

## INTERVIEW WITH MR LOUIS EMMERIJ

*This is an edited version of the interview of Louis Emmerij by Gerry Rodgers on 27 June 2008 in Geneva, including some corrections.*

**Interviewer** – Louis, can you start by telling us something about where you are coming from, your own background and your first professional experience.

**Mr Emmerij** – I was born in Rotterdam before the Second World War. I was there when the Nazis bombed the city on 14 May 1940. I remember all the important events during the Second World War but we will not go into that today as it is a long time ago but it has made, of course, quite an impression on me.

The background of my parents – my father was from a family of university people. He was the only one who did not go to university. He went to post-secondary technical education. In Holland we still have two streams at the post-secondary level: one is fully-fledged university and the other one is post-secondary non-university education which, in my father's day, was for technical streams leading up to sub-engineers or high-level technicians.

My mother was from a working class background – very different from my father's. I checked with my mother later what happened and she said "Well, we met on the dance floor". So that is as good a reason as anything else!

I did my primary and secondary education in Rotterdam and I did my military service early. In those days, you had to go up for military service the year you turned 20. I was borne on Christmas Day so I turned 19 on Christmas and a week later it was the year when I turned 20. So I asked politely whether I could be called up as soon as possible and they

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said yes. So I did my military service early. I took that initiative because I did not quite know what to do after secondary education, which study to undertake or to study at all. I needed a break to reflect and it was during my military service that I could think a lot and at the end I decided to study, not in Holland, but to go to Paris.

So I did my undergraduate work in Paris – *Licence en sciences économiques* and at the same time I finished the three year cycle at the *Institut d'études Politiques* – and did my graduate work in the United States: Johns Hopkins University and Columbia University. In the end, of course, I spent at least as many years studying than if I had stayed in Holland because one of the reasons I did not want to study in Holland was, in those days, studies were very long. No intermediate, no BA, no MA, but all the way to the doctorate.

So that was the background. I returned to Paris where I started working at the *Institut d'études du développement économique et social* (IEDES).

**Interviewer** – In which year?

**Mr Emmerij** – It must have been about 1962 or 1963. I went back to Paris from New York. I met Georges Pompidou, who was then still the Director-General of the Rothschild Bank whom I had had at *Sciences Po* as a *Maitre de Conference*. He offered me a job at the Rothschild Bank. What would have happened to me had I said “yes”? The road not taken!

**Interviewer** – What would have happened to the Rothschild Bank?!

**Mr Emmerij** – It was one of the banks that were nationalized by Mitterrand later.

I met another professor of mine, Michel Debeauvais who worked on the economics of education at the IEDES which was directed by Francois Perroux and he offered me a job in that field, which was new in those days – education viewed as an investment, not as a consumption good. I accepted his offer and a year later I went to the OECD, because the OECD was very interested in educational policy and planning for manpower purposes. So that is about the background as far as I can go until we talk about more professional things later.

**Interviewer** – How long did you stay at the OECD?

**Mr Emmerij** – I spent about six or seven years in the 1960s. I was a young man in the OECD, working on the economics of education, through what we called the manpower approach. What we did, we projected the economy 15 years in the future, calculated the occupational structure of the labour force, translated the occupational structure into an educational structure and hence we could calculate and determine the required expansion of education and the change in the structure of education. Pretty impossible to do, I now think. That is one of the reasons for my interest in recurrent education. It is next to impossible to make these projections 15 years hence and, therefore, you must make the educational system more flexible. But we will talk later about that maybe if you are really interested.

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**Interviewer** – We can talk about it because was that not that the starting point of the work on employment in developing countries? Was not that the first approach that people took to employment creation?

**Mr Emmerij** – No, certainly not. These manpower projections for educational policy purposes had very little to do with employment policies as we later developed those in the ILO World Employment Programme. That leads straight into one of your questions. How was I recruited into the ILO? I think I was recruited into the ILO for the wrong reasons.

The ILO had a manpower division, or manpower department in those days, and they tried to do more or less what we had done in the OECD, making the mistake of equating employment policies (which is a development problem) with a manpower projections approach (which is a much narrower problem). I saw this, of course, immediately, but I did not say so because I was really interested in the job I was offered. But I think it is telling that the ILO recruited somebody (we are talking about 1970) who had no experience in employment policies and employment creation but who was very interested in it. For me, it was a God's gift. I was ready to move to another field and I did. So, maybe those who recruited me showed incredible insight. They saw the potential in me to come in with a fresh mind and succeed in what was obviously a very difficult job.

**Interviewer** –Who recruited you?

**Mr Emmerij**– During my OECD days I had worked in Argentina, because the Ford Foundation - when they saw the results of our work in the less developed Mediterranean member countries of the OECD - was so impressed - again, I think for the wrong reasons - that they proposed to the OECD a million dollars, we are talking about 1964 or 1965

dollars, if we would transfer that experience to Latin America. The OECD – after some hesitation to undertake work in non-member countries - decided to do Argentina and Peru and I volunteered to head a small team to go to Argentina. I must admit that we did a fantastic, sophisticated study, already much better than what we had done in the OECD countries. This was in 1965- 1966. In 1970 I was invited back to Buenos Aires to discuss the report we had done four or five years before. I returned to Paris via Mexico City and in my hotel was awaiting a huge telex about a mile long signed Bernard Fortin. And Bernard Fortin explained in great detail that there was a new programme – the World Employment Programme - and that they wanted me, and whether I could come over to Geneva to discuss this. So I sent a telegram saying “OK, 30 August I will be in Geneva”. I saw Bernard Fortin and I saw Bert Zoeteweyj. Of course, Zoeteweyj was more sophisticated as an economist, although very stubborn. He must have understood, he must have looked at the potential rather than at the work experience I brought with me. So I was accepted. We are now in September 1970. As you know, in November 1970 the Americans stopped paying, delayed their dues as long as possible, and a recruitment stop was imposed except, of course, for Mendez and me. Jorge Mendez started out as the chief of the department and I as chief of research and deputy director. So that is how I was recruited!

**Interviewer** – So, at that time it was really bringing together different bits and pieces from around the ILO to start the programme going or was it all new?

**Mr Emmerij** – A new department was created which was actually a split-off from the Manpower Department. So I found a department with a wonderful title – World Employment Programme....

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**Interviewer** – So you invented the title?

**Mr Emmerij** – No, the title was not invented by me; it was there. David Morse had launched the World Employment Programme in 1969 – this was at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the ILO, the Pope was there, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded, etc. So, when I arrived I found a wonderful title, but very few people and practically no money. I think there were fewer than 20 professionals among whom only a handful of economists, like Felix Paukert and Ajit Bhalla.

The immediate challenge for me was, therefore, to obtain extra-budgetary money in order to attract qualified people. I was very much helped in that by the American decision to stop paying their financial contribution to the ILO. Many donor countries and also Organizations were attracted by the title of the Programme and considered it an important initiative. Onassis once said, the first million dollars is the most difficult to obtain, after that it is easy! Well, my first million dollars came from the UNFPA, the UN Population Fund, which had just started then. There was a person, Kailas Doctor, whom you surely remember, who was the link between the UNFPA and the ILO. He had gone around the entire Organization, all the chiefs of department and said “There is money, there is money to be had” and everybody said “we do not know what to do with it”. So when I arrived, he was at the end of his tether and he came to me and he said to me “Louis?” and I said “Of course, sit down, Kailas”. He explained, I went to the library, turned myself into a demographer, wrote a convincing paper on population and employment and three months later we had more than a million dollars! Well, you know that.

**Interviewer** – Yes, I was living on that for a long time!

**Mr Emmerij** – And then the Swedes came, also with a million dollars. I was lucky in that there was a very interesting man who was doing the multi-bi funding, Zmirou was his name, a Turk. He was very helpful, but had the same experience as Kailas Doctor - nobody in the ILO had the imagination to contact him. So he brought the Swedes to me. I took them out to lunch. I spent a lot of my own money on lunches in those days! Again, a million dollars from the Swedes! Then the whole thing started rolling. I could almost open my own bank account! I could recruit whoever I wanted. In the meantime Jorge Mendez's contract was not renewed. I think for the wrong reasons. He was a very nice person. But he did not have, maybe, the energy. He had a very nice wife, which must have cost him a lot of energy. He is dead now, for quite a few years.

And so, one and a half years after my arrival, I became the head of the department and could set up all those sections on population, income distribution, technology, informal sector, emergency programmes, rural development, etc. Then it was easy sailing in a sense because I had created a team thanks to the extra-budgetary funds. And to do anything of importance necessitates team work.

**Interviewer** – Did Abbas Amar have any role?

**Mr Emmerij** – Yes, very much so. Without Abbas Amar – who was the number two in the Organization when Wilfred Jenks became Director General in 1970 - I would have left probably after six months. He understood the necessity of research if you are in a relatively new field. That was much less the case with Jenks and most of the other Deputy Directors General and Assistant Directors General. In general, most people in the Organization did not quite understand what we were doing. The research programme became huge. And so, there was first of all a lack of understanding in the Organization about the nature of the

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employment problem which we quite correctly understood to be a development problem, and, second, there was also a certain amount of jealousy with all that money rolling in. I could not only recruit people but was also able to give them promotions. Those who headed research programmes all became D1s, such as Dharam Ghai, Dick Blandy, Felix Paukert, Keith Griffin, Ajit Bhalla, etc. Blandy left early. Who again took over from Dick Blandy?

**Interviewer** – J.N. Sinha for a year and then it was me.

**Mr Emmerij** – In this ambiance of jealousies and lack of understanding, Abbas Amar protected me. Abbas Amar was amused by all these new young people coming in. I myself was a relatively young man. I was 36 when I came; 38 when I became the D2 head of the department. He was very amused. He understood. He read everything quietly, always sitting in an easy chair, never at his desk, dictated long memoranda. Without him we could not have done what we have done. So I owe him a lot of gratitude and very often, until this very day, I have a silent thought for him. Jenks was a brilliant man but in the field of international law. He did not understand what we were doing, but he listened to Abbas Amar.

When Wilfred Jenks died in October 1973 in Rome of a heart attack, Abbas Amar wanted to finish Jenks' term as Director-General and then leave the Organization. But Francis Blanchard, the other deputy Director General, outmanoeuvred him and was elected Director General in early 1974. Abbas Amar, who was a proud and sensitive man, was very much hurt by this incident. He resigned and left.

I had also handed in my resignation to Blanchard because I think a new Director-General must be free to appoint the people he wants in important positions. Abbas Amar, before

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leaving the Organization, then sent a 25-page memorandum to Blanchard, saying certainly not to let me go. In conclusion, Abbas Amar was crucial in the whole thing. Without him, nothing would have been done.

**Interviewer** – So when you got this all going, looking at this from the perspective of the ILO today, it is incredible that it happened, because you cannot imagine it happening today. The first thing that you think about today is the constituents: the Workers and the Employers and some of the Governments, who would probably find this a threat or would want to control it. How did you get them on your side? Or did you get them on your side?

**Mr Emmerij** – You say that today this would not have been possible. But it was not supposed to be possible in the early 1970s. It is always very difficult to set up a thing like that. Don't forget that trade unions and employers existed also in 1970! They do not care about new policies based on research.

Let me give an example. The first high-level employment mission report was done for Colombia. When the Report was published<sup>1</sup>, the Colombian trade union representative in the Governing Body screamed and shouted that the report had said, among other things, that trade unions should also look after the unemployed and the poor and not only after their membership, the happy few that were gainfully employed. He created quite a row and it was a pretty terrible situation, I was very much attacked. A year later, this trade unionist was killed, like so many trade unionists in Colombia. He was found on the dustbin.

It was again Abbas Amar who in those early years, between 1970 and end of 1973, smoothed things over. He invited the trade unions, he invited me, we had big meals and he

<sup>1</sup> ILO : *Towards full employment. A programme for Colombia* (Geneva, 1970)

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did all the talking and I just sat there drinking wine. I must say, however, that the trade unions were actually more understanding in the end than the Employers. The Employers – not very much could be done with them.

This is just another example how much the Programme and I owe to Abbas Amar. He was the diplomat, he talked and talked and said that Louis was a good man, even if he was, sometimes, undiplomatic! So he solved a lot of situations. By the time Abbas Amar left in early 1974, the World Employment Programme was already so strong and, in a sense, powerful thanks to Abbas Amar, my money-raising abilities, the recruitment of an outstanding team and the results that were being produced, that it had become a much easier situation. It became difficult again around the World Employment Conference of 1976.

**Interviewer** – We will talk about that in a second, I hope. The other sort of linkage, apart from the political linkage, is the substantive linkage. One of the things that I realized later was that there were many things going on elsewhere in the ILO, which could have had a bearing on the World Employment Programme but the link was never made. There was work on minimum wages, which did not seem to have much connection. There was work on social security which did not have much connection either, etc.

**Mr Emmerij** – Right, there are of course in any Organization many things that can be linked to what is going on in one department, although in the case of the ILO, I think, there was not too much going on in my days that we saw as very useful to our endeavours. But the main thing was that I saw it as a necessity to build a fortress and that was positive and at the same time negative. The World Employment Programme (WEP) was becoming such a strange and exceptional animal in the ILO universe - with increasing jealousies and attacks, even during Abbas Amar's time but particularly afterwards - that I felt compelled

to build a fortress and shut that fortress off from the rest of the Organization. The good thing was that the walls were so strong that nobody could really do anything about the Programme from the outside.

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**BOX 1.**

**Nicolas Valticos**

*The fact that I had built a fortress did not prevent me from having extremely friendly and sometimes amusing relations with colleagues in the traditional ILO. A prime example was Nicolas Valticos who was in charge of the international labour code. We both knew that we would never be successful in influencing each other but he could be extremely funny. He was a guy who was quick on the uptake. We were writing the draft report of the World Employment Conference document in a motel at Founex near Geneva. When he heard that he said with an amicable smile: "There is Louis de Funes and his crew writing the script of their forthcoming movie." I thought that was extremely funny. So we got along fine. I only saw him once raving mad and that was against Bert Zoetewij when the latter addressed him critically in the icy way he had a habit of doing. Valticos had a marvellous career after the ILO. He was a judge at the European Court of Justice and must have died happy with himself. Whenever I think of him, I smile.*

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But, at the same time, as you correctly mention, the things that could have been useful in the rest of the Organization for the WEP were discarded by me. I did not want to have anything to do with the likes of Nicolas Valticos, who was otherwise a nice guy, but I saw the International Labour Code as a bureaucratic device which would complicate our difficult work still further. I was probably wrong there but not at the time! I considered the ILO out of date and the WEP at the forefront of progress! You must simplify when you want to progress in a difficult field. Take De Givry. Of all the directors of departments, he was the most understanding of my problems and he understood why it was difficult for me. He was more on the qualitative side, do you remember? I liked him and was attracted to his work. But we had so many things to do, we had become so huge, that I continued until the end with my fortress mentality. Now, I do not know in how far some of the section chiefs, the Paukerts, the Bhallas, etc behaved in that sense, but I think they were all in the fortress and did not have that many tentacles outside. What I do know is that, when Abbas Amar asked us to take over the traditional ILO rural work and put it with us in Keith Griffin's division, it was not exactly a success.

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## **BOX 2**

### **Jean de Givry**

*I took a particular liking to Jean de Givry who was in charge of a Department on the Quality of Life or something like that. He was a nice and elegant man. He was a Protestant – a French Protestant – very serious. We were very often early in the ILO and had breakfast together in the cafeteria. There was one thing I particularly liked about him. There would be crumbs of bread or croissant on his plate and he would pick up the crumbs with his fingers and eat them – that is exactly what I used to do. I said to myself that it must be a Protestant habit. We do not leave a crumb untouched. **Interviewer** – There is an interesting story because just after the WEP they launched with de Givry the International Programme for the Improvement of Conditions of Work, which I think conceptually was modelled to some extent on the WEP but which was nothing like as successful. **Emmerij** –*

*You can be a French Protestant and try to eat the crumbs and not be successful in managing a difficult thing.*

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The interesting question is, if I had stayed would I have continued that attitude? Or would I have opened up? I think I would have continued the fortress attitude and that, of course, is not sustainable. What would have happened if Abbas Amar would have become the Director-General for two-and-a-half years? Would I have left that early to accept the invitation to become the Rector of the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague? If Abbas Amar and I had stayed longer, Amar would have continued to defend it. But what would have happened had I stayed nine or ten years?

Today my conclusion is - having thought about that in later years – that the Programme, as it was going, could not have been sustained for a longer period of time. We would have had to open up and as soon as you open up, you not only take the positive things, but also the bureaucratic constraints with you. That is my tentative conclusion.

**Interviewer** – So the counter-factual is the circumstances under which WEP could have survived and not gone into decline because it went into decline.....

**Mr Emmerij** –The WEP could have continued to thrive for a couple of more years but not indefinitely, even if I would have stayed on, I think.

**Interviewer** – Can we come back to where we were? How did you get on with Blanchard? In his interview with Juan Somavia, he was very positive about his relationship with you.

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Afterwards, when I saw him privately, I said to him that that was very interesting that he was positive because the rumour at the time was that you and he did not get on very well. And he said to me that the problem was (*in French: "Il voulait être le chef et c'était moi le chef*).

(Laughter)

**Mr Emmerij** – I have said in public ... Were you there when Abbas Amar left and I gave this big dinner?

**Interviewer** – No. I was too junior for that.

**Mr Emmerij** – No, no, no, the whole department was invited. When did you come on the scene? 1974? So, just a little bit later, because Abbas Amar left early 1974. I invited the entire department – the secretaries, everybody, and a couple of friends from outside the Department, like Payro and Jef Rens, the former deputy director-general. I paid for the whole thing – with love and pleasure because of my respect for Amar. Blanchard was there. I gave a speech. In it I said that I loved Blanchard but did not respect him. That was not the kind of thing I should have said but that was exactly how I felt. He was a very good human being. His heart was in the right place and Vera, whom I met in the ILO in those days and whom I married, confirmed it. When she was a Bulgarian refugee without a passport, she went to Blanchard and he said “OK, we will give you a three-month contract and that will be renewed for a few times” and then after two years he called her back and said “You have now been here for two years, you go to the Personnel Department and say that after two years they must give you a permanent contract” and that is how it happened. Now, as you may know, before he joined the ILO he was in the equivalent of what is now the International Organization for Migration. So he knew these problems. Vera writes to

him every year, and I sign the letter as well, with conviction. So he is a very nice human being – there is no doubt about it and I love him for that. But, intellectually, he was literally afraid, and the day I really noticed that was at the opening of the World Employment Conference. I was sitting next to him and, at the time, he thought that there was a good chance that the heavens would fall on him, which almost happened, of course.

But the interesting thing is that I had received the invitation to become Rector of the Institute of Social Studies a year earlier, in 1975, so I went to Blanchard and said that since there was a certain tension, nothing terribly serious but a certain tension between us, maybe you would prefer that I accept it now and leave it to somebody else to continue the preparations of the World Employment Conference. “NO! You cannot leave now. You must finish that job.” So I called up The Hague and said that if they were willing to wait for a year, I could come in September 1976 and that is how it happened.

But Blanchard was very insecure because in all honesty he was in an extremely delicate situation. The Americans were about to leave, which they did, of course, some time later. There was a problem with China. It was not a happy situation for a person who was not too strong a personality but he was extremely good diplomatically.

**Interviewer** – Before we come to the World Employment Conference, Louis, tell me about the people in the World Employment Programme, the people who you inherited or that you recruited. Who were the most important of that crowd for taking the agenda forward, intellectually?

**Mr Emmerij** – To my mind, the two important people intellectually speaking that I inherited were Felix Paukert whom I put in charge of the work on income distribution and Ajit Bhalla who became the leader of the technology work. The article Felix Paukert

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wrote for the *International Labour Review*, on income distribution in 53 countries, still stands today. It is very good. He was not the fastest of workers, but what he did was solid. But I must also mention here John Sykes whom I inherited from Abbas Amar when he left. John was the supreme operator in the good sense of that word. He could get most things done in the bureaucracy, including in the Personnel Department, smoothly and without making waves. I owe him a lot.

I recruited Dharam Ghai and Keith Griffin later. They were with Felix Paukert and Ajit Bhalla the major senior intellectual forces that we had. But the dynamism came from below, from all those younger people that were brought in, including yourself.

Dick Blandy, who was recruited to head the population sector of the WEP, did well, not only for the Programme but also for himself later, which is fine with me. He was attacked by the bureaucrats that he had written himself a project of US\$40,000 before returning to Australia to give a boost to the Institute he was going to direct. But the project was fine and what is 40,000 dollars out of a million that we had received from the UN Population Fund. So we solved that.

Antoinette Béguin is a story in itself. I inherited Antoinette Béguin. She was responsible for the regional teams, while Lothar Richter whom I also inherited was responsible for the traditional manpower process. He recently died, I understand. He wrote funny poems. Antoinette Béguin was the typical excellent international civil servant. Her grandfather had been there. Her father had been there. She was a third generation ILO civil servant. She knew all the ins and outs and she was loyal, at least as far as I could tell. She grumbled from time to time. She was the only one who sent me 1,000 Swiss francs in an envelope to participate for the farewell dinner of Abbas Amar that cost me 7,000 Swiss francs. I appreciated the gesture but I sent the envelope back to her and said "Buy yourself a nice dress". Antoinette Béguin was an excellent bureaucrat. She handled these things quite nicely. She was not, of course, the powerful intellectual force that we needed to get the WEP on the rails.

But what I liked most – and so did Abbas Amar – were all those younger people that were brought in – lots and lots of outstanding young people. You are, of course, the last of that crowd!

**Interviewer** – Eddy Lee is still here.

**Mr Emmerij** – See, now that is interesting. Eddy Lee. Keith Griffin brought in two young people – the young Eddy Lee and another guy who left soon afterwards from South Africa originally. Eddy Lee was a radical, like Keith was. But as I followed Eddy Lee in his long career he became a bureaucrat too. He has not done anything out of the ordinary since then, so he has conformed. They all conform. But anyway this is your question about the people?

**Interviewer** – But there are other people as well, because there were the outsiders. There was the IDS (Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex) crowd?

**Mr Emmerij** – Oh, yes, but that was different, of course.

**Interviewer** – But if we are thinking of the construction of the agenda or of the approach, how important were they?

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**Mr Emmerij** – The WEP had three major components: research, the high level employment missions, and the regional teams. The first two were the most important, although PREALC did important work later, and so did ARTEP for that matter.

Richard Jolly and I still have discussions about the role of the employment missions. There is no doubt that the first three were very important in shaping the Programme. Dudley Seers headed the missions to Colombia (1970) and to Ceylon (1971), as Sri Lanka was then called. Richard Jolly and Hans Singer headed the Kenya mission (1972). I participated personally in the Ceylon and Kenya missions for the entire duration. These were all first-rate reports, particularly Kenya, of course. Kenya was the most important report. “Redistribution from growth”, as Hans Singer called it, the “informal sector”, it all came out of the Kenya report. <sup>2</sup>

The missions to the Philippines under Gus Ranis and to the Sudan under Just Faaland were also very important. However, the first three were obviously more crucial in helping to shape the World Employment Programme. But you cannot say that these missions were **the** determining factor. The research work was first-rate also. Richard Jolly still thinks these three IDS missions were the great thing. They were a great thing, but they were one important factor among at least two, research being the other one. The regional teams did a couple of very interesting things as well.

**Interviewer** – Let me just pose a follow-up question on that, which is a more general question for research strategy today. The external research networks are actually pretty important, because on its own the ILO does not have the size nor the clout. You built up a large programme. So you needed those external networks. But do I understand from what you have said that for you the external network was significant but not decisive?

<sup>2</sup> ILO: *Employment, incomes and equality: A strategy for increasing productive employment in Kenya* (Geneva, 1972).

**Mr Emmerij** – Well, as you must know, we had not only a large internal programme with a lot of clout (when I left we had 150 people in Geneva and 150 in the field, we were bigger than UNCTAD!) we had an even larger external network. The various WEP research programmes had hundreds of people working for them in all the continents, producing tons of excellent papers and books, both because we had clout and money. We could recruit anybody that we liked. Amartya Sen did two books with us. He owes his Nobel Prize, to a certain extent, to the World Employment Programme and he said that much in the interview he did for us in the United Nations Intellectual History Project (UNIHP). He was very generous in that respect. So we had not only a strong internal programme, we had an even stronger external network on the research side. And on the employment mission side, we had, as I already mentioned, Just Faaland of the Christian Michelsen Institute in Bergen for the Sudan, Gus Ranis in the Philippines from the Yale Growth Centre, Etienne Hirsch for Iran, etc. It was a fantastic, moving feast, to talk like Hemingway.

**Interviewer** – That was not consistent, was it? You went from Kenya, with a much more structuralist model, to the Philippines with Gus Ranis and something which was sort of soft neoclassical.

**Emmerij** – Well Gerry, if you ask somebody to do a job, you cannot tell him “Use this model”. One of the purposes of asking different people after the three IDS missions was precisely to get another perspective. By the way, many people would say that the Philippines mission was the most successful. I personally do not think that is true. Still, it

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was on purpose that we let several flowers flower simultaneously or sequentially. It was an eclectic programme in that sense.

**Interviewer** – It did not bother you working for Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines?

**Mr Emmerij** – No, not at all. Particularly not for Mrs Marcos! In those days, she was an intelligent, beautiful woman. I counted her shoes – there were not 3,000 pairs of shoes in her cupboard. I was there! Marcos was small. He stood behind his desk. He had a kind of heightened floor there so that he could stand taller than he actually was. Look, I think Ferdinand Marcos and his wife were not as bad as they have been painted once they were kicked out, with American support. Actually, I thought it was good that we were working there during Marcos because we could point out what the future economic and social policies had to be.

There was a debate in those days, the 1970s, about development assistance. Should we give development assistance to so-and-so, who is a bastard? Jan Pronk, as a young minister for development cooperation of The Netherlands, then said: “People are already punished by having a bastard as a president, should we punish them twice by denying them development assistance?” That was the beginning of getting the NGOs involved and giving them the money. So, I am quite happy that we worked in the Philippines.

**Interviewer** – Let us come to the World Employment Conference? Was that your idea?

**Mr Emmerij** – How does the saying go? “Success has many parents, failure is an orphan.” As the WEC is now considered, even by Francis Blanchard, as a success, it may be time to

set the record straight. I, for one, do not remember having ever said “I want a World Employment Conference”. What we did say, some of us, was that there had been Stockholm in 1972, the Population Conference in 1974, the FAO’s Food Conference in 1975. So the question was raised whether we should do something also. I was rather neutral in that early debate. I do not think because A did something; B must do it too.

The person who was most vocal in this debate was Pathmaraja. He had been the Ambassador of Ceylon in Geneva, the Permanent Representative, and as the Government changed and he was out of a job, I gave him a post as my public relations man, or should I say, as my minister of foreign affairs! He was very good at it. If I have to credit anybody for launching the idea of the WEC and getting it accepted by Governments and trade unions, it is him. He said “God damn it, Louis, we must do something” and he knew this whole circuit in Geneva, all these ambassadors. He did the rounds and he talked to the Employers, he talked to the Governments, he talked to the trade unions. He must have been 60–65 per cent of determining factor to have the Conference. Not me.

**Interviewer** – And Blanchard did not have a problem?

**Mr Emmerij** – Blanchard was, of course, in two minds. For him having a big conference was something important as it would put the ILO on the map substantively. It was only later when he saw the final draft of the report he had to sign, that he had second thoughts, I suppose. Although, there again, I am not quite sure. For example, we were in Founex , as you may remember, writing the final draft of the WEC report and we were really concentrated, Dharam Ghai, Ajit Bhalla, Keith Griffin, Gerry Helleiner, Helen Hughes of the World Bank, myself were there. ...

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**Interviewer** – Reg Green?

**Mr Emmerij** – No, Reg had been there for the first draft that we wrote in 1975. So, it must have been about 8.30 in the morning we were working our heads off. And all of a sudden Blanchard appeared. Nobody heard him come in. And Blanchard, as a nice gesture, he said, I am just passing by and wanted to say hello and bon courage, etc.

My conclusion is that everything was okay before he saw the final result and got all kinds of conflicting feedback about it. But he saw a real possibility there for the ILO. However, he was nervous in the face of the US attitude and other problems he had on his plate. But all is well that ends well. He is now very proud of the Conference and of the concept of basic needs.

Now the next question, I suppose, is who had the idea of basic needs?

**Interviewer** –Yes. That is the next question! You can read the script.

**Mr Emmerij** – The first person who mentioned the concept of basic needs to me was Dharam Ghai. You remember that I had appointed Dharam Ghai as head of the secretariat for the World Employment Conference. Dharam Ghai walks in my office, probably towards the end of '74 or beginning of '75 and he says “Louis, I think basic needs should be the main theme of the World Employment Conference” and I said “Dharam, what the hell is basic needs?” He explained as well as he could and in about 15 minutes I had understood that this was a heck of a good idea. I told him to go ahead. So from my point of view it was Dharam Ghai.

But in the course of UNIHP I have done some research on the question of the origin of the concept. My tentative conclusion is that the idea came from the Bariloche Foundation. You may remember that you and/or Michael Hopkins invited this fellow Skolnik who was one of the two quantitative economists of the Foundation (the other was a lady, Graciella Chichilinsky). So, Hugo Skolnik was invited before Dharam came to my office. He convinced either you or Michael or the two of you that the concept of basic needs was IT. Therefore, I now believe that the sequence of the introduction of the concept was 1- the Bariloche Foundation, 2- Skolnik convinces you and/or Hopkins, 3- you and/or Hopkins sell the ideas to Dharam Ghai, 4- Ghai walks in my office and convinces me. So the prize goes to the Bariloche Foundation!

**Interviewer** – And it was Hopkins, not me. Again, seen from today’s perspective, it was totally insane. There you were, picking up a sort of vague, general concept with no roots in the ILO.

**Mr Emmerij** – Well, let me note that it was, therefore, not you who stood behind the concept and sent it to Dharam Ghai! Or have you been so brainwashed after all those years in the ILO that you have forgotten that, as an Organization that is supposed to look after the social side of things, trying to devise a development strategy that will ensure that even the poorest have a decent income is of crucial importance. What about that vague concept of “decent work” that you like so much...

First of all, may I say that contrary to “decent work”, basic needs is not a vague concept. That I understood immediately. Actually, I should have given a minute ago also credit to our own Programme: redistribution from growth became redistribution with growth

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through the 1974 Hollis Chenery World Bank publication.<sup>3</sup> *Basic needs* is a variation on that theme and is very precise. You may wish to read again the 1976 report we submitted to the WEC.<sup>4</sup> In it you will find a macro-economic framework, sector frameworks, regional breakdowns, and an international trade dimension. It quantified what the rate of growth had to be between 1975 and 2000 with a given amount of redistribution, in order for the basic needs (that were also quantified) to be fulfilled, including for the poorest 20 per cent of the population.

What was vague about that? Hey, come on, I was an econometrician before I became a wiser man so I know how these things work but you cannot say that it was vague. You should read the Report again, like Richard Jolly did the other day You would be impressed like he was. I think the concept still stands. The human development approach owes a lot to the basic needs concept. Richard has a very interesting chapter on the human development approach in our last UNIHP volume (the Grand Synthesis!) and its antecedents where basic needs plays a crucial role and is actually better quantified than the human needs concept.

**Interviewer** – So you arrived at the Conference with the report. Maybe there is more to tell on the report before you arrived at the Conference?

**Mr Emmerij** – No, I am happy that I could correct you!

<sup>3</sup> H.B.Chenery et. al: *Redistribution with growth* (London, Oxford University Press, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> ILO, *Employment, growth and basic needs: A one-world problem*. Report of the Director-General to the World Employment Conference (Geneva, 1976).

**Interviewer** – And you arrived at the Conference with the report on basic needs. Then what happened?

**Mr Emmerij** – Well, we did not arrive at the Conference naked, so to speak. There had been quite some preparatory work. As I mentioned earlier, we had written a first draft of the WEC report in the summer of 1975. That draft was very widely distributed. Pathmaraja, Dharam Ghai and I divided the world to discuss the draft. We travelled all over the place. I had the industrial countries and Path and Dharam divided the rest of the world. It was a highly successful operation and we met with a lot of enthusiasm, except in the USA which was in my part of the world. I went to Washington with the report and there was Walter Galenson whom I considered a friend. When the Programme was launched in 1969 by the then Director General David Morse (who quickly left afterwards, with the Nobel Peace Prize) a troika was established to advise the secretariat on how to proceed with the WEP. This was of course before my time! That troika consisted of Walter Galenson, a friend of David Morse, Hans Singer and a Dane by the name of Kjell Phillips. When I came I said that I did not need anybody. I do not need any troika or any advisers so I discontinued the troika but not before having had some good discussions with Walter and his wife.

When I arrived in Washington in the fall of 1975, I discovered that Walter had been appointed the main advisor to what was to become the US delegation to the Conference. He had written a long paper (which he updated for the Conference proper) and I can assure you that it was very critical, although in a highly biased fashion. He influenced the tripartite meeting in Washington in a negative way. So it was a very difficult meeting.

Our ILO representative in Washington, who was an African American and had himself been the head of the CIO before the merger with AFL, George Weaver was his name, said afterwards “Well, Louis, I do not understand why you did not lose your patience” and I

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said that I did not understand it either. Walter Galenson made the people around the table believe that here was a quasi communist manifesto because there was a lot about redistribution. And in the first draft the redistribution aspect was more pronounced than in the final draft because it was concerned not only with marginal redistribution but redistribution of land and the whole works.

However, I did score an important point during that meeting in 1975. I knew that Walter Galenson had written quite a lot about South Korea, Taiwan and Japan, how well these countries were doing. Irma Adelman and I had already eaten your strawberries with salt at your home and she had already produced this report on “redistribution before growth.” So, when he attacked our report. I said to him “But, Walter, you have always been so enthusiastic about East Asia, particularly South Korea and Japan and Taiwan and you know full well that these countries owe their success in large part to the huge redistribution policies imposed by the Americans – MacArthur in Japan, land reform after the Korean War in ’53 and later years.

He swallowed but never gave up his attack. And he repeated it still in the 1980’s when he wrote that book about the ILO.<sup>5</sup> When the World Employment Conference came along in June 1976, there was a little man who entered my office and he said “I am from the Government delegation of the United States” and I asked who was in charge of the delegation and he said “I am”. A little guy like that. He must have been an assistant deputy secretary of the Labour Department or whatever, a total nonentity. That was the interest the US Government took in the Conference during the Ford administration.

On the contrary, the US trade union representative was the guy who later became the successor of George Meany and was already the number 2 of the AFL-CIO.

<sup>5</sup> *The International Labor Organization: An American View*. Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981.

**Interviewer** – Kirkland?

**Mr Emmerij** – Lane Kirkland was there. He was the most subtle of the Americans present and I suspect that he was rather in favour of the report, but he kept that for himself..! When it comes to the Employers’ representative, I have gracefully forgotten who that was. The American tripartite delegation was opposed to the whole thing from the beginning, with Lane Kirkland more subtle than the rest. The European Employers were not very enthusiastic either, but the trade unions and many Governments were very enthusiastic. The developing countries were all in favour at that moment in time.

There was a funny episode in the middle of the Conference. You may remember that the Employers’ spokesman attacked me for having prepared a draft of the final document of the Conference, which was of course the thing to do and is quite normal. I still laugh when I think about it. Mr Jain, you remember the Deputy Director-General from India, Jain had to come in and chair that particular meeting. I was sitting next to Jain and then came the spokesman of the Employers, a Mexican, a big guy. He said “This man (pointing at me) has prepared the final draft document of the Conference, we cannot accept this”. And he went on and on and on. And I just said that this was what responsible people have to do and I left and let Jain discuss it.

But my main memory, my souvenir, of the Conference was the great enthusiasm overall – great enthusiasm. The developing countries, European countries, European trade unions wildly enthusiastic. The communist countries were in favour, although some of the Hungarian academics had little things here and there. There was a huge debate the last night. I had John Sykes stop the clock for effect that evening. I must say, once again, that John did successfully whatever you asked of him! The clocks stopped at midnight and the Conference went on for about two or three hours more and then the final document was

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adopted by consensus with a couple of dissenting paragraphs at the end by the Americans and some of the European Employers.

I found the ambience during the World Employment Conference marvellous, it was exciting. On the whole, there was a lot of enthusiasm as we have seen later when in November 1976 Jimmy Carter was elected. All of a sudden, basic human needs became the leitmotif of USAID. McNamara had already bought it wholesale. Helen Hughes, the Australian economist in charge of the research department of the World Bank had helped write the final draft. She was wildly enthusiastic. Hollis Chenery and McNamara were both behind the concept of basic needs, so the World Bank became involved, the United States became involved. That is where the developing countries - still in the midst of the battle around the new international economic order - started having questions. They said, "What is going on?" The United States in favour, the World Bank in favour. They want us to redistribute our stuff within our countries, what about international redistribution? Of course, our report has that too. But all of a sudden, the stress was on internal redistribution and the developing countries started perceiving that as a way to kill the new international economic order. Their perception may have been right, but it was not inherent in our report and in the final document of the Conference.

But to sum up, my impression and my souvenirs are of a wildly enthusiastic two weeks - the experience of a lifetime.

Now you want to ask me about Walter Galenson?

**Interviewer** – I want to ask you about Walter Galenson because it seems that something underhand was going on.

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**Mr Emmerij** – Yes, I did not know at the time that something fishy was going on about my resignation. As I mentioned earlier, I had already handed in my resignation to go to Holland after the Conference.

**Interviewer** – But Blanchard already had your resignation before the Conference?

**Mr Emmerij** – No, I had told him orally that after the WEC I would go back to my country. There was something that I found funny. Bernard Fortin - the same Bernard Fortin who had sent me the telex in Mexico City and who had become Chef de Cabinet of the DG - walked into my office and said, “Louis, Blanchard has not yet received your resignation”, I said, “what is the hurry, what is going on? We are in the aftermath of the WEC and there are a ton of things to do.”

Years later, I read Walter Galenson’s book, and there is this long footnote which said: the World Employment Programme had lost its way, it was no longer what it was supposed to be. The World Employment Conference, by adopting the concept of basic needs, was terribly mistaken. The tripartite American delegation went to see Francis Blanchard, the Director-General of the ILO, and unanimously asked for the resignation of Louis Emmerij, the chief instigator of the perversion. I am overdoing it a bit!!

Reading this, I said to myself, the bastards and I mean here ILO bastards! Instead of telling me, Blanchard must have said - knowing that I would go anyway - “I will fix that for you, gentlemen”, sends Bernard Fortin – Louis, where is your resignation? Had I known this, what was behind all that, I would not have resigned. They should have had to sack me with a good two-year compensation package, right? I am only half- joking here!

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So there was something fishy, and if Galenson has told the truth in his book, I find it not fair play on the part of the Director-General and of his Chef de Cabinet of not having told me, “Louis we know you are going to resign anyway, but know that this has happened ...” So I had to learn that through my good friend Walter Galenson. I suppose he must have told the truth because of this little incident that – Fortin comes into my office and asked, “Where is your resignation?” Amazing. Then of course the Americans left anyway...

**Interviewer** – But not for that reason?!

**Mr Emmerij** – Well, Blanchard and company saw ghosts all over the place. But, obviously, the Americans left because George Meany wanted them to leave. The day George Meany died they came back. George Meany was behind this, not so much because of the World Employment Programme – it was because of the Soviet Union having three seats: the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the rest of the Soviet Union. They had three countries there and each had three representatives which were all the same thing because Meany did not see any difference between a soviet trade unionist, a soviet employer, and a soviet government official. So, they had nine votes while the United States only three and, actually, only one. That was the major thing. You may have heard what happened when Wilfred Jenks was elected in 1970 against Blanchard. Blanchard was supposed to win by two votes. The night before the election, Wilfred Jenks promised the Americans that he would not appoint a Russian Assistant Director-General, he won, and the first thing the man did, after having been elected, was to appoint Astapenko, the Ukranian. So there were a lot of little silly things there. I found this disagreeable.

**Interviewer** – The World Bank was an ally ...

**Mr Emmerij** – You mean in the basic needs concept and the WEC report? Yes.

**Interviewer** – ... which is interesting. There you have this radical “pink” programme and the World Bank was an ally?

**Mr Emmerij** – Well, the WEC report was not more pink than the World Bank “redistribution with growth” publication of 1974. In retrospect, there is a debate as is the case so often. Richard Jolly maintains it was McNamara who was in favour of basic needs and redistribution rather than Hollis Chenery. You remember of course McNamara’s famous Nairobi speech of 1973, written by Mahbub ul Haq who later was put in charge of the basic needs work in the Bank.

My experience shows that this is not quite true. Hollis Chenery, Chief Economist, Vice-President of the World Bank, invited me three times to Washington during the preparatory work of the WEC. I was received as royalty. I have never been received by the Bank or anybody else like that. Everybody was there and was listening. Hollis Chenery, if he was not entirely convinced, never showed it to me. He was enthusiastic and he wanted the Bank to work on it, to do more quantitative work on it. Therefore, the World Bank was in favour, not because **we** were pink, we were all pink, to use your terminology. But if you read again the redistribution with growth book and our own WEC document, I would not call it pink, I would call it common sense. So no, these were progressive documents but only American conservatives would (still) call it “pink.” Hollis Chenery was a very serious economist. He had done very good work and was convinced that one of the few ways that you can get everybody involved in the growth process was through redistribution with growth.

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**Interviewer** – On the demise of the basic needs strategy, you say, basically, it was the developing countries, the G77 shot it down or was there more to it?

**Mr Emmerij** – No, you did not hear me say that. The developing countries had second thoughts after they saw the United States and the World Bank going for it. They were nonplussed and asked themselves whether it was not a ploy to get rid of the NIEO and international redistribution.

But it must be said that many developing countries actually never gave up on basic needs. In the early 1980s we had the Washington Consensus revolution. We went back to another era in terms of development and economic and social development strategies. Structural adjustment, neo-liberalism were in and the progress in thinking we had accomplished in the 1970s was out. The 1980s was one big disaster in terms of economic growth for most of the developing countries. In 1990, Mahbub ul Haq and UNDP launched the human development report and slowly the ideas came back under the guise of a human development approach. That was progress, although – and I repeat this – without a quantified macro-economic framework, as we had in our WEC report. So it was a change in policies that went back to a previous era.

**Interviewer** – But did the basic needs strategy have internal support from the ILO? I mean, after you had gone?

**Mr Emmerij** – Well we talked about that – I never asked anybody.

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**Interviewer** – Normally those things are supposed to be followed up by action.

**Mr Emmerij** – Yes, correct, but I was no longer there, remember? I left in September 1976, Antoinette Béguin being appointed as my successor. Now the World Employment Conference final document specifies that follow-up action is required. Have you ever seen follow-up action? No, there was no follow-up action. That is the big difference between the human development approach and the basic needs approach. The human development report, you have hundreds of local, national, and regional human development reports, an enormous amount of national and regional follow up action. Actually, I am amazed that the human development approach is not more successful. But at the same time, I am not amazed because the approach is not quantified, there is no macroeconomic framework. It is like the Millennium Development Goals – they hang in thin air.

Contrary what happened with the basic needs approach, you can not say that the human development people, the secretariat in UNDP, did not follow up regionally, nationally, and locally. Richard Jolly tells me that there are about 600 regional, national and local development reports. That is huge, and we never did it. You never did it. I was in Holland minding my new business.

I remember Antoinette Béguin writing to me when I was in The Hague – very enthusiastic. There had been another meeting and everything was going fine. I wrote back and said, “Antoinette, what is happening with the follow-up?” She never answered and so I knew that that was not done. I think it was not done for two possible reasons. First, Blanchard may have been afraid of the American reaction which came in any event in November 1977 when the United States withdrew from the ILO. Second, Antoinette did not penetrate the basic needs idea into the rest of the ILO. Instead of the WEP changing the Organization, the Organization changed the WEP – something I had always been afraid of. Hence my fortress mentality.

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**Interviewer** – Are you still pleased that you left when you did?

**Mr Emmerij** – Well, you know, I was 41 years old. I had always wanted to go home at some point in time. I had been away from my country ever since I started studying. I went to Paris. I went to Bologna, I went to New York. I went back to Paris, etc. But I had always wanted to take the responsibility of my ideas which meant that I saw myself as having a political career. So at 41 years of age, that was about the last moment I thought that I could try that and so I did. I spent more than nine years in my country, longer than anywhere else. I wrote a lot of columns in the daily and weekly press, I was on TV a lot, I addressed the population, in short I became a very well-known Dutchman, but no luck in politics itself!

As I say somewhere else, you must at least have failed in one thing, otherwise your life gets boring if everything succeeds, so that was the one thing where I failed. In retrospect, I was lucky because, my God, with the investigative journalism we have these days, they would have found out everything about me and all my mistresses and wives and so I was lucky, I just stayed under the radar screen!

**Interviewer** So after you left the ILO you were nine years at The Hague at the ISS? The first thing is, how did the ILO look from the ISS? Those nine years were nine difficult years for the ILO? What was your impression of how well the ILO coped with that period?

**Mr Emmerij** – I never looked back. I have never looked back at organizations where I have played a certain role once I left them. I think that is bad. It is bad if you continue to

stick your nose into affairs which are no longer yours. After I had received Antoinette's letter, and I had not received an answer to my answer to her, I knew that things were changing and that the World Employment Programme was gradually being absorbed in the mainstream of the ILO, that the fortress mentality had ceased to exist, all the bridges were down and the water was out. It could have been very good if the Programme had changed the rest of the ILO, but.....

We were talking about the risks, the pros and cons of the fortress mentality. I think the bridges went down too early and the bureaucratic hordes galloped in too early. The Programme still went on for another two years at its pace. But then it was clear that that was it. But I *never* asked any questions and nobody ever talked to me about it. I knew that this was the end of a nice adventure. For me it was certainly one of the high points in my career. I love looking back at it. I still laugh or smile at all the things we were able to do, all the money we were able to collect and the end-product.

After I had left the Organization, I no longer had any impression about the ILO in any amount of detail. I had other problems on my plate in The Netherlands. Once you leave, leave the Organization alone. Do not bother the people that you have left behind and do not bore them with your opinions. It is another era that starts. I think it was not as good as the previous era but that is my opinion. I had other things to do at the ISS because, for God's sake, this was September 1976. We were still in what is now the Palace of the Queen, and there is a wonderful park behind it, and the students and some of the staff were still walking around with red and black flags in the air. So I had my hands full getting that sorted out, and the ILO was behind me.

**Interviewer** – The 1980s were, in retrospect, not just a neo-liberal wave, it was the failure of the development community to find responses?

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**Mr Emmerij** – Yes, in our United Nations Intellectual History Project, we blame the United Nations very much for not having stood up against the World Bank, the IMF, and some of its member countries. The possible exception is UNCTAD. That is of course one of the reasons why UNCTAD got more and more marginalized. Just as the United Nations proper - and DESA, the Economic and Social Department in New York - should have undertaken the World Employment Programme rather than the ILO, so the same thing applies here – the UN should have stood up to this onslaught of stupid, counterproductive policies. Gerry Helleiner, in the oral history interview he gave to us for the UNIHP (the United Nations Intellectual History Project) said it best. He said “I expect the results of this neo-liberal period of the 1980s to be practically zero”. Something had to be done. Some of the policies had gone overboard and had to be rectified, but they went from one extreme to the other, and that was perfectly counterproductive.

By the 1990s things were coming back slowly, much too slowly. As I mentioned a minute ago, the human development approach has not really had an impact yet. I interviewed Jacques Polak, who had been the long time research director of the IMF, a Dutchman, and I asked him, do you get the Human Development Report? He said “Human Development Report? It is not even distributed in the IMF. We keep it outside”. So, yes, the United Nations has not stood up to correct the excesses of the neo-liberal approach and its extremes and, to a large extent, it still does not stand up because the human development approach, the Human Development Report, is not really accepted outside the UNDP, and even within the UNDP the resident coordinators or whatever they are called these days, they see it simply as a publicity stunt. They have an occasion to launch the report, the Prime Minister comes and the President comes and that is it.

But as the world changes, so do policies and I foresee changes for the better in the near future, but probably not before a disaster occurs.

**Interviewer** – You went from The Hague to the OECD?

**Mr Emmerij** – I went back to the OECD, but the OECD Development Centre.

**Interviewer** – The OECD Development Centre – and is that very, very different from being in the OECD proper?

**Mr Emmerij** – Well, look. The OEEC became the OECD in 1961. Europe dropped out of the name and development came in. There were less than 24 countries in those days – 21. Japan came in later. Finland came in later. So, Torkil Kristensen - the first Secretary-General of the OECD, an intelligent, soft-spoken Dane - said, look, this is the rich man's club, these are the industrial countries. We must have something that is the bridge between the member countries and the rest of the world. So not only did he set up the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and its secretariat, the Development Cooperation Department, but he set up a semi-autonomous outfit, the Development Centre with, at its head, a president who, in those days, became the number two of the organization. Robert Buron, the first President, had been a minister in de Gaulle's Government that negotiated the Evian Agreement with Algeria in 1962, and his party, the MRP, Mouvement Républicain Populaire, which no longer exists, walked out of the Government for I think agricultural policy reasons. So the MRP ministers found themselves unemployed, including Robert Buron. The Development Centre was created just in time and Buron became the first President and was an excellent president. This coincided with my joining the OECD proper in the 1960s. I was in the Chateau; they were in a separate building. My

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first wife was the assistant of Raymond Goldsmith, who was the Vice-President of the Development Centre, a financial economist from Yale.

So, I have known the OECD Development Centre since its inception. It had a semi-autonomous status. Its President was kind of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the OECD area. That is why I liked it. It was a little fortress outside of the grasp of the OECD.

**Interviewer** – And what did you achieve while you were there?

**Mr Emmerij** – I kept it alive which was something, because the Development Centre has been under constant attack of the Americans, of course, again, but also of several other countries. The main reason was that it was undertaking programmes that were not totally under the control of the OECD Council, because of its semi-autonomous status

In terms of research, I think I did the right kind of stuff but nothing spectacular. We worked on income distribution, the informal sector, employment, the debt issue, globalization, etc. I organized several quite spectacular conferences, among others on “One world or several?”

My main parting shot was when I proposed that the Development Centre indeed disappear and be integrated into a Department that combines everything that the Organization does on the relationship between the member countries and the non-member countries. That Department of International Economic Relations would absorb part of the Economic Department (for instance, the work it was doing on China), part of the International Trade Directorate, the work that the Organization was doing on the international debt situation, the DAC and the Development Cooperation Directorate, the Development Centre, the Club du Sahel etc. I proposed it when I had already handed in my resignation to go to the IDB in Washington. So, I could not be accused of personal ambition. But a young American

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ambassador, ambitious in the wrong way, killed it. Amazing! Because the Americans should have been the first to like this idea.

There was one thing we did that should have been of interest to the ILO. David Turnham had written a book about employment in the Development Centre before the World Employment got started. Actually, it was the only study that existed that was useful at the end of the 1960s. He went to the World Bank shortly after the publication of his study.

I got him back to the Development Centre and said, “David, you write a book on employment, taking as a starting point your early study and then looking at what the ILO World Employment Programme has accomplished”, and he did. It is a very nice book, very interesting.<sup>6</sup> One of the interesting points he makes is that, among the Employment Missions the Philippine Employment Report was the best. That will interest you in the light of one of your remarks earlier in this interview.

The work we did was solid, but not really exciting. Nothing compared to the World Employment Programme. Nothing even compared to the ISS. The World Employment Programme was a difficult substantive situation. The ISS was a terribly complicated institutional situation. I had to get a grasp on the pretty wild situation I was confronted with and I did, and everybody is thankful for that and the Institute is still doing well.

The Development Centre was a difficult political situation. Personally, I rather enjoyed it. I had a driver. I had a car. I travelled first class and now, of course, I am sitting in the toilets in the back of the plane! I had a good contact with the Secretary General of the OECD, Jean Claude Paye. It was a good time but not as exciting as previous episodes of my career.

<sup>6</sup> *Employment and development: A new review of evidence* (OECD, Paris, 1993).

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**Interviewer** – Did you go straight from there to IDB?

**Mr Emmerij** – Yes. Enrique Iglesias, not the singer but the other one who was President of the Inter-American Development Bank, knew of my seven-year itch, because if you look back at my career, on average I spent about seven years in each of my career segments – a little bit less in the ILO, a little bit more in the ISS, exactly seven years in the Development Centre. So Enrique Iglesias knowing about this seven-year itch, wrote to me in 1992 and said, Louis, you will soon be seven years at the Development Centre. Do you want to come to Washington to be my special adviser on social lending, lending for the social sectors? And I said yes because Enrique was and still is a wonderful friend of mine, a nice man, and I considered it a privilege to work with him on Latin American development.

So I went to Washington. Of course, I was personally out of the decision process there. I was an adviser. So, your advice is as important as the man whom you advise makes it. That is an interesting difference compared to a situation where you are personally responsible.. And Enrique is a man who does not like to take tough decisions. So we had breakfast regularly when he was in town and I said, Enrique, you must tell manager X – vice-presidents in the IDB are called managers – to do Y. He said, what is “Y” and I explained. He said, yes I agree, I will have lunch with X. And I said: “No, Enrique, no lunch. Tell the man.” And he would not do it.....

That was frustrating in the beginning, but I soon discovered that it also had advantages. It is like sports. If you have been an athlete or a football player for many years you cannot stop instantly. You must train less and less and less. It can take two years to get back to normal life. So I took the years I spent in Washington with Enrique as the equivalent of that. I had been very busy, very active, I could now slowly decompress. If you are in the water, if you dive, you must slowly go back to the surface, and that is what I did. I had a

wonderful time there because the regional development banks are much more interesting in my experience than the World Bank. They have many more people from the region. They are truly banks with a human face, well more of a human face than the World Bank or the IMF. And of course Enrique Iglesias is a wonderful human being.

**Interviewer** – What were the main ideas that you were trying to promote then?

**Mr Emmerij** – I put forward proposals on the quality of education. It was quite clear, already then, that the quality of education was going down at all levels – primary, secondary and university levels. Therefore, it was timely to switch to qualitative factors in educational lending. I pushed a programme for urbanization. As you know, now more than half of the world population lives in cities, and in Latin America it is about 70 per cent. So that is a huge problem – lots of diseconomies, travelling from where you live to the work place and the hours lost in traffic jams. I proposed that the Bank invest more in transport, and in infrastructure and made proposals about how to introduce it and how to make it survive. As the special advisor to the President, I had many irons in the fire. I made proposals about social security, employment in the informal sector, income distribution, health provision – you name it. I also organized missions to several countries to show how a consistent set of social policies could be identified and supported by Bank lending. Very useful work, I believe.

**Interviewer** – How many years did you do that for?

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**Mr Emmerij** – Seven years. I came there in early 1993 and left at the end of 1999. I have been working on the United Nations Intellectual History Project ever since.

**Interviewer** – More than seven years.

**Mr Emmerij** – Indeed, it will be nine years this summer. I have asked for some money from the Dutch Government to disseminate the results. So we will be travelling around the world selling the major conclusions of the project and, if the Dutch Government gives that money, which I think it will, next summer, after ten years, the thing will be finished. That is the longest period I have worked on anything in my life.

**Interviewer** – You are working on ideas, so going back to the WEP, if you could pick out three ideas from the work on employment in the 1970s which have stood the test of time, what would they be?

**Mr Emmerij** – The three ideas I would pick are 1- Growth and distribution with basic needs in the background; 2- the informal sector; and 3- recurrent employment and education.

Employment creation is still very important, obviously. I am a little surprised that one seems to have lost the notion of employment-intensive development policies. I think one should revisit that idea. What are the efficient employment-intensive development policies for the next coming years?

Let me also say, if I may, that one of my great ideas and first love - recurrent education or, recurrent employment if you wish – has never had much traction. Recurrent education, not life-long education, is a very precise concept. It gives people the opportunity to return to school when they feel motivated to do so after a period in the labour market. I have always been impressed with the GI Bill after the war – the GI Bill in England and in the United States gave veterans who had survived the war the opportunity to go back to school. All the empirical studies of the results of the GI Bill show that these somewhat older people – 23, 24 – were the best students by far and had the best results by far and did their studies in the shortest period of time.

Most people discover their motivation later in life. I think that only a minority of people know when they are 16 to 18 years old what to do. I did not. That is why I went to do my military service as soon as possible. I needed a reflection period. During my military service, I met soldiers – who became friends of mine – who had only had primary education and who were superbly intelligent. I have corresponded with some of them for years and they wrote the most marvellous and articulate letters. That is where this idea came from – and from my mother also, she only had primary education. She was a highly intelligent woman. I have always wondered why we do not have an educational system which gives these people the opportunity to go back to school later in life.

I had this idea of recurrent education during my first period in the OECD toward the end of the 1960s. When I came to the ILO I followed the work on paid educational leave and saw immediately the complementarity with recurrent education and employment. Particularly in periods of high unemployment, as we had in the 1980s, instead of paying people unemployment benefits for doing nothing, why cannot we use the same amount of money to give these people an opportunity to get out of the labour force and into education? It is a much more productive way of spending. It is an investment in human capital.

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**Interviewer** – Would you say that idea was not really developed much in the World Employment Programme?

**Mr Emmerij** – Yes, I would say that. But read the Ceylon report and read the Kenya report, particularly the Ceylon report.<sup>7</sup> In the education chapter written by Ron Dore and me you will find the one single early application of recurrent education to a developing country.

**Interviewer** – Afterwards you had Jan Versluis. He was working on education and labour markets and he was doing something on curriculum development. He may have been working on ...

**Mr Emmerij** – No, I do not think he worked on that. I talked to him but he was frustrated. He had been an assistant to Jan Tinbergen and he should and could have followed a brilliant academic career in the Netherlands. I have never understood why he joined the ILO and went into the field. I had to save him in Peru. He was on the point of being kicked out of the country.

**Interviewer** – Going back to when you were picking out ideas, you mentioned the informal sector. Were you convinced of the usefulness of the concept?

<sup>7</sup> ILO, *Matching employment opportunities and expectations. A programme of action for Ceylon* (Geneva, 1970)

**Mr Emmerij** – Although I normally recognize a good idea when I see one, this was not the case with the informal sector. As a matter of fact, I was against the concept of the informal sector when we discussed it in Nairobi during the Kenya Employment mission. I put it much too strongly now, but I was sceptical about it. However, I quickly became converted, particularly by John Weeks who wrote this splendid chapter in the Kenya report and the appendix at the end. He was the man who talked about the steel and glass modern sector. I ended up believing in it so strongly that I set up a special section in the department and got Harold Lubell to head it and undertake all these case studies. I have not mentioned him at the beginning. I should have mentioned Harold Lubell among the four or five people I did mention at the beginning of the interview.

May I just say another word about recurrent education and employment? If I would get a second chance to work on employment problems - that would be a main concern of mine. How can we get a system where people who are intelligent, who have an innate ability that goes well beyond the formal education they have received – how do we get people like that, once they become motivated – how do we get them back to school? I believe in giving everyone vouchers for a given number of years of education – and they can use these vouchers whenever they want to use them over their lifetime. These vouchers should be paid totally or at least for a big part by the Government, but the time is not yet ripe for that. But it is coming. It is coming.

**Interviewer** – There is a more general question here. In this project on the ILO's history and in the project you are doing on the UN intellectual history, the general question is the means by which ideas have influence – the process by which ideas have influence. I dug out an old Keynes quote the other day about the relative importance of ideas and vested interests and Keynes is arguing that people give much too much importance to vested interests; actually, what drives the world ultimately is ideas.

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**Mr Emmerij** – That was the quote that was in the yellow document – the first document of our research programme. You found it. Abbas Amar loved it. It was a good quote.

**Interviewer** – We have at the moment another idea in the ILO, decent work, which is being developed and sold. Working with Juan Somavia it is very interesting to try and understand his political strategy for making sure that the ideas that he works on actually get embedded in processes locally, globally, whatever. In the work that you have been doing, have you found any simple answers about how it is that ideas have influence? The World Employment Programme was an idea which had influence and then ceased to have influence, so it is a wonderful case study in some respects.

**Mr Emmerij** – We discussed that to some extent earlier in this interview. There is no single unique answer to that. First of all, you do not always know where ideas come from. When we talked about basic needs, I now think that the idea came from the Bariloche Foundation, as we discussed. The idea of the World Employment Programme came probably from Zoetewij, but I cannot be sure about that. So you have ideas that come on the radar screen – in your case, of the ILO – in our case, of UN agencies. You try to trace where it comes from. It enters the radar screen of an international organization. It is being picked up. But of course you have to give it “body”, and, thus, a document is being written and it gets either immediately killed or it is being changed and distorted, or it is accepted like it is. And then it goes to the most important stage which is to work the idea out in some detail, including at the national stage.

In the case of the ILO-WEP, the initial success was due to the combination of a wonderful title which reflected a growing awareness of real employment problems in the world, a huge amount of money flowing in with which we could hire both good senior people and a host of enthusiastic youngsters, the building up of an impressive research network worldwide, the launching of the employment missions with excellent leaders and the

cooperation of many UN agencies, and then of course the backing of the number two of the Organization. It all came together, a thing like that rarely happens. It is not a question of things being more difficult now. It has always been difficult. There is no difference between now and then, but it happens once in a lifetime, I think. I have never been able – I have never tried even – to duplicate that situation. Everything went well.

I am sure it will happen one of these days again. It may happen now with climate change. Climate change, if it is well handled in one place, can become even more successful than the World Employment Programme ever was.

Another example may be the idea of human security which, I think, has legs, as the Americans say. Did you read the UNIHP book on “Human Security and the UN?” We asked a diehard human security man - who defined security in terms of army, rifles and bullets - to write about this larger concept. It is very interesting. He does not go all the way but he goes part of the way. The relationship between economic development, human rights and human security is, I think, one of the upcoming big problems. If you tell me that Somavia can sell decent work then you can sell anything in the world, as far as I am concerned. He really succeeds in selling the idea? People will say “yes” but the day he leaves – which I understand is still far away – nobody will talk about decent work anymore. Decent work – how do you quantify it? Has it been quantified?

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### BOX 3

#### On Third Terms

*I understand Somavia is going for a third term in order to stay on for 15 years, like Blanchard, and then Blanchard wanted to have half a term - another two-and-a-half years - you remember? It is amazing. Why cannot people leave a position before it is too late? Third terms are disasters. Third terms on the whole are disasters – like two seven-year terms as President of France are disasters. Mitterrand was a disaster in the second period*

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*and so was Chirac. M'Bow was a disaster in his second term as Director General of UNESCO. He was good in the first term – it was also seven years then. You should never stay longer than ten years at most; seven or eight years is optimal. You can do things. It is long enough to get things going and do things. Do not overstay your welcome.*

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**Interviewer** – Not very well. But you need a vehicle for an idea. The vehicle is the phrase that you use. Actually, the idea is more important than the vehicle. That is where this business of vested interests comes in. What happened in the 1970s was that there was an agenda that was being built, which was actually in head-on conflict with some of the major global vested interests. In that fight between the idea and the vested interests – we can see who won.

**Mr Emmerij** – In the second half of the 1970s, more than half the battle was won by the WEP. The vested interests (as reflected by President Carter, the World Bank, national governments) turned around in our favour. What happened in the 1980s was that the economic and financial orthodoxy changed drastically, the WEP was headed by more bureaucratic and prudent people, Blanchard was afraid and there was no longer a number 2 to straighten his back. In that sense the ILO reflected the entire UN system, as mentioned earlier. There was no longer a strong countervailing power coming from the system. And so, the WEP ended not with a bang, but with a whisper...

Anyway, I wish you and the ILO all the best with the concept of decent work. I have never seen it as a path-breaking idea. It is like child labour. Who can be against child labour? Even the Americans are giving money for that kind of thing. Who can be against decent

work? But do you get a handle on it? That is the important thing. We had handles. In the World Employment Programme, we had handles – plenty of handles. They may not have been the most acceptable but we had handles.

**Interviewer** – Well, I am going to ask you a question about any major disappointments in your career?

**Mr Emmerij** – As I said earlier, I would have loved to have had a political career after leaving the ILO and returning to my country. It was a disappointment. But not a major disappointment for the reasons I gave half an hour ago. It is no longer fun to be a politician in any place so that disappointment is no longer a disappointment.

I have been blessed. In one of the interviews I gave, I compared my six years in the ILO – actually, five years and nine months - with a well known story “The 80-yards Run” by Irvine Shaw – the guy who wrote that famous book about WWII “The Young Lions”. In “The 80-yards run”, there is this young college student who is in love with a young girl of the university. The young girl says to him “I am not interested”. One Sunday in an American football/rugby match, that young college graduate makes an 80-yard run. The whole stadium screams in wild enthusiasm and the young girl is now convinced that he is the man to marry. Twenty years later the young man who is no longer so young, looks back and he observes that his career has not really taken off, his wife was a disappointment, and they are no longer in love. And then he realizes that that Sunday afternoon of the 80 yards run was the high point in his life and that everything has been going downhill since then.

Well, the high point in my career was the few years I spent in the ILO – the World Employment Programme. I cannot say that everything has been going downhill since then

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but the rest of my career has been a plateau and may be a gentle slope. It was still a lot of fun, but the WEP period was certainly the high point. I was young. I had built a wonderful team. We did creative work. All these wonderful secretaries that wanted to work for us, Julia Conway, Dany Kukowska, Sue Evans, Frances Owen-Kaufman, and many others – wonderful women. They were superbly qualified, volunteered to work hard, and were on top of that very beautiful! They were also ambitious. They came and begged to work with the World Employment Programme because something happened there.

In conclusion, I have not had major disappointments or even minor disappointments. I have been blessed.

**Interviewer** – You might also have the satisfaction that you set an awful lot of people off on an interesting track.

**Mr Emmerij** – I hope so. You are of course a prime example of that! I have recently re-established contact with Keith Griffin. He is retired and now lives in Portland, Oregon where his daughter has an art gallery and is a painter herself. Keith was and is a good man. He is progressive in his professional life and pretty conservative in his personal life. He took on British nationality when he was President of Magdalen College. At precisely the time when he obtained his British passport, his wife Dixie from Texas said to him “I am sick and tired of Oxford. I want to go back to the States” and he became an immigrant in his own country! He writes beautifully.

**Interviewer** – You stay in touch with Dharam? You may not realize it but at this moment we are both working for Dharam.

**Mr Emmerij** – I had lunch with Dharam the other day. We are now Thursday – I had lunch with him last Tuesday. He claims that he is living in a different world, that he has nothing more to do with all that stuff that you are doing. He only had the idea. He refuses everything and now that he has refused all the offers he got, he no longer gets any offers. I asked: “Dharam, what is this different world you are living in? He has not been able to explain that with any amount of precision but he claims that he is out of it. Do you mean to say that he is not out of it?”

**Interviewer** – Well, first of all, the reason why we are actually having this interview – if you go back in the chain of causation – it is because Dharam actually convinced me to get this whole process going. I would be retired. In this sense, I am working for Dharam but Dharam is around and he floats in and out from time to time. He will not escape. He may not realize it but he has a manuscript of this book which will be sent to him next week for his comments.

**Mr Emmerij** – He will be happy about that, I can tell you, because I sensed that he feels a little bit isolated.

**Interviewer** – I think vis-à-vis Somavia he may have a little bit of that feeling. He played an important role in the transition team and in the original ... Maybe he felt that he was not really appreciated. Something like that. He would not say that himself.

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**Mr Emmerij** – No, he has not said that himself. He has simply said that he has opted out and that it is, on the one hand, voluntary – that he wants it – but, on the other hand, you get the impression that he would love to get invitations again to do something. It is a strange attitude but I think it would be nice and he would appreciate it to comment on the manuscript. He also claims he does not want to be paid anymore. At the same time, he claims that he is paying all these taxes. He has always had a mystery trait about him.

**Interviewer** – Thank you Louis. I think we have covered a lot of ground. Have we missed anything important?

**Mr Emmerij** – I do not believe that we have missed anything of any importance. We have the main building blocks in.

**Interviewer** – That is great and, before we send the manuscript to Dharam, I may have to go back and correct one or two things, in the light of what you said. Thank you.

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#### **BOX 4**

##### **A Glimpse of the ILO during the Inter-bellum**

*I did an article for the ILO Review at the occasion of the ILOs 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I was asked by the then editor of the ILR whether I could do an article on employment work at the Organization throughout the 75 years – and I read a lot covering the 1920s and the 1930s. You know what struck me most – the arguments were the same. It comes back and back and back. For example, on part-time work, on the role of education – the same arguments as we had in the 1980s – in the industrial countries at least - you found in the speeches of the delegates. These speeches were much more eloquent in those days –*

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*marvellously expressed, compared to what we hear being mumbled in our days. But, I was stunned by the fact that 60 years ago you have the same arguments, the same pros and cons around the same proposed solutions. People don't learn from history. They don't read. That article must have been published in 1994. I was already at the IDB. I remember I went to the IDB office in Paris to find -- they have a good library there -- all the old books.*

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**End of interview.**