

INTERVIEW

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FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE STAFF UNION



Interview No 4

ILO Staff Union 100 1920
2020
A century of struggle and solidarity

PRESIDENT 1995-1997

Question 1

What does the ILO Staff Union, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, mean to you?

The Staff Union represents for me a wide range of values and principles that are part of my convictions. I joined the Staff Union as soon as I was recruited at the ILO in Geneva in 1988 as a Specialist in Workers' Education and Trade Union Training at EDUC, which later became ACTRAV, demonstrating that my professional activities were in synergy with the responsibilities and role of the Staff Union.

In 1989, I was elected to the Committee as Substitute Member for Africa. In 1996, I had the honor of being elected Chairman of the Staff Union Committee. My membership and affiliation with the Staff Union have given concrete expression to my convictions of solidarity and assistance to workers of all categories on the one hand, and have consolidated my determination to continue the struggle for the respect of workers, the improvement of their working conditions, and the promotion of their moral and material well-being on the other hand. I am pleased to note that the above principles are part of the values of the ILO, which is the first specialized agency of the United Nations and the only one with a tripartite vocation. The International Labour Conventions adopted by the International Labour Conference sufficiently illustrate the importance and responsibility of trade unions around the world.

This is an opportunity to celebrate the role of the Staff Union and to commend the victories achieved in defending and promoting the legitimate interests of staff of all categories at headquarters and in the field. By way of example, we can mention the mobilization of the staff which resulted in the compensation of headquarters staff following the annulment by the ILO tribunal of the salary adjustment decided unilaterally by the ICSC (International Civil Service Commission). I note with real satisfaction that the Staff Union is the most representative Staff Union in the world with 70% of members from all categories both at headquarters and in the field and that it includes the Former officials Section which is composed of retirees from all categories at headquarters and from all regions of the world.

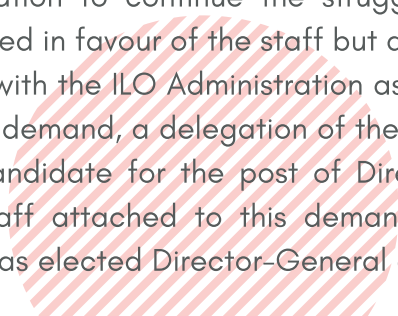
ILO Centennial Commemorations and the Declaration adopted on that occasion historical events have demonstrated the importance of preserving the principle of tripartism, the values of Work and have identified the challenges for the future of work to be met in the short, medium and long term.

The celebration of the centenary of the Staff Union is a historic occasion to pay tribute to the trade union an leaders who contributed to the creation of the ILO on the one hand and on the other hand to urge the current leaders to assume their duties of accountability, to exercise their collective and individual responsibilities in promoting the values of solidarity, unity of action and the principles of trade unionism in the world. The immediate, short-, medium- and long-term negative and multifaceted consequences of the coronavirus pandemic justify the mobilization of current leaders to promote solidarity and defend the legitimate material and moral interests of workers at the local, national, regional and international levels. They must demonstrate adaptability, creativity, innovation and promote their capacities for dialogue and negotiation to preserve the positive gains made in favour of workers and to obtain new victories.

Question 2

What motivated your commitment to run for President of the Staff Union and what message would you like to convey to future Presidents?

I would like to remind and let it be known that my election to the position of President was the result of a proposal by the colleague who was acting chair of the committee. Taking into account my commitment, her proposal was unanimously adopted by the members of the Committee. This gesture of solidarity to my honour reinforced my commitment and determination to continue the struggle to achieve positive results that will not only preserve the interests acquired in favour of the staff but also to take the necessary steps to sign a collective bargaining agreement with the ILO Administration as soon as possible. In view of the importance that the staff attached to this demand, a delegation of the Staff Union Committee under my leadership met in Geneva with the candidate for the post of Director-General, Mr. Juan Somavia, to underline the interest that the staff attached to this demand. He promised to do whatever was necessary in the event of victory. He was elected Director-General of the ILO in March 1999.



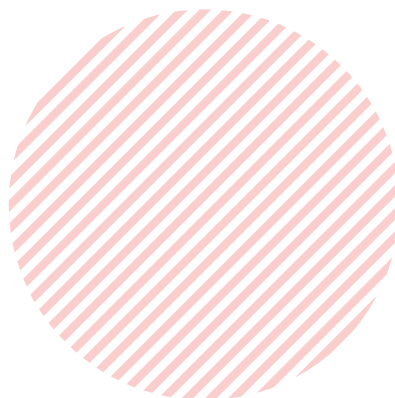
It was to reaffirm this demand that in its resolution adopted at the General Assembly on January 31, 2000, the Union instructed the Committee to negotiate with a view to signing a collective bargaining agreement with the ILO Administration in the year 2000 (see Union No. 298 of March 2000). Thanks to the Committee's efforts, this historic agreement was reached and signed on 27 March 2000 by Director-General Somavia and colleague David Dror, Chairman of the Staff Union Committee, in the presence of all members of the Committee (see Union No. 299 of April 2000). This is also an opportunity to recall that, following the Committee's request for the Union's membership in PSI (Public Services International), this membership was obtained in 1998. It should be recalled that PSI is composed of 700 affiliated organizations with 20,000,000 members in essential public services in 163 countries and that it cooperates with the United Nations and NGOs to improve the functioning of services and promote the interests of public servants.

After the expiration of my term as President of the Union, I continued to be a member of the Committee. until 2001. When I retired in October 2001, I joined the Former officials Section which is part of the Union du Personnel and currently I am the 2nd Assistant Executive Secretary of the Former officials Section Office.

My message to future presidents:

Always take into consideration the trust of the workers and respect the principle of solidarity and collective management of union activities.

- To adapt to the context that exists during the period and to face with determination one's responsibilities in defending the interests of the personnel.
- To show creativity and imagination on the one hand and, on the other hand, to promote training and qualification of personnel and elected members at all levels, taking into account the new forms and dimensions of the world of work (telework, digitization, robotization, etc.).
- To pay tribute to former Presidents, and to retirees to preserve the positive achievements in favor of the staff and to carry out awareness-raising and unionization activities in favor of young people and women.
- Promote unity of action and solidarity with the Associations and Unions of the specialized agencies of the United Nations in Geneva and other headquarters.



Question 3

What have you gained from your years as President? Do you have an anecdote that remains in your brief?

In addition to the above results, I must mention the organization of regional meetings, the strengthening of cooperation and solidarity with the Staff Associations and the Unions of United Nations Specialized Agencies based in Geneva. Among the many anecdotes that have remained in my memory, I mention the following: Following an annual World Economic Forum held in Davos (Switzerland), participants from large multinational companies visited the ILO headquarters in Geneva and in their debates some seriously criticized and insulted the unions.

After their departure, I went to the Director-General's office to protest and to remind the cabinet officials that "we will never accept that guests of any kind insult the unions at the ILO headquarters because for us this is equivalent to going to Rome (Papal Residence of the Vatican) and insulting Christians and to Mecca (Muslim Holy City that houses the Pilgrimage), insulting Muslims". At the ILO headquarters, all visitors are required to respect unions.

Question 4

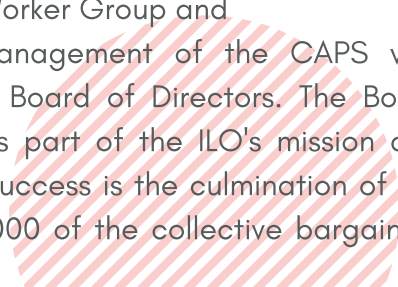
What are the 2 challenges and 2 major successes you have faced during your mandate?

The first challenge was to convince the Administration of the ILO under the leadership of the Director-General at the time Mr. Michel Hansenne (1989-1999) on the need to have an agreement on collective bargaining with the ILO Administration and the Staff Union.

The second challenge was the functioning of the Insurance Fund for the Protection of Staff Health (CAPS) with the existence of risks and attempts at privatization of the Caisse's management.

The 2 major successes:

The first major success: with the support of the Board of Directors' Worker Group and of some government members, the idea of relocating the management of the CAPS was abandoned and decisions to initiate reforms were taken by the Board of Directors. The Board reminded the Administration that the protection of staff health is part of the ILO's mission and responsibilities because of its tripartite nature. The second major success is the culmination of the steps taken when I was President, culminating in the signing in 2000 of the collective bargaining agreement between the ILO Administration and the Staff Union.



Question 5

In closing, what would you say about motivating ILO entrants and especially young people to join the ILO Staff Union?

- The young people who have the chance to join the ILO (ILO Executive Secretariat and whose current Director-General, Mr. Guy Ryder, is a trade union leader) must take into account that this tripartite organization is the first specialized agency of the United Nations, which celebrated its centenary in 2019 with the presence of 35 Heads of State and Government from the 187 member States from all regions of the world.
- Joining the Staff Union, which has a membership of 70% (the highest in the world) of staff in all categories from 150 countries at headquarters and 40 offices around the world is an historic opportunity not to be missed. As beneficiaries of the positive results of the struggles led by past and present generations, who have mobilized to promote and defend fundamental labour rights and principles and the independence of the International Civil Service, young people must join the Staff Union and continue the struggle not only to preserve the positive gains achieved but also to lead the struggle with determination and solidarity to achieve new victories, for without struggle there is no victory.
- Bearing in mind the collective bargaining agreement between the Administration and the Union, take into consideration the current socio-political and economic challenges at the international level and those of the Member States on the one hand, and the positions of the tripartite constituents on the other, and formulate demands in favour of the Staff accordingly and mobilize the membership in support of the Staff Union Committee.
- Being an ILO official is a multidimensional privilege because it means exercising individual and collegial responsibilities that take into account the nature and values of work that continue to evolve.
- To take into consideration the fact that the current Director-General of the ILO, colleague Guy Ryder, is a trade unionist, which is proof of the role played and functions assumed by trade unionists. Two other trade unionists have had responsibilities and assumed the following functions: Mr Assane DIOP (Senegal) was Deputy Director-General, and the second, Mr Luc CORTEBEECK (Belgium) was Chairman of the ILO Governing Body in his capacity as Chairman of the Workers' Group.

CONCLUSION: We have celebrated with historic success the ILO's centenary with a trade union leader as Director-General. In the face of the anxiety-provoking climate in which we live, the multidimensional challenges of COVID-19 and its consequences with the spread and virulence of the virus in the world, let us mobilize for the Union's centenary to be a success. The Union is the struggle, with conviction, intergenerational solidarity and unity of action at the local, national, regional and global levels. United and in solidarity we will win and we will overcome.

