

Christopher Robson

29th January 1941 – 23rd March 2013

CHRIS ROBSON was a long-standing activist for equality for gay and lesbian people, and for civil rights more generally. From the early 1980s he was pivotally involved in all the key campaigns that delivered such fundamental progress for us in this country. We would not have achieved this transformation so effectively without the huge commitment, as well as the wise, calm and principled guidance, of Chris.

Chris was a committed trade unionist, active in the Union of Professional and Technical Civil Servants (UPTCS), IMPACT, and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU). In UPTCS, he and Tom Leacy successfully negotiated the groundbreaking 1988 Civil Service agreement, which stated that discrimination on the basis of HIV status or sexual orientation “would not be tolerated.” He was also on the ICTU working group that produced the pivotal 1988 publication *Lesbian and Gay Rights in the Workplace*.

He had an acute understanding of the importance of making progress in employment areas, and was particularly proud of his role in getting sexual orientation explicitly included in the Unfair Dismissals Act (1993) and the Employment Equality Act (1998).

Christopher and Bill Foley, partners of more than thirty five years, recently celebrated their civil partnership. Over the years Bill (a member of IMPACT’s Dublin Hospitals branch) and Chris were comrades in arms in many pivotal campaigns including the establishment of the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Men’s Collective, the organisation of the pivotal 1983 Fairview march, and the founding of Gay Health Action.

Chris was a founder member of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) in 1988 and continued on as a board member. He was a skilful strategist and a persuasive speaker. He wrote beautifully with great insight. Equally important, he ensured that his own great generosity of spirit was the



bedrock of GLEN’s approach to campaigning.

Chris was brave, principled and passionate; to be an open gay activist in the 1980s was not easy. We had few friends and supporters – and many powerful enemies – in those days. But Chris put himself on the line and took risks with his career because he believed that discrimination and oppression were inhuman and that each person had a responsibility to take action where they could.

The range of Chris’s commitments was huge and included being a long-standing board member of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the Ana Liffey drug treatment project and EURO-CASO, the European response to the HIV/AIDS crisis. He was a founder member of the Campaign for Equality.

His legal legacy is powerful; gay law reform in 1993, equality legislation, civil partnership, and now moves towards gay marriage. It is so sad that Chris was not able to witness the overwhelming vote for civil marriage at the recent Constitutional Convention. He would have been thrilled.

Chris was a huge force who enhanced all our lives, all our communities and Irish society.

A secular memorial service held on Saturday 30th March was a wonderful and moving celebration of the breadth of Chris’s life, the profound impacts he had on people’s lives, his great talents, passions and foibles. President Michael D Higgins was represented at the service by his aide-de-camp, Commandant James Galvin.

Our great condolences go to his partner Bill Foley and to their families and wide circle of friends and colleagues.

Kieran Rose
IMPACT member and chair of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network.