

**To Bob Hepple
Barcelona
13 June 2013**

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues,

We all share today an immense pleasure in honouring a scholar of exceptional standing. On behalf of the whole audience, I want to thank the organizers of this conference for this unique opportunity. I also thank them for the special privilege they gave me to present the award to Bob Hepple.

Professor Bob Hepple, Sir Bob Hepple from 2004, Queen's Counsel, Fellow of the British Academy is the holder of numerous degrees *honoris causa*, one of which makes me particularly pleased, since it was granted at the University of Bari in Italy. He is above all – especially for the academic community gathered here today – a passionate teacher and writer in labour law, antidiscrimination law, comparative law, international and European law, as well as Professor of English law. He is a mentor and a guide for young and less young scholars throughout the world, an advocate for the enforcement of fundamental rights, an assertive promoter of social justice, a militant guardian of freedoms.

It is impossible for me in a few minutes to give a full account of Bob's intense life in so many different fields. I shall select a few events, which reflect my admiration for his many achievements, for his humanity and humbleness, in one word for his very distinguished style.

Open the website of the Squire Law Library, University of Cambridge in the archive devoted to eminent scholars and you will discover Bob's 'two lives'.

In South Africa, where he was born, he started as a young leader of the Student Liberal Association, then became an active supporter of the African National Congress. He was the organizer of protests for the emancipation and freedom of black people. He fought for antiapartheid strategies, thus strengthening the antiracist beliefs that had already inspired his father and his whole family.

As a young lawyer, he defended Nelson Mandela in the so-called 'incitement to strike trial'. Mandela makes a few references to Bob in his autobiography, when he reports the turbulent events of 1962, which then led to his imprisonment. In Mandela's pages Bob's legal competence appears vividly interwoven with his dedication to the cause. Bob was 'accused n.11' in the Rivonia trial and experienced imprisonment himself. We are proud to have him here with us

today. We are also lucky to read about all such events, which crossed Bob's life and brought him close to a hero of modern times, in an autobiographical recollection, recently published in South Africa, called 'Young man with a red tie. A memoir of Mandela and the failed revolution'.

Bob's second life takes place in the UK and indeed in many parts of the world. Bob had to escape from South Africa in dramatic circumstances and was born again to face new challenges, without ever losing contact with his roots. When he was admitted back to South Africa, he was asked, among other things, to write the labour code of Namibia and was presented over the years with a number of academic acknowledgments. He has constantly been a solid point of reference for younger labour lawyers in South Africa and the emblem of modern labour law.

In the UK Bob kept expanding his horizons. He was a judge, an academic in prestigious universities; he has worked closely with the ILO, fighting for the consolidation of labour standards; he has approached European law in a critical and yet constructive way; he has created an original methodology in comparative labour law, reinterpreting Otto Kahn-Freund's legacy. He has brought together different circles of lawyers in conferences and seminars, travelling the world, spreading ideas and promoting dialogues among scholars of different legal traditions. He has anticipated the most controversial issues related to global law and to the difficult balance between trade and social rights, which are such a relevant part of contemporary discussions. I like to underline the clear and essential style of his writings, well read in all fields, rigorous and attractive.

His openness to explore new frontiers in law brought him to become the chairman of the Nuffield College of Bioethics. I have heard him speaking the language of human rights in that respect as well, with his usual attention to details and to in-depth analysis.

Bob is a very special human being, capable to listen and to offer his point of view in a non-confrontational way. In a community of scholars, such as the one I was introduced to during my visits at Clare College in Cambridge, I closely observed his genuine, non-patronizing practice of gender balance, to which he added respect and encouragement for women fellows of the College. His portrait kept at Clare, painted at the end of his mandate as a Master of the College, captures him in a very realistic manner: smiling, looking ahead, with a touch of irony in his eyes. And irony is in fact such a rare gift, when it is combined – as it is in Bob's style – with curiosity and attention for people.

I have also observed and admired his love and care for his children and grandchildren and, above all, for his wife Mary, herself a dedicated and intelligent analyst and promoter of human rights. Bob and Mary have carried on together inspiring research; a conversation with them is always enriching.

Bob Hepple is a good friend for so many of us in this room. My hope is that this ceremony, in recognition of his rich life and of his brilliant academic career, will bring the younger generations even closer to his inspiring scholarship and to the fundamental values that he has defended in troublesome times and continues to defend now. From today new conversations will start within the labour law world community, where Bob's voice can be heard, as a reassuring one.

Silvana Sciarra