

## In Memoriam: Ruth Ben Israel (1931–2020)

It is with great sadness that the *International Journal* marks the passing, on 1 February 2020, of Ruth Ben Israel. Born in Port Said, Egypt, Ruth became Israel's most prominent twentieth-century scholar in the fields of international and comparative labour law. Her contributions to the development of fundamental social rights at work included monographs and numerous articles, and for a decade she was the 'international face' of Israel on the international boards of the International Society for Labour Law and Social Security (ISLLSS) and the International Industrial Relations Association (IIRA).

My first face-to-face encounter with Ruth was three and a half decades ago, during an international conference in Caracas, Venezuela. Having just completed my first year as Founding Editor of the *International Journal*, I was on the look-out for interesting material to include in future issues, and had been alerted to the existence of an Israeli researcher working on international aspects of the right to strike.<sup>1</sup> However, even before I had the chance to track down this potential author, I was accosted in the lobby of the conference hotel by a diminutive but forceful presence who, without ceremony, demanded: 'You are Alan Neal. Why are there no women members on the International Editorial Board of your journal?'. Ruth's version of the meeting claims that, with nowhere to retreat or hide, my response was: 'Oh, but there is – You!'. Thus did the *International Journal* acquire its first female Editorial Board colleague!

Ruth came late to the field of Labour Law, having previously studied applied arts in Paris before returning to Israel. After completing her doctoral studies in 1975, she embarked upon an academic career in the Law Faculty of the University of Tel Aviv. She became a full professor there in 1986, and, upon her retirement from the Alain Pohair Chair in Labour Law in 2000, was granted the status and title of Emeritus Professor. For a quarter of a century she wrote on key issues in international and comparative labour law. During her later years, after recovering from a significant illness, Ruth committed herself to the promotion of Labour Law scholarship in Israel through her writings in Hebrew,<sup>2</sup> before finally returning to

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<sup>1</sup> What was eventually to see the light of day as *International Labour Standards: The Case of Freedom to Strike* (Kluwer, Deventer 1988).

<sup>2</sup> In particular, with her opus *Labour Law* (Open University of Israel 2002).

her applied arts roots with the publication of a volume of Bible drawings created by way of her newly-embraced medium of 'digital painting'.<sup>3</sup>

Ruth Ben Israel will be remembered as a formidable proponent of social rights and freedoms. Her international *leitmotif* is to be found in the keynote address which she delivered in 2000 to the 16th World Congress of the ISLLSS, under the title of 'The Rise, Fall and Resurrection of Social Dignity',<sup>4</sup> where she outlined her 'multi-dimensional notion of work' in a framework of social, economic and human dignity.

In his introduction to the *Liber Amicorum* penned by colleagues in Ruth's honour, the late Roger Blanpain summed her up in the following terms<sup>5</sup>:

Her approach is always very open, direct, pragmatic and to the point, but at the same time very determined and steady. Once she has decided on a course of action, she will by sheer force of character pursue her goal. The many labour law problems she has tackled during her long and fruitful career are a clear demonstration of this.

My own contribution to that *Liber Amicorum* reflected similarly that<sup>6</sup>:

directness and battling spirit have been hallmarks of Professor Ben Israel throughout her illustrious career on the international labour law scene. Whether with pen in hand, or when taking the podium at numerous high-profile gatherings around the world, or in the context of her participation within the Israeli judicial system, her voice has been a powerful and unyielding spur to future improvement and an improved sense of 'justice' for those on whose behalf she has taken up the cudgels.

Those of us who have enjoyed the challenge and privilege of knowing and working with Ruth have lost a steadfast and admired friend and colleague. We mourn her passing and extend our sympathies to her family and colleagues in Israel.

Alan C. Neal  
Founding Editor

<sup>3</sup> *Bible Illuminations: From Creation Until Moses* (Gefen, Jerusalem 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Proceedings of the XVI World Congress of the International Society for Labour Law and Social Security (Jerusalem, Israel, 3–7 Sept. 2000).

<sup>5</sup> R. Blanpain, *Laudatio*, in *Labour Law, Human Rights and Social Justice, Liber Amicorum in Honour of Prof. Dr. Ruth Ben Israel*, xiv (R. Blanpain ed., Kluwer, Deventer 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Alan C. Neal, *Ensuring the Right to a Safe and Healthy Working Environment: Where Actions Speak Louder than Words*, in *ibid.*, at 59, 70.