

A Tribute to Dan Gallin by Karin Pape, Former Deputy Director of WIEGO's ORP Programme June 2025

When I walked into the office of the Global Labour Institute (GLI) in Geneva on a day in March 2002, I did not know that this first meeting with Dan Gallin would be the beginning of a new era in my life. We had moved to Geneva one year earlier and I was looking for something useful to do – actually I was looking for a job. However, this was not the reason for my visit to the GLI. I wanted to discuss the content of a brochure Dan had written about the relationship between trade unions and NGOs. After a long conversation – which, in retro perspective served the purpose to check my politics - he offered me a job.

At that time Dan was the Director of the WIEGO Organization and Representation Programme and his task was to organize the participation of organized informal workers' organizations in the ILO general discussion in 2002 on "Decent Work and the Informal Economy". WIEGO had raised funds so that Dan could hire an assistant.

I started to work with Dan. As a trade union activist from Germany, the informal economy was an alien world for me. Dan said: "You will learn. If you have questions, you can ask." I had lots of questions and whenever I asked Dan, he would put aside everything and would sit down and explain. It often included a little session of a specific time in the history of the labour movement to give me the context, also the political struggles within the labour movement. All of this was enriched with examples from his time as General Secretary of the IUF and how he had dealt with difficult situations. My second apprenticeship had started.

When the Dutch NGO "IRENE" started to work towards a global conference on domestic work in 2006, this was the beginning of a global movement of domestic workers. WIEGO, the IUF and the GLI worked together using the process of fighting and lobbying struggle for an International Labour Standard for Domestic Workers at the ILO, to support domestic workers' organizations worldwide in their endeavour to form an international network: the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN). After the adoption of the Convention 189, the Network further developed its structures and became the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) in 2013.

Dan gave us support and guidance and he criticized when he thought that something went wrong. Without his knowledge and experience we would not have been able, for example, to draft a clear, democratic constitution of the IDWF, which served the needs of a young organization well. There was probably no other trade union leader who had such a unique and comprehensive knowledge about the global labour movement and its many different national facets. Dan looked at problems in the context of history and his own experiences. We were very privileged to always have a living encyclopedia with us.

In his [speech at the IDWF Founding Congress in Uruguay 2023](#), he said:

"One thing, though, is clear: your future is with the labour movement. You will contribute to shape it, perhaps more than you now realize (...). Our task is now to restore the identity of all working people as a class, and to restore the trade union movement as the instrument of its emancipation. You are part of this process; you are part of the renewal of the trade union movement."

Dan had a broad concept of the working class. Consequently, he supported workers in the informal economy to organize as workers. It is part of his legacy that the global labour

movement today recognizes the majority of workers in the world – informal workers - as workers that should and must belong to the trade union movement.

His even broader concept though was a political vision *“to build the labour movement of the future, a fighting movement for freedom and justice, the liberation movement of humanity.”*¹

The mission of the Global Labour Institute, which he founded in 1997, is *“to offer a space for free discussion for all those – whatever their political origins and organisational commitments- who seek to restore the labour movement to its original purpose, to be the driving force for a progressive transformation of society, to restore the historical memory, to successfully confront reactionary authoritarians, whether they operate under a ‘Left’ disguise or shamelessly advocate a resurrection of fascism”*². He provided a platform of like-minded people who would create the “invisible international”.

Dan was a great teacher and a true internationalist. He was my mentor, a comrade and a friend. It very rarely happens that this kind of a relationship develops when the one is in her forties and the other in his early seventies. I am missing Dan. We lost a great thinker and radical implementer who defined democratic socialism in terms of radical democracy.

Who is now answering my questions? I think, Dan would have said: “You just have to do it yourself”.

Rest in power, Dan.

¹ [An Invisible International](#)

² See [ibid](#). A detailed mission statement can be found [here](#)