

*By Philip Bowyer, Former General Secretary PTTI/CI, and former Deputy General Secretary of UNI Global Union*

Curt Persson was one of the architects of UNI Global Union.

Elected in 1990 as President of Postal, Telegraph and Telephone International (PTTI), Curt led that organization through a period of turbulent change as the world of communications transformed from public service and public ownership into one dominated by privatization, technology, and free-market ideology.

Curt helped make PTTI into a more open organization, ready to welcome others into the creation of a new international, Communications International (CI). He was a very early supporter of the idea of CI and FIET building a joint headquarters.

He presided over his last PTTI Congress in Montreal in 1997 when the name was changed, not without controversy to Communications International. A policy was adopted to work with Media and Graphical workers and to reach out to organizations including FIET and ITF. He wanted to see a more powerful organization able to control and benefit from change. Once that decision was taken there was no turning back. UNI was a reality within 3 years.

Curt, born in 1938, started his working life as a letter carrier in Malmo, Sweden, in 1954. He soon became a training organizer with his union, and after holding various positions, became the President of the Malmo Region of the Postal Workers Union in 1968.

A year later, he moved to the union headquarters in Stockholm, when his union became part of a bigger public sector union, SF, including PTTI and railway workers. He became President of SF in 1984, a post he was reelected to several times until his retirement in 1995, when further mergers led to the creation of SEKO.

In retirement he held numerous positions, including membership of an important government commission looking into submarine activities around the Swedish Coast. He once told me he had learned more about submarines than anybody needed to know.

He was also active in numerous organizations including PRO, a lobby for pensioners interests with over 400,000 members. He was PRO President from 2008 to 2015.

Curt Persson was a genuine, good person. He was a pleasure to work with. The perfect President of an international trade union. He was calm, tough, and far seeing. He was not afraid of change. In fact, he embraced and advocated for change but insisted it must be used to improve the lot of workers.

His death, 23 November 2020, a victim of COVID-19, leaves us poorer but pleased and proud that we knew a great person who gave so much to so many of us.

To his widow, Gunilla, and their family, we send our condolences.