

### **Louis Emmerij**

#### **Interviewed by Ashwani Saith**

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Louis Emmerij is at present Senior Research Fellow at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and Co-Director of the United Nations Intellectual History Project. He started out his career specializing in the economics of education at the OECD in Paris (1963–70). He then moved to development studies, a field which he has not left. He was successively Director of the ILO World Employment Programme in Geneva (1971–76), Rector of the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague (1976–85), President of the OECD Development Centre, Paris (1986–92), and Special Advisor to the President of the Inter-American Development Bank, Washington DC (1992–99).

AS: How did you come to be interested in development?

LE: Development was not my first love. I started my career working on the then new field of the economics of education. We looked at education as an investment in human beings *necessary* to reach a certain level of income, rather than as a consumption good that can only be obtained *after* having achieved a given level of income. That seems self-evident today, but was not so forty-five years ago. Expressions like human resources and human capital, that are now common place, were then viewed as heresies. I worked in this area, first, at the University of Paris, and then at the OECD that played an important role in pioneering the field.

However, during my graduate work at Johns Hopkins and Columbia, I worked on international trade and read widely in development economics: W. Arthur Lewis, Albert Hirschman (who was my teacher at Columbia), Paul Baran, Benjamin Higgins and others. Also, when I was at the OECD in the 1960s working away on quantifying the link between economic growth and educational expansion, I did field work in Spain and Yugoslavia which were then among the less developed countries of the OECD. When the Ford Foundation gave the OECD a grant of US\$ 1 million (this was 1964!) to transfer the experience we had obtained in the Mediterranean countries to Latin America (a huge precedent — because it meant working in non-member countries —

that took the OECD Council two days to digest and approve), I volunteered to lead an OECD team to Argentina where I worked for fourteen months.

So, I must conclude that somewhere, somehow, the problems of development and of less developed countries have always attracted me! It must come, I think, from an innate belief in social justice and equality of opportunity that I developed very early in life by looking around me.

AS: Did the Dutch experience of war influence your thinking on development issues?

LE: The Second World War really took place. I was there, in Rotterdam, five years old at the beginning and ten at the end. In spite of my tender age, I remember the events distinctly, starting with the bombing of Rotterdam on 14 May 1940 and ending with the infamous hunger winter of 1944–45 — and the dropping of food by Red Cross planes in April 1945 that probably saved my life. The war taught me about bravery, about cowardly behaviour, about generosity under duress, and also that one cannot make generalizations about peoples and nationalities. There are saints and villains in all countries and among all peoples. These are lessons that go well beyond development issues, although related to them.

AS: Which economists or, more broadly, social scientists would you identify as having shaped your early involvement in the subject?

LE: I already mentioned several authors I read during my graduate studies. Once I became involved full time in development studies and practice, as of 1971, I was fascinated by Amartya Sen for his theoretical work with a practical bent and by Dudley Seers for his practical work with a theoretical bent. I already knew A. K. Sen from the early 1960s when we both worked on Tinbergen's econometric model (the so-called Tinbergen–Correa model) linking education to economic development. I have been- impressed by Hans Singer and continue to be stimulated by his example. Among other contemporaries, I have learned a lot from Mahbub ul Haq and from Richard Jolly, who is a friend with whom I continue to work to this day. I am still close to colleagues like Dharam Ghai, Gerry Helleiner, and wish I could re-establish a working relationship with Keith Griffin. During my Latin American years, I was impressed by Raul Prebisch and Celso Furtado, but also by the Argentine sociologist Gino Germani.

An economist who influenced me more generally — and particularly in econometrics — was Robert Mundell, when I was at the Bologna Center of the Johns Hopkins University. There were about fifty of us graduate students with various full-time professors in residence, including Mundell, who was then twenty-seven — only a few years older than his students. He gave us his full attention whenever we needed him, while writing the seminal articles that led to the

Nobel Prize forty years later. I learned that you had better be taught by a young man with a world to conquer than by an already-established figure with a world behind him.

AS: How would you assess the influence of Jan Tinbergen on Dutch social science? On Dutch aid policy? On Dutch economics?

LE: I studied in Paris, Bologna and New York, but not in Rotterdam. I was never a full-time student of Jan Tinbergen, although I came to know him quite well. I spent a month with him and his assistants in 1962 or 1963. This was in order to get to know the Tinbergen–Correa model that I just mentioned. His senior assistants were Henk Bos, Gerard Boon, and Hans Linnemann. His younger assistants were Peter Cornelisse and Jan Versluis (I met Loet Mennes and Jan Pronk later). I learned a lot from all of them. In the 1970s, Tinbergen helped me with my work on the ILO World Employment Programme and we became pretty close.

Tinbergen's career, I believe, can be divided into four periods. First, the 1930s with the econometric forays and innovations as embodied in the studies on business cycles in the US and the UK undertaken in the framework of the League of Nations before World War II. Second, his work on Dutch macroeconomic models as founder and first Director of the Central Planning Bureau of The Netherlands between 1945 and 1955. Third, his switch to development economics, economic planning, advisor to many governments, Director of the Netherlands Institute of Economics (Department of Balanced International Growth), between 1955 and 1975. And fourth, his active retirement period when he became more radical and interested in peace economics.

He got the Nobel Prize for his work during the first period and to an extent the second, and not for his work on development studies. That is why he shared the Prize with Ragnar Frisch, the Norwegian economist who pioneered econometric approaches early on together with Tinbergen.

In my opinion, Tinbergen's influence on development *policy* has been more important than his substantive contributions. He was in much demand, through the UN, for advising developing countries and for helping to elaborate their development plans. He had some funny stories about his technical assistance adventures. When he was head of mission to Afghanistan, he came back with a five year plan which appeared with a preface by the King of Afghanistan that said: 'Without the necessary data but with the help of almighty Allah we here present our five year plan'. He could also tell entertaining stories about colleagues: 'When Nicky Kaldor went on mission, the budget must include the cost of peace keeping operation that is needed to put out the riots that followed the Kaldor five year plan!'

His influence on Dutch development aid has been very important, not least through his disciples, particularly when they became

Ministers, such as Jan Pronk. His influence on Dutch economics diminished as time passed by and economics became too esoteric for his taste. Let me give a concrete illustration here. In 1963, at an OECD conference, Tinbergen presented his education–economic growth model. He got bitterly and somewhat outrageously attacked by Balogh for simplifying far too much the complex real world.

Tinbergen, very cool, replied as follows: ‘We have preferred to start with highly simplified models in the scientific tradition which is also well known in economics. The Keynesian multiplier model is an outstanding example of this tradition. There is no point in introducing theoretically refined concepts and relationships if they cannot be translated into numerical estimates’. This is typically Tinbergen.

However, please note that he remained for many, many years the most cited economist of The Netherlands. His influence was in no small measure due to his personality which was generous, polite, understanding, and modest — a modesty, however, that could border on arrogance, but only visible to those that knew him well.

AS: How did you come to develop the concept, or notion, of life-long learning? Was it ahead of its times? Is it coming to be recognized more fully now?

LE: The concept of life-long learning is vague and can mean many things. It was already around when Denis Kallen (a social psychologist) and I launched the much more precise idea of *recurrent education*. This was towards the end of the 1960s and of my (first) time at the OECD. It is difficult to determine who was first to have the idea. For example, I remember that Olaf Palme, when he was Minister of Education of Sweden (before he became Prime Minister), gave a speech in Strasbourg at the Council of Europe in 1968 or 1969 where he talked about recurrent education and gave a first definition of the concept. Was that before or after the Emmerij–Kallen initiative? I do not know and, frankly, it is not important. What *is* important is that we published several OECD studies, working out the idea in concrete detail. Later, I pursued the idea alone, adding the concept of Paid Educational Leave which was, of course, the *sine qua non* to make recurrent education possible.

In a nutshell, recurrent education divides the education system in two: basic education that everybody must pursue early in life; and recurrent education that people can take later in life when they are motivated to do so. I was very impressed with the GI bill in the US and the UK that gave military personnel who had survived the war the possibility to go back to school and University. Studies showed that these (older) students were very motivated, finished their studies faster, and with better results than the ‘normal’ students. Motivation comes at different periods in a person’s life while the education system

is conceived as if every sixteen- or eighteen-year-old knows what she wants and is fully motivated at that age.

When I came back to Holland to take up my job as rector of the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), I was asked, in 1977, by the Government of Joop den Uyl to chair a Commission of the Social-Economic Council (the SER in the Dutch abbreviation) on Paid Educational Leave. After a flying and hopeful start at the beginning, it all slowed down with the arrival of the 1980s, and in the end we did not get very far.

So, coming back to your question, the idea was certainly not ahead of its time. It was right *on* time. It is crucial to give people a second chance later in life, crucial for them and crucial for the economy that needs all the human investments it can get. However, as of 1981 successive governments thought it was a luxury (a consumption good!) and not an investment. The economics of education had not penetrated the political spheres. And anyway, ‘there was no money and no alternative but to muddle along’.

Interestingly enough, the mid-career students that the ISS attracted came right out of the book of recurrent education. They were financed, in my days, by Dutch development assistance. Oh paradox, not good enough at home, but fine for foreigners. The world in reverse, one could say.

Is there light at the end of the tunnel? I do not see any, but I may have become short-sighted. There are little initiatives here and there, such as pregnancy leave, and educational leave for shorter periods and at the expense of the person taking it. A beginning, but without vision, real insight, and daring. The usual story when politicians without vision are at the helm.

- AS: Clearly your stewardship of the ILO research agenda on employment-focused growth, under the World Employment Programme, was one of the high marks and major contributions of your professional work. How did WEP come about? How did it change over its lifetime? How and why did it die?
- LE: You are right. My work at the ILO — first as director of research and a little later as Director of the entire World Employment Programme — was without doubt the high point in my career. It was short (1971–76) but ‘violent’ and creative. It reminds me of Irvin Shaw’s short story *The Eighty Yards Run*, where a college student is in love with a hesitant sweetheart. One Sunday afternoon in a hotly disputed (American) football match, he makes a touchdown after an eighty-yards run. This makes all the difference: his sweetheart is no longer hesitant and marries him. Years later, when his career has not taken off and his marriage is in great difficulty, he realizes that that Sunday was the high point in his life and that everything had gone downhill since then. Of course, my high

point came somewhat later and I have continued on a plateau; if there has been a downhill slope, it was a very gentle one, but nevertheless . . .

The origin of the World Employment Programme (WEP) lies in the 'discovery', towards the end of the 1960s, that high economic growth was not necessarily accompanied by an improved employment situation, poverty reduction or less unequal income distribution. A country could have a very decent rate of economic growth, but still have huge and even growing employment and poverty problems. In other words, economic growth was a necessary but insufficient condition to do something about employment creation and poverty reduction. I apologize for belabouring such a simple point, but in the 1980s, and to some extent even today, we had to explain this over and over again and with mixed results!

The WEP was launched in 1969 at the fiftieth anniversary conference of the ILO. Pope Paul VI was there, the Organization got the Nobel Prize for Peace, and the long serving Director General, David Morse, presented this new and ambitious programme (the WEP), and then quickly left the ILO . . . before the American government stopped paying its contribution (25 per cent) in November 1970 — yes, that long ago! When I appeared on the scene on 2 January 1971, I found a beautiful title (WEP) but very little money and few people. It would go too far to explain how I reversed that situation. Suffice it to say that money (extra budgetary resources) started flowing in as of the second half of 1971. Onassis is supposed to have said that the first million dollars is the most difficult to get. Afterwards it is easy. Well, I can confirm that. With the money coming in, I could hire whoever I wanted and I did. Dharam Ghai, Keith Griffin, Ajit Bhalla, Dick Blandy, Felix Paukert, Harold Lubell took charge of newly set up research divisions on income distribution, technology, population, rural development and employment, the informal sector, etc. Bright young people and senior consultants like Jan Tinbergen, Amartya Sen, Irma Adelman, Erik Thorbecke and many others joined this moving and creative feast. We defined and launched the debates on the informal sector, growth with redistribution, and basic needs.

Let me say a few words about the latter. Employment is not an end objective. It serves to fulfil one's needs. The idea of 'basic needs' originated, I believe, in the psychology literature of the 1940s. The best-known publication in this connection is an article by Albert Maslow in the *American Psychological Review* of March 1942, in which he distinguishes five rungs on the needs ladder, starting with the very basic needs (food, shelter clothing) and ending up with cultural needs. We concentrated on the first rung of the ladder. It had taken more than thirty years for this revival to take place.

But we were not alone in this 'rediscovery'. As happened with recurrent education, and to an extent with the informal sector, 'suddenly' the

idea is in the air and it is difficult to disentangle who was first, assuming this is an important question. In the 1970s, work on basic needs took place in three different places, practically simultaneously: in the Latin American Bariloche Project, in the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, and in the WEP. As I just said, we concentrated on the first rung. While many people were already on the second, third, fourth, and even fifth rungs, an important proportion of the population was not even in sight of the ladder. And so the idea arose of designing a development strategy that had as its main objective meeting basic needs, including those of the poorest 20 per cent of the population.

Basic needs were defined in terms of food, housing, clothing, education, and public transport. Employment was both a means and an end, and participation in decision-making was included. The first thing was to quantify the basic needs for the target year twenty-five years in the future, to be followed by an estimate of GNP in that year, and an estimate of the required annual growth rate. This approach reversed conventional practice, which was to project a desirable annual per capita economic growth rate into the future. The latter was a forward rolling approach, while the basic needs approach achieved more precision by setting specific production targets and deriving the desirable rate of growth implied.

In the case of most countries this required rates of growth that were unrealistically high by historical standards. The only alternative to reach the targets of basic needs was to work at two levels: the rate of growth *and* income distribution. Indeed, if income distribution improves, the overall rate of economic growth need not be so high. We showed that with 'redistribution from growth' — that is, marginal redistribution of the future increase of income rather than redistribution of existing wealth — basic needs targets could be reached with an annual rate of economic growth of 6 per cent. When this package was presented at the 1976 ILO World Employment Conference, it was greeted with enthusiasm. The two exceptions were the American tripartite delegation and some of the employer representatives from the rich countries. Opposition may have reflected suspicions rather than well-founded fears. And with the election of Jimmy Carter a few months later, Washington's official view changed so much that USAID started preaching aggressively the gospel of 'basic human needs'. The President of the World Bank, Robert McNamara, adopted the basic needs approach wholesale and tried hard to steer his operational departments in that direction.

This *volte face* had a somewhat surprising effect. The developing countries that were at the time in the midst of a fight for a New International Economic Order became suspicious. They were trying to change *international* income distribution while the basic needs strategy focused very much on *national* income distribution.

As you can imagine, work and ideas like those sparked problems, jealousies, and fears in the ILO — fears that the Americans might leave

the Organization. By that time (1975–76) I led a department of 150 people with another 150 people in the field. Our activities went well beyond the traditional ILO work, although not beyond its Constitution, which includes the famous Declaration of Philadelphia. Pressure to reign us in had been building up ever since I joined the Organization and got cracking. I owe it to my boss — Dr Abbas Ammar from Egypt, Deputy Director General and number two of the ILO — that our work could continue along the lines we considered necessary. He backed us up and was mightily amused and impressed with that gang of young people. Abbas Ammar left before the World Employment Conference took place — for reasons of pride that I do not want to go into but with which I sympathized — and in 1975 I had already decided to return to my country, The Netherlands, in order to join the ISS. The Institute had graciously agreed to give me a year before joining so that I could finish my responsibilities with respect to the World Employment Conference. I left the ILO in September 1976 just ahead of the American withdrawal . . .

It was obvious to me that with the disappearance of both Abbas Ammar and myself, followed by the US leaving the Organization, the WEP was being thrown on the defensive and that the traditional ILO would gradually encroach on its work, narrowing and ‘streamlining’ it. In the circumstances it is something of a miracle that it continued on its course for several years. It was really during the 1980s, with the drastic change in economic orthodoxy, that the WEP was cut down to size and, to all intents and purposes, became a routine and traditional ILO programme. However, its ideas have not died. For instance, the basic needs approach was reborn in the human development thinking of the 1990s and beyond — albeit in an updated and theoretically better founded framework — by Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen. So, never despair by temporarily setbacks and lapses in common sense! I apologize for talking about this at such length, but I still get excited thinking about those days, even if they go back thirty years by now.

- AS: A lot is said about good governance in the less developed countries (LDCs) as a pre-requisite for receiving external assistance. What about good governance in the advanced market economies?
- LE: Good question! Is there a single country in the world that can say, with a good conscience, that it possesses ‘good governance’? Certainly not the United States where the financing of political parties and individual politicians’ election campaigns are one big mess, where election results are problematic (Chicago in 1960, Florida in 2000), where voting machines are often non-existent and susceptible to fraud, where democracy can border on dictatorial methods. Certainly not in France, Spain or Italy either, where half the politicians have been in jail, are in jail or will be there soon! Nevertheless,

these countries are, by conventional standards, highly developed. Would the US have been eligible for development assistance during the time of the *robber barons* at the end of the nineteenth century? Of course not! Well, it did not need that assistance, but that is not the point here.

It follows that countries have become powerful and rich in spite of all kinds of (bad) governance. So, why all this cabal about good governance today? I believe that the background is to be found in the end of the Cold War. Before, all kinds of terrible governments were supported ('I know he is a bastard, but he is *our* bastard'); after, the corruption excesses of certain governments and leaders got much more attention.

The definition of 'good governance' is very broad and diverse, but includes in all cases the notions of anti-corruption, human rights, and democratic forms of government. All three are of course to be commended, but do not have much to do with the take-off period of economic development. One could defend the thesis that in the long run sustainable economic and social development is only possible if a minimum package of good governance is present. That, however, must come from within and cannot easily be imposed from the outside. Interestingly enough, we do not hear much about *international* good governance which is at least as, if not more important. But let us leave that to a follow-up of this interview!

AS: Several governments demand that LDCs shift expenditures from military outlays to the social sectors. But many of these governments are actively involved in selling their armaments to LDCs, and sometimes to both sides in sensitive areas. How can such matters be addressed?

LE: Well, they have been addressed, of course, mainly in the UN. As far back as 1955, France made the first proposal in the United Nations. Participating states should agree to reduce their military spending each year by a fixed percentage. The resources thus released would be paid into an international fund, a quarter of which to be allocated to development and the remainder left at the disposal of the government concerned. Variations on this proposal emerged from other governments in subsequent decades, including during the First Development Decade in the 1960s.

However, the most thorough and innovative report on disarmament and development came later when the Thorsson Commission was set up in 1982. Its report reviewed a great deal of evidence and analysed the issues with care and concluded that 'the world can continue to pursue the arms race with characteristic vigour or move consciously and with deliberate speed towards a more stable and balanced economic and social development. It cannot do both'. This is a variation on the butter and guns theme.

May I add in passing that this long and outspoken concern of the UN stands in sharp contrast to years of silence from the World Bank and the IMF. As the World Bank historians commented, 'Arms reduction . . . is

sensitive as well as political and was typically avoided by the Bank until . . . the aftermath of the Cold War’.

There was indeed a temporary dip in military outlays after the end of the Cold War; there was a peace dividend, but it did not go to development assistance. That assistance actually declined during the booming 1990s! This is, therefore, yet another example that governments do not necessarily do what they promise or pay lip service to. There is a lot of hypocrisy involved, as we see today in connection with arm sales to China. It is an idea whose time has not yet come. But that is no reason to throw up one’s hands in despair. There is a marvellous French expression that I have adopted as my own, namely *‘frappez toujours’*. That has also been the attitude of Nobel prize winners like Jan Tinbergen and Lawrence Klein who both did (and in the case of Klein still do) a lot of work on peace economics.

AS: Tell us about the UN Intellectual History Project (UNIHP) — what should we expect from it?

LE: The short answer is ‘a lot’ — and read the article in the March 2005 issue of this journal that I wrote with my two Co-directors of UNIHP, Richard Jolly and Tom Weiss. But some time has elapsed since then, so let me give you an update.

Nine out of the fourteen books, presenting the history of ideas launched by the UN by subject matter, have been published or are in press. All the oral history interviews have been completed and the book summarizing the fascinating information contained in them was published last May. So, we can start drawing some conclusions and lessons. Three remarkable facts emerge from the UN history in economic and social matters. First, how much the UN has contributed to economic and social thinking and ideas in the second half of the twentieth century (setting up an international framework to stimulate national development, terms of trade issues and centre–periphery analysis, population, environmental and gender problems, and so on). Second, how many of these ideas have had a major and worthwhile impact. Third, how many of the early ideas emerged in response to initiatives of the dominant economic powers, especially those of the United States, even if subsequently Washington appears to have forgotten many of its early contributions. Examples include Truman’s Point Four, Kennedy’s First Development Decade, and the World Food Programme.

I will resist the temptation to go on and on, but one point must be emphasized, namely that we are writing a *forward-looking* history. We will stand on the shoulders of the past in order to peer better into the future. Let me give one or two examples of what we are seeing today, 60 per cent into the Project.

First, there are many areas where new international thinking and research are urgently required and where the UN must do far more

creative work. Some examples are: (1) the growing divide between the Islamic world and the West — which is a political, cultural, religious, and development problem; (2) measures of human security that go beyond the traditional compass of either the military or national security forces; (3) action to take into account cultural aspects in the development equation leading to regional differentiation of economic and social development strategies; (4) global economic inequalities — once front and centre-stage — must return to the Agenda as gaps between the extremes continue to widen.

Second, the UN needs to foster an environment that encourages rewards and creative thinking of the highest intellectual quality. This has implications for recruitment and promotion. The quality of staff is essential, and no compromise can be made here in ensuring the highest standard of competence. That is what I encouraged and achieved during my ILO days, but could only do so thanks to extra-budgetary resources and the backing of a man of courage and integrity, Abbas Ammar. When I talk to former colleagues in the UN today, they tell me that what I did thirty years ago would not be possible today! If that is even partly true, it means that the point I have just made about creative thinking is of the utmost importance and urgency.

AS: The UN system might well have generated some excellent ideas for value-driven development, but it never had the political clout to put these ideas into effect. What room is there for better development strategies to be followed within the current global governance structures and their internal inequalities?

LE: Our work shows that the UN, political clout or not, has been instrumental in pushing ideas along, many of them coming from outside. This is definitely true for the environment, gender, and population. It is also true for terms of trade issues early on, and, later, for elaborating the human development strategy. The human development approach is making progress. The Millennium Development Goals and the national and international development strategies worked out in the Millennium Project under Jeffrey Sachs, are other examples that something important may be afoot. The World Bank and the IMF are on board and this is one of the few times that they are working together with the UN. Even if the international governance structure is biased, as I implied earlier in this interview, it is possible to move things forward — *frappez toujours!* I realize that the constraints on alternative ideas and action are great, but there are plenty of ideas that are creeping along.

AS: What is the future of full employment?

LE: That is a quick change in subject matter! It is an area about which I have written extensively in the 1970s and 1980s. I hesitate to come back to it. The definition of full employment has shifted over time.

A hundred years ago full employment was when people who wanted to work, worked 150,000 hours over their lifetime. Today it is less than 80,000 hours, at least in the industrial countries. In France the length of the workweek was reduced to 35 hours and with five to six weeks vacation a year, this amounts to something like 60,000 hours! Not surprisingly, there is now a debate about greater flexibility in terms of the number of hours people want to work on a full time basis.

I have always been against introducing inflexible and 'dictatorial' measures in order to maintain full employment. I have been against imposing the 35 or 25 hour work-week, reducing the retirement age, keeping youngsters longer at school against their will, and so on. I have been, and still am, in favour of recurrent education and paid educational leave as a means to get back to full employment in difficult times. That is a flexible measure, it is voluntary, and moreover it is an investment in human capital. Let me stop here and just conclude that full employment is here to stay, albeit in flexible circumstances. The situation is different in many developing countries where people are often over-employed (women in Africa), but only get a poverty return on their labour. This was a topic that kept me busy when working on the WEP.

- AS: The ILO shifted from the concept of Basic Needs (which was elaborated in your WEP years at ILO) to Social Exclusion, and now to Decent Work. Is this just product re-packaging or is there a fundamental strategic shift involved?
- LE: Look, I hate to talk about and pass value judgements on how organizations in which I have played a certain role in the past, are managed and performing today. Especially in the case of the ILO, since I consider the present Director General, Juan Somavia, a friend. But let me say this. There is no comparison between the concept of basic needs and the concept of decent work. Basic needs was and is a pretty precise, quantified, and comprehensive development approach in which employment and work play a role, among many other things. Decent work has none of these characteristics; it is not precise, nor quantifiable, nor comprehensive. This does not mean that it is unimportant. Who could be against 'decent work'? The conclusion must be that Somavia did introduce a fundamental strategic shift in the work of the ILO. It is up to each of you to decide whether this has been for the worse or the better. In any event, it is very different.
- AS: Has the ILO managed to recover credibility and space in global policy debates?
- LE: I hesitate to answer in the affirmative. In one of its most recent reports written by a World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (*A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All*, published in 2004), its stand was timid and not up to the challenges of our times. It has disappeared without a trace. A missed opportunity.

AS: Can the ILO be taken seriously if it does not systematically include the informal economy workers as basic stakeholders?

LE: You really insist, don't you! It was the WEP in my time that put the informal sector on the map. First, through the brilliant Kenya Employment Report under Hans Singer and Richard Jolly, and then with a series of case studies in several cities on all continents under the research direction of Harold Lubell and later of S. V. Sethuraman.

As I implied earlier, it is not my habit to check what organizations are doing after I have left. But the other day I was asked to do an article on the informal sector and so I did some research on how the concept has evolved of late. What I found is that the ILO has continued its interest in it. For instance, in 1993 — in connection with the UN revised system of national accounts — the ILO Conference of Labour statisticians passed a Resolution concerning statistics in the informal sector that redefined the sector in specific (and, I may add, rather narrow) terms. A 1999 conference on the informal sector organized by the ILO and the ICFTU (International Confederation of Trade Unions), categorized the informal workforce into three broad groups. I do not want to enter into the details, but the interest of the ILO in the sector has continued to this day. Now, are informal sector workers officially represented on the ILO Governing Body and the International Labour Conference? Yes and no. Don't forget that the ILO, because of its tripartite structure, already has a more comprehensive representation of what lives in society than the rest of the UN that only has governments on its decision-making bodies. Informal sector workers should be represented by the trade union representatives, and informal sector employers by the employers' representatives. Clearly, this is not the case or only very partially so. But is that not, at least in part, inherent in the very definition of the informal sector?

During my WEP period, I encountered the same problem with respect to the unemployed. The trade union representatives, particularly those of the developing countries, had problems with the Programme. They should have been interested in un- and underemployment, but they represented the 'elite' workforce . . .

The ILO must continue to be taken seriously because it is the only place where there is any hope that informal sector workers and employers will find any official representation any time soon.

AS: In terms of the impact on development thinking and practice, do you think you have managed to achieve more from outside government than might have been possible if you had been part of a Dutch cabinet?

LE: That was the path not taken and only God knows where that path would have led me. One of the reasons for coming back to The Netherlands in 1976 was that I wanted to take the consequences of my

thinking and ideas. That means that I had to take political responsibility. Well, I tried and failed. There must always be something that you did not achieve in life in order to remain active rather than bored.

As to a more specific answer to your question, I would say 'it depends'! It depends how long I would have been in the cabinet, in what posts, at what level. But I doubt that I could have done — in a national decision-making position — anything at the international level akin to the idea of basic needs, the informal sector, or recurrent education and paid educational leave. My very tentative conclusion is that in terms of *ideas*, I have done better outside the national government structure than I could have within it. As to *practice*, the jury is out until, in a future life, I will be able to take the other path!

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