

INTERVIEW

ITA MARGUET,
FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE STAFF UNION

Interview No 6



PRESIDENT 1993-1995



Question 2

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

Having gained progressive experience at the Committee level, and as outgoing General Secretary, I felt I could offer leadership with confidence to take on the personal challenge of drawing together the capacities and talents, professional and other, to the benefit of our membership as staff in the ILO. About advice to future Presidents, humility and collegiality will go a long way to achieve success.

Question 1

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

A lot since it represents the survival over time of an elected dynamic group of officials at all levels in the Office who have devoted their collective energies and drive towards the Union's creation and determination to support and defend what, after all, represents the basic purpose of the Organisation.

Question 3

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

My years of Presidency and prior involved hard work over long hours and devotion to challenges that seemed unsurmountable, whether individual or collective, while never giving up in face of adversity.

Anecdotes are many not only within the Committee itself but in so many different circumstances. One in particular was aiding the then President of the ILO Governing Body who took a bad fall and smashed into one of the large windows at the R2 Collonade level of the building. I was walking behind him and able to assist while we waited together for the medical service to arrive. He was taken in hand and made a good recovery. A spot of his blood stained my dress that he learned about later. In my archives I have his letter as President of the Governing Body dated 29 January 1996 saying it symbolically marked his solidarity and attachment to the Staff Union ... "pour la vie et pour la mort" ... R. I. P.

Question 4

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

Two challenges and two major successes can be considered relative in the overall period of my Presidency. One is assistance to staff of the ILO Brasilia Office whose Director was using despicable forms of harassment causing major health, personal and family problems. With the support of the Staff Union using legal counsel, he was finally dismissed from his post and from the Office. ILO Administrative Tribunal Judgement No 1609 was a resounding success for the staff complainants. The case was covered throughout in Staff Union Bulletins and the final ILOAT Judgement was reported in UNION 268, March 1997. It carried a front page picture of the group of relieved colleagues in Brasilia.

The other is during my Presidency industrial action was organised at the ILO over the case of Article 3.1.1 in the ILO Staff Regulations under threat of amendment or deletion that concerned the General Service category.

With massive support from the staff at all levels, the Office was left practically deserted. It disrupted business of the ILO Governing Body then in Session since essential services were halted. Senior Administrators argued that interpreters and others were not ILO staff and should be permitted to respect their contracts, that I ignored. I was invited to the Director-General's Office but refused. Instead I led staff meetings in the ILO Cinema over a two-day period when the strength and solidarity of staff held to pursue industrial action. ILOAT Judgement 1330 deals with the complaint to which a long list of staff joined as adherents to the case. The final outcome was the negotiation of an ILO Special Fund to which staff in headquarters and in the field offices could voluntarily contribute.

Question 5

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

The Union should be proactive in making contact with new entrants with the help of Union Stewards where they exist and Union Representatives in the external offices. A useful tool would be a brief information package enclosing a letter of welcome signed by the President with an invitation to join.

