

Friday, 21 June 2024

Vale Stan Sharkey

The ACTU mourns the loss of Stan Sharkey, a giant of the Australian union movement, who passed away today aged 91.

Stan was a leading unionist in the building industry for many decades. He first joined his union as an apprentice bricklayer. He made additional money to support himself while training as a boxer, winning all 17 of his professional fights.

But it was as a union activist and leader that his fighting spirit was best shown, Stan was fearless, committed and tough, motivated by the needs of others above all else. He demonstrated the working class values of empathy, tenacity and the use of dialogue to build broad progressive coalitions amongst unions in Australian and internationally.

Stan was served as the elected leader of his union as the NSW State Secretary of the Building Workers' Industrial Union (BWIU), Assistant National Secretary of the BWIU, and National Secretary of the CFMEU and Vice-President of the ACTU.

As a union leader, Stan played a vital role in campaigns in the extremely dangerous industry to ensure workers were safe, treated with dignity, and gained wages and conditions that reflected the social contribution of their work. This included campaigns for fundamental rights that these workers had been denied, such as paid public holidays, sick pay, long service leave, and many others.

Stan dedicated his life to the union movement and was committed to action to improve the quality of life of all workers, well beyond the building industry.

He was an avid internationalist and helped lead the BWIU's fundraising effort to help support the establishment of Union Aid Abroad APHEDA in 1984.

He played a prominent role in demonstrating union solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including helping support the establishment of the Trade Union Committee on Aboriginal Rights alongside Aboriginal unionists such as Kevin Cook.

Stan's life is a testament to the principles of unionism – of solidarity, collective strength, and the fundamental dignity of the working person.

The ACTU extends its deepest sympathy to Stan's family, his friends and comrades, in particular to those in the CFMEU.

Solidarity forever.

ENDS