

Date: 8th December 2020

From: Mark Paterson – Chair, Federal Union

JOHN PRESTON RIP

All of us in the Federal Union were deeply saddened to learn of the death of our friend and colleague John Preston on 30th November at the age of 80. Many of us had known him for decades and always greatly appreciated his witty and trenchant contributions to the work of the Federal Union, of the European Movement, of the Federal Trust and of Chatham House. In personal conversation he was similarly stimulating and cheering company, drawing on his wide range of personal experience and extensive reading. Discussion with John was never dull and frequently challenging of conventional assumptions.

At the centre of John's political interest lay the cause of federalism, particularly but not exclusively European federalism. John's interest in federalism had two roots, one academic and one practical. John was a particular follower of the federalist writer Andrea Bosco, whom he often quoted. John had himself been a Visiting Lecturer at London South Bank University since 1994. The more practical side of his federalism derived from his experience of the car industry, where European and international co-operation were central to efficient production and improved service for the consumer. John characteristically celebrated his 80th birthday by donating to the shelves of the Federal Union a handsome volume on the history of car production in Eastern Europe. We were happy to give him a birthday lunch in return.

In the best sense of the term, John was an evangelist for his federalist ideas. He was an indefatigable writer to the newspapers, relishing his successes in placing his letters, but (usually) forgiving of the foolish editors who occasionally failed to understand the importance of his epistles. He was ever deterred from trying again after the occasional rebuff. Like the late John Pinder John Preston occasionally seemed genuinely bemused that more of his contemporaries did not understand the obvious correctness of federalist ideas and analysis. Like John Pinder, he never allowed this bemusement however to become a cause of resentment or ill-temper. Our memories of him will be of an equable and good-humoured man of definite views, which he expressed with vigour and clarity.

In the later years of his life, John suffered from a condition which restricted his mobility. All of his friends admired his determination to continue as far as possible attending the academic and political events which were so important to him. Most of us learning of his death will have had a pleasant memory of John's recent participation in a federalist event, and almost certainly of John asking a pleasant but pointed question of an appreciative panellist. We hope this is a memory that he would be content for us to have of him.

Our thoughts go out to his widow Christina and to his wider family. The Federal Union will be making a donation to a charity chosen by John's family.