

INTERVIEW

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FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE UNION



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Question 1

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

The ILO Staff Union has always been a strong supporter of the international civil service and the interests of ILO staff. This has not always coincided with the objectives of the ILO Administration or the Governing Body. While organizing joint action and staff solidarity, it helped to ensure the smooth functioning of the organization and the correct application of existing rules and regulations.

Question 2

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

I joined the Staff Union as soon as I became a member in 1962. Willi Longerich, Chairman of the Staff Union Committee, persuaded me to stand for election to the Committee. Under his leadership, I helped organize the fairly successful ILO staff strike when David Morse was Director-General. My good results in the Staff Union Committee elections encouraged me to run for the posts of General Secretary and President and to accept this responsibility.

As working conditions at the ILO have changed considerably since my retirement, it would be inappropriate to convey a specific message to my successors. There are limits to this: They must keep in mind the well-being of all categories of staff, vigorously defend the application of ILO principles to all employees, and never lose sight of the need to help create a good and productive working atmosphere. A loyal and committed staff is the ILO's greatest asset.

Question 4

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

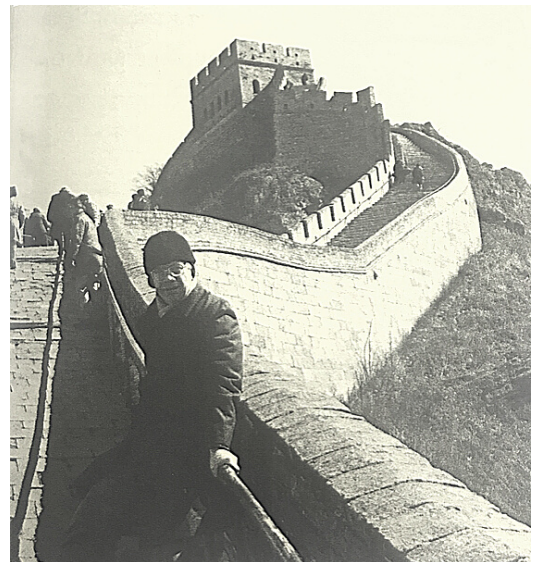
In my time, the biggest challenge was the temporary withdrawal of the United States from the ILO and the severe fiscal crisis. In this crucial period, Ali Taqi was President and I was Secretary-General. He managed to mobilize the staff. The General Assembly voted for a temporary reduction in salaries to avoid lay-offs. The Governing Body was impressed. All jobs were saved.

A more amusing anecdote is the following: Before China returned to the ILO, I attended a UNIDO seminar in Beijing. Our DG Francis Blanchard was determined to reactivate China's membership of the ILO after the Maoist revolution. He had planned to visit China. I was asked to do diplomatic scouting, which I did with the help of the UN Special Representative and the Australian Embassy. I had time to make a trip to the Great Wall where a picture of me was taken. Manuel Carillo, the editor of our magazine *Union*, liked it and put it on the cover of *Union* without my consent. Francis Blanchard was not amused because I was unwittingly stealing the spotlight.

Question 3

What have these years of presidency brought you; do you have an anecdote that remains in your memory?

My experience as General Secretary and Chairman and member of the Administrative Committee has improved my negotiating skills and my ability to manage conflicts and controversial meetings. Contacts with members of the Governing Body have made me aware of the political difficulties facing the ILO.



Question 5

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

I don't know how young civil servants behave today and how much loyalty to the organization and solidarity can be expected in the face of the proliferation of short-term contracts and precarious jobs. But self-interest should motivate them to join the Staff Union. They may need to defend themselves against injustice or arbitrariness. As ILO employees, they should value mutual assistance and freedom of association.