

A Tribute to Dan Gallin by Chris Bonner, former Director of WIEGO's Organization and Representation Programme

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I first heard of Dan Gallin whilst working as a union organizer in South Africa in the 1980s. He was already something of a legend in the international trade union movement. Here, in South Africa, he was known for his support for union struggles during the Apartheid era, and in particular for the Food and Allied Workers Union.

On joining WIEGO as the second ORP Director in January 2004, I was nervous and somewhat intimidated to find I would be taking over from Dan Gallin. Who was I to take over from such a giant and try to fill his big shoes? But Dan was very welcoming and not at all put out by my lack of understanding of organizing workers in the informal economy. Rather, he was patient in his own challenging way, and always supportive. He would explain, share information, answer questions, challenge, correct and guide and always with respect.

In those early days, I was amazed at the amount of information he had collected, and meticulously documented on domestic workers' organizations, amongst others. This was invaluable when two years later the domestic workers' network began to emerge. It was also invaluable in helping me compile a database of organizations in the informal economy - one of my early tasks. His collecting, recording and sharing information was truly remarkable.

For me, his active participation in the ORP Advisory Committee was most critical. Along with Marty Chen, Renana Jhabvala, Pat Horn and Dave Spooner, I had a formidable team to assist me. Having a support structure for advice, collective strategizing and accountability made my transition from formal trade union work to working with workers in the informal economy possible. Dan, as the first ORP Director, had initiated the ORP Advisory Committee, for which I will be ever grateful. As I recall, Dan never, or rarely, missed an ORP Advisory Committee meeting. While stepping down from the WIEGO Board in 2010, he continued to actively participate in the Advisory Committee until 2017, keeping us focused on the centrality of organizing. At times you would be fooled into thinking Dan was sleeping. But to everyone's surprise, at an important point in the discussion, he would raise his head and make a critical intervention. Here was a man who could sleep, listen, and contribute to a discussion all at the same time. A remarkable skill!

Dan was not only an ORP Advisor, but he also continued to directly engage in organizing work. He was greatly loved and respected by the domestic workers who frequently asked for his presence. At the launch of the IDWF, it was Dan who the Latin American leaders trusted to report to their delegates on late night discussions we held to resolve differences on the constitution. Dan was also a champion of home-based workers, making sure that extending organization and the formation of an international network was constantly on the agenda. Again, it was not just talk. It was Dan who first made contact with home-based workers in Eastern Europe, and participated in meetings that led to the formation of HomeNet Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Even the waste pickers, with whom he had less direct contact, turned to him for information and advice on democratic worker organization.

Dan Gallin: international trade unionists, “left” intellectual and writer, an inspiration and active supporter for workers- especially women workers- in the informal economy. You will be missed but not forgotten.