

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Transcription of the interview of Louis Emmerij



by Gerry Rodgers

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Louis Emmerij worked for the ILO from 1970 to 76, for most of this period as Director of the World Employment Programme.

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 did my primary and secondary education in Rotterdam and ... 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. ...

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

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.

...

Interviewer – ... 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 Zoetewij. Of course, Zoetewij 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.... 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. ...

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 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. ... 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 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 published¹, 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... 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 did all the talking and I just sat there drinking wine. In 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.

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

Interviewer – 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.

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.

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 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.

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.

...

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.²

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.³

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 ... 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

² PREALC and ARTEP were the regional employment teams for Latin America and Asia respectively.

³ ILO: *Employment, incomes and equality : A strategy for increasing productive employment in Kenya* (Geneva, 1972).

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 – 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. ...

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 through the 1974

Hollis Chenery World Bank publication.⁴ *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.⁵ 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 – 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

⁴ H.B.Chenery et. al: *Redistribution with growth* (London, Oxford University Press, 1974).

⁵ ILO, *Employment, growth and basic needs: A one-world problem*. Report of the Director-General to the World Employment Conference (Geneva, 1976).

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 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.⁶ 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.

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.

⁶ *The International Labor Organization: An American View*. Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981.

...

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 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.

...

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.

...

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.

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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.

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.⁷ 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.

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Interviewer – you mentioned the informal sector. Were you convinced of the usefulness of the concept?

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

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

strongly that I set up a special section in the department and got Harold Lubell to head it and undertake all these case studies.

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