

Nigel YOUNG

929Wiberg, H.

Hakån Wiberg, a leading European Peace Researcher who died in Copenhagen, was one of the very best spirits in Global Peace Study since the late 1960s. Although a child of 1960s peace activism, Wiberg was both part astonishing auto-didact, a remarkable polymath; but also a scrupulous, and multilingual scholar with a deep scientific (in its best sense) inclination. Despite strongly held opinions, his approach was always skeptical, critical – even detached. He was famed

for his riposte to a 1980s Peace Movement request for partial “research”: “I do not do studies that ‘prove that X or Y is true’, that is not the task of peace research”. His greatest intellectual contribution was perhaps to stand outside the parameters of the Cold War in its last two decades. Asking “What is East? What is West?” His knowledge of Eastern/Central Europe led him, from the 1970s, to a special focus on South Slav societies, predominantly the “cross-roads”

state of Yugoslavia; its demise in the 1990s was of deep and special concern, though he had long predicted it.

Hakån loved life (perhaps too much) and love – and being in love; his wisdom, humour humanity

and intuition made him a great social networker, and these skills helped him build up the International Peace Research Association (IPRA). He was a key figure in the European Peace

Research Association (EUPRA) and Director of the now (defunct) Copenhagen Peace Research

Institute (COPRI): he was a leading figure in Nordic peace studies, but his reputation was somewhat

overshadowed by the North Americans, such as the Bouldings and Anatol Rapoport, and his fellow Scandinavian, Johan Galtung and younger researchers.

But his contribution was immense.

For 33 years he was on the editorial board of the Journal of Peace Research and played key roles in Peace Programmes in Lund, Oslo and Dubrovnik. But above all he was the only person

I have known who had memorized the whole of Lewis Carroll’s The Hunting of the Snark, his favourite

poem, from which he would frequently intone appropriate passages, even in academic seminars. For example the Bellman’s pronouncement:

“What’s the good of Mercator’s North Poles and Equators, / Tropics, Zones, and Meridian Lines?”

/ So the Bellman would cry: and the crew would reply / “They are merely conventional signs!”

This passage reflects his engagingly humorous and critical appraisal of all the received paradigms and frameworks, but also his keen awareness that peace research had yet to evolve (despite the emergence of a Copenhagen School of International Relations), truly effective alternatives of its own.

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