking Social Democracy: Seven Decades in the Fight for Equality' | Jonathan Sas et Luke Savage sont co-auteurs de « Seeking Social Democracy: Seven Decades in the Fight for Equality ».

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Jonathan Sas

Ed Broadbent... was NOT a texter. When he wanted to talk, he called.

Many of these calls were to check up on me and my children's health.

He was my mentor, but also a considerate friend who showed deep warmth.

By and large Ed's calls were to talk about what mattered immensely to him— political ideas.

I will never forget my first cold call...

I was in the food court of Toronto's Eaton centre back in 2015. Seeing his name on my screen, I quickly ducked into the Sport Chek. I was immediately on speaker phone.

Ed and his then partner, the great socialist theorist Ellen Meiksins Wood, launched into debate.

“Jonathan, we have some notes on the piece you sent from The Guardian”

For the next 45 minutes, wedged between tennis rackets and hockey sticks, I was engulfed in discussion about the Greek debt crisis.

I remember Ed’s despair at the blunt force of austerity, and the inequitable costs that would be borne by working people...

I’m going to miss those calls.

We just heard about Ed’s inspiring work leading rights and democracy. Less well known is his two decades of work with the Socialist International.

As a Vice President, Ed was engaged in important diplomatic efforts in Central America, advancing human rights against an imposing current of repressive US foreign policy.

I will end with a short passage from an article he wrote in The Globe in 1986. This was at a time when many leaders of social democratic parties were retreating from their convictions.

Not Ed...

“The world of a politician is a world of light and shadow. Never merely pragmatic, it is always moral.

For us in the international social democratic movement there has always been the difficulty of reconciling certain universal principles with their application in a variety of countries with widely divergent histories.

It is a problem, it is difficult — but it must be done.

When we talk about democracy, pluralism, religious freedom, tolerance, human rights and self-determination, we are not giving voice to

mere abstractions relevant only to a few nations; we are talking about human values and ideals that we believe desirable for all people, at all times, in all parts of our world.”

Luke Savage

It was on September 28, 1968 that Ed rose to speak in the House of Commons for the very first time. And, by his own account, it was quite a grand occasion. “I must say I am particularly pleased to see such a crowded house at 5:15 on a Friday afternoon,” Ed announced — to the maybe five or so colleagues in attendance. “Who would have thought that so many thousands would have turned out?”

A son of Oshawa, a city whose storied struggles against the greed of the automotive industry were a turning point for industrial unionism in North America, Ed had been elected to represent his hometown by just 15 votes after a stint as a professor of political theory at York University. And the speech he gave — at least to few who heard it — was, in every way, completely and utterly him.

For one thing, it began with a joke — delivered in his trademark deadpan.

More seriously, it somehow swung — with seemingly no effort — from references to John Stuart Mill and Athenian democracy to celebrations of the gains won by ordinary people throughout the first part of the 20th century: pensions, the universal franchise, public health insurance, the protections of the welfare state.

In the speech Ed made clear that, while he regarded all of these things as tangible victories on the road to equality, they were also insufficient in the task of realizing real democracy and human freedom. He wanted workers to have a greater say, not just at the bargaining table but in the running of their workplaces. He argued that the kind of austere democracy that leaves entrenched the hierarchies of our society cannot truly be called democracy, and he concluded by calling for a seismic shift of power from the few at the top to the many below.

As my friend Jonathan has just reminded us, Ed Broadbent was a democratic socialist in the truest and deepest sense. He was someone for whom the world of the mind represented in history, philosophy, and economics, was inexorably linked to a greater human struggle for democratic equality.

It was to that struggle that he devoted his life. Thank you.