

**Introductory notes for Manfred Weiss LLRN Award for Distinguished Contributions to  
Labour Law**

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I have the pleasure to introduce to you a colleague, mentor and friend. Guy and Evert, thank you for the opportunity to share Manfred's story with everyone here today, it is indeed an honour to do so. An expert is described as "a person who has made all the mistakes that can possibly be made in a very narrow field". Manfred Weiss clearly qualifies as an expert in labour law: but then again, it is only when you are not afraid for your voice to be heard rather than being an echo that you get the chance to make a mistake or two. Today we recognize the unwavering voice of Manfred Weiss.

Manfred Weiss was born in 1940 in Tuttlingen, Germany. He graduated from the University of Freiburg in 1964 and this already showed his good decision-making skills as he met his beautiful and universally-loved wife, Monique, whilst there. He then spent some time as research fellow at the Center for the Study of Law and Society of the California University in Berkeley (USA) before returning to join the Law School of the J.W. Goethe University in Frankfurt in 1970. After a brief stint at the University of Hamburg he returned to Frankfurt where he "allegedly" retired and was appointed as an emeritus professor in which capacity he continues to be active, doing *only* those things he loves, which apparently does not include attending faculty meetings. It is remarkable, however, that Manfred (by choice) still teaches, supervises, examines, and writes peer review reports. Often accompanied by Monique, he also continues to travel extensively to collaborate, teach and present papers as speaker at international events. He is also involved in several annual seminars in comparative law – usually in beautiful cities like Venice.

**For Manfred, the interdisciplinary approach to Labour law (integrating legal, sociological, historical, philosophical and economic perspectives), has always been important. To quote: “He has tried to combat those for whom legal doctrine is an end in itself.”**

**For a person to be honoured by a distinguished contributions-award it seems unnecessary to dwell on the point that he is a reckoned scholar for who the comparative, European and international perspectives always have been a central theme of his work. In my estimation the fact that Manfred has been a visiting professor at law faculties more than 30 times, over a comparable number of years in a dozen or so different cities is clear evidence that Manfred is not only known for his fierce opposition to PowerPoints but, first and foremost, for his significant contribution to the discipline of labour law.<sup>1</sup>**

**Manfred is an academic at heart (one just needs to look at his comprehensive publication list (more than 25 books and approaching 200 articles))<sup>2</sup> but he is one who kept close contact with the “real” world. During his long career he therefore was not only recognised and honoured by his national and international subject disciplines and relevant professional associations (including the German Association of Labour Jurists and the International Industrial Relations Association), but one of Manfred’s biggest contributions was his involvement as consultant of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).**

**He was part of many ILO commissions to different countries, including Zambia and South Africa,<sup>3</sup> and has been a consultant for different governments, on behalf of the European Commission, especially in Eastern-Europe. His contribution to the law reform of different**

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<sup>1</sup> He was a visiting professor in Leuven and Ghent/Belgium (1984) (2008), Paris/ France (1985, 1992, 1994, 2003, 2004 and 2005), Strasbourg, France (1987), the Sorbonne in Paris (1993, 1994 and 1996), Bordeaux in France (1996, 1999, 2004 and 2005), Pennsylvania in Philadelphia/USA (1987, 1988 and 1991), Gainesville and New York/USA (1989), (1997 and 2001), etc.

<sup>2</sup> His specialist field may be said to be the European and International Labour and Civil Law; in particular his research focuses on worker participation. He is also co-editor and member of the editorial boards of several German and international accredited journals.

<sup>3</sup> Other countries include Sri Lanka (1984), Sudan (1987), Trinidad (1988), Hungary (1991), South Korea (1991), Poland (1991), Bulgaria (1992 and 2006), Romania (2004).

**countries including my own, South Africa, and thereby his passionate promotion of Labour law and Social justice internationally cannot be underestimated.**

**Prof Weiss has received honorary doctorates in Europe, South-America, and Africa. And, I think, if he could manage only one more he would have one for each of his 5 grandchildren.**

**On a serious note, Manfred worries about the shape and form that Labour law will survive in, in view of the many changes due to globalization and technological developments and, importantly, the pressures put on Labour law by a neo-liberal ideology. However, one of the countless things we admire about Manfred on a professional level is his continued ambition to contribute to a development, which will safeguard the role of Labour law in view of such current challenges.**

**Other aspects about Manfred, the person, we admire include:**

- i. Manfred being a rebel at heart – one only needs to read his work to know this is the case (he has often said- “re-regulation instead of de-regulation”, he has written that “As far as the core assumptions are concerned on which labour law is based, [he] see no need for a change of paradigm” only readjustment and refocus, and, that “Labour Law should not expand in overarching categories for all the miseries of the world. [because] Then it would lose its function”.**
- ii. Him giving all possible support to young students and colleagues, many of them women, always with a great measure of wisdom and good humour.**
- iii. Being a thinker, a fighter, an optimist. And,**
- iv. Perhaps a bit controversial - his time-management (that is expressly excluding time management with regard to departures or any kind of appointments).**

I am told that as young academic Manfred looked up most to Otto Kahn-Freund who quite often came to their house and with whom he discussed Basic Problems of Labour law and Comparative Law. He speaks of other role models (some of them here today) such as Clyde Summers, Benjamin Aaron, Bill Wedderburn, Bob Hepple, Gino Giugni, and in particular Spiros Simitis.

I know that there is several of my generation as well as others that look up to you, Manfred, who appreciate you discussing Basic and Fundamental challenges and opportunities of Labour law with us *and*, who are delighted that you are *with good reason* receiving this award today.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in congratulating Manfred Weiss.