



Governing Body

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SIXTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Report of the Director-General

Obituary

Lord William Brett

1. The Director-General announces with deep regret the death, on 29 March 2012, of Lord William Brett, a British trade union leader who, among his many roles at the ILO, served as Chairperson of the Governing Body from 2002–03.
2. Born in 1942 in Rawtenstall, Lancashire, Bill Brett, a lifelong Manchester United supporter of Irish descent, left school at the age of 16 to work as a railway ticket clerk. Six years later, in 1964, he became an Officer of the Transport Salaried Staff Association, his first of several union positions. He also worked for the National Union of Bank Employees in Lancashire, for the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staff, and for Prospect, the professionals' trade union. A principled pragmatist, his passion and dedication to trade unionism was driven by the injustice that he witnessed and his desire for change. Throughout the 1980s, he battled hard during the Thatcher government, particularly during the Government Communications Headquarters dispute.
3. In his career at the ILO, Lord Brett held several crucial positions, as Worker member of the Governing Body, Chairperson of the Workers' group, Vice-Chairperson and Chairperson of the Governing Body and Director of the ILO London Office. He fought against child labour, for collective bargaining and for high-quality public services and the rights of public service workers. He was particularly influential in the development of the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization and the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. He was also involved in the improvement of ILO technical cooperation and in the Organization's contribution to the UN Summits on Sustainable Development. He contributed enormously to the adoption of the worst forms of child labour Convention in 1999. When he became the Chairperson of the Governing Body, a Worker member said that Lord Brett epitomized the contribution that trade unions had made across the world.
4. He was also involved in politics, starting in 1963 when he was elected a councillor of the London Borough of Lewisham, the youngest ever to hold this position. In 1999, Lord Brett

was granted a life peerage, subsequently serving as a government whip and Home Office Minister, followed by opposition front-bench spokesman on Home Affairs and International Development. In his later years, he became a member of the Ruskin College Council and a Senior Fellow of Sullivan University in Kentucky, which awarded him an honorary doctorate.

5. Lord Brett's extensive career with the ILO encompassed many formidable milestones that helped shape the future of the Organization. He played a pivotal role in the election of Director-General Juan Somavia, who commented afterwards that he "learned early on that Bill [was] a person worth listening to". He was a fierce negotiator, influencing meetings with his forthright manners and cutting wit, delivered, as described by one former Government member of the Governing Body, (in a rapid-fire North Manchester accent), "the delight of English speakers and the despair of all but the finest interpreters". Despite his daunting style, he was extremely generous to those around him and was known for taking the time to thank people personally for their work. Both physically and politically, Bill Brett was a tower of strength, bettering the causes for which he fought. His contribution to the work of the ILO was immeasurable.
6. *The Governing Body requests the Director-General to convey its condolences to Lord Brett's family and to the President of Prospect.*