

Solidarity - Independence – Democracy SID

Platform (October 2007)

Version 1.0

1. INTRODUCTION

Solidarity, Independence, Democracy - SID is a trade union open to all employees of EU institutions including the officials and other agents of the Communities. Its main purpose is to act in the general interest of the staff, without prejudice to the statutory powers of the Staff Committees. It shall defend the Rights of all EU institution employees based on EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Industrial Democracy and within the EU laws.

The worst thing that can happen to good ideas is to be buried alive under a heap of dogma and jargon.

You are invited to comment on this Platform.

No one is dogmatically claiming that this Platform contains some metaphysical, all-transcending Truth; just a few good ideas and some useful information.

Expect it to be updated as reality evolves and/or as people simply develop better ideas.

2. EU CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

The EU Institutions “solemnly proclaimed” the CFR. Its Article 51(a) says that “The provisions of this Charter addressed to the institutions and bodies of the Union with due regard for the principle of subsidiary ... “. Both publications of tenured professors of EU law and judgments of the EU Courts confirm that the CFR does have real legal effect, no matter what politicians try to make the public believe.

The 54 Articles of the CFR have been published in all official languages and can be understood and correctly applied by anyone.

The best way to defend these important rights is by using them. And that is what we plan to do.

3. INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY

(In French “cogestion”, In German “Mitbestimmung”)

There are rudimentary forms of industrial democracy in about half of the EU Member States and it is striking that the level to which it is developed correlates to the economic and social development of the Member States.

In a nutshell, what does Industrial Democracy mean, what does it do? Well, when workers have the right to vote on certain management decisions, directly or through elected representatives, that is the beginning of Industrial Democracy. It usually begins as non-binding consultation. The second stage of its development is reached when there is a legally binding arbitration between the positions of management and labour; this is co-determination (“cogestion”, “Mitbestimmung”). At this stage neither side can get 100% of what it wants at the other's expense. Practical experience with this system in Germany shows that it sometimes leads to a period of chaotic infighting during the first year. After that, both sides learn to play the game of give and take. If all goes well, a certain amount of mutual respect and sometimes even trust develops. This is why “Mitbestimmung” has contributed to Germany's famous stability and prosperity. Bosses, billionaires and conservative Christian democrats grumble about it, but in fact they have never made a serious attempt to undermine “Mitbestimmung”, even where and when they held large majorities. They have no wish to follow the example of the authoritarian economies of England and Russia, which have been consistently outperformed by Germany.

Staying with the German example, industrial democracy is practiced both in the private and the public sector. The rules for applying it in the federal civil service are laid down in a statute called the “Bundespersönlichkeitsgesetz” which is abbreviated to “BPersVG” (“Federal Personnel Representation Statute”). The Federal Republic of Germany is generally considered to be one of the better administered and governed states in the world, so we may conclude that, at the very least, industrial democracy has not ruined its government.

Article 27 of the “Statute of Officials and Other Servants” states that “Recruitment shall be directed to securing for the institution the services of officials of the highest standard of ability, efficiency and integrity, recruited on the broadest possible geographical basis from among nationals of Member States of the Communities.”

As a result, we are recruited because we have been proven to be members of an elite of EU citizens, by way of competitive civil service examinations. Elementary set theory shows that we are thus also an elite with regard to the Germans since they also have equal opportunities to enter our service.

Logically this implies that we should enjoy, at least, all the rights that the BPersVG gives to our colleagues in the German federal civil service.

There is a second, more abstract argument for industrial democracy, which places it in the context of general democracy. Civil servants who are denied the right to participate democratically in running their jobs will develop the habit of apathetically carrying out the orders of their hierarchy. Their only connection with democracy will be to mark a ballot with a few “x” every several years. Since they have no direct experience of democracy, they cannot be expected to defend it vigorously. That is not good. Industrial democracy is better.

4. ROTTEN PAY – ROTTEN WORK

This old IWW proverb was true in the Chicago of 1905 and it is true today.

The Kinnock reforms imposed cuts to pay and benefits that came to 17.5% for tenured officials and 20%-30% for newly recruited ones. Some contractual agents have lost 40%+ of their pay. At the same time, the average work load increased in quantity and quality because 10+2 new Member States were added to the EU with nothing like a proportional expansion in staff and budget. To make things even more difficult for us, the “reform” imposes knowledge of a third language on new recruits as a condition for their first promotion, no matter whether there is any need for it in their work at all.

The loss of motivation is obvious. It is better not to cite specific examples because that would put colleagues at risk from management reprisals. But the President of the Commission has made a partial admission during a “Staff Forum” when he was asked whether there were any problems with recruiting people after the cuts. He replied that, in general, all was well. Then he added that there are some problems with translators/interpreters for rare languages and with specialists in competition law. This candid answer is quite revealing when we consider how low pay is in the new Member States. It is also disturbing when we recall that enforcing EU anti-trust legislation (against billionaires and mega corporations) is the most important task that the Treaties give solely to the Commission. Normally the President of the Commission would be upset to see that he was getting only next-to-the-very-best in the one field where he can hope to make his mark. His relaxed attitude shows that simple employment market pressures alone cannot safeguard our standard of living and working.

So where did all those hundreds of millions of EUROS saved at our expense go? Debt relief and malaria prevention in Africa? No. Job creation in Europe? No. Was the money used to cut public deficits, at least? No. The money went to finance tax cuts for billionaires and mega corporations, with no guarantee of even one job created, or at least saved. We issue a public challenge to the propagandists of neo-liberalism; “Prove, with facts and logic, that your policies improve people's lives.”

Until you do, we will continue to think that people are happier in secure jobs with reasonable pay.

The civil service is no automobile factory and applying the strategies of classical industrial unionism is a prescription for defeat. A strike of a few weeks would fail miserably because the billionaires and mega corporations are only too glad to be “free” of us. The working conditions in the civil service are as much a political question as an economic one. The joint budgetary authority of the EU is the European Parliament together with the Council (with the two Coreper lurking in the shadows). Lobbying the individual members and the political groups of these bodies is a necessary part of any successful defense of our working conditions. There are plenty of reasonable arguments for our position and there are people “up there” who will sometimes listen to reason, as the rescue of the 2000 jobs has demonstrated in 2006. Who else will defend our interests if we do not do it ourselves?

Contacts with journalists and other media workers are another important weapon in our self defense arsenal.

To some unionists, it may seem unsettling to read that strikes and demonstrations are not ends in themselves but means to influence the decision makers. But in the civil service this is not defeatism, it is realistic.

In the long term, subtle, patient resistance practiced in many different ways by individual colleagues and by groups will help to convince middle and top management that it is much more efficient to give staff its fair share of the available resources than to try to bully us into accepting ever deeper cuts.

5. COUNTERING SURVEILLANCE AND MANIPULATION

Modern electronics and telecommunications can be used for or against democracy according to political will. The extensive surveillance of telecommunications by the United States' NSA plus partners under the code name ECHELON is famous. But the EU is not at all innocent; the United Kingdom is certainly the second strongest pillar of ECHELON. Recently the German Minister of Home Affairs, Mr Schäuble, has campaigned vigorously for the legalization of covert surveillance of computers connected to the Internet. Mind you, not for the introduction, but for the legalization.

In some areas of concern, parts of the United States are actually better off than Europe. Because of the threat to privacy that they pose, the state of California has officially excluded the use of RFID chips in its documents (such as driver's licenses and other permits). In marked contrast to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, EU Commissioner Reding has gone on record publicly with the contention that RFID technology does not need to be regulated. You are probably carrying several RFIDs at this moment; they are already in many European passports! DG INFSO is using its employees as guinea pigs to experiment with this RFID technology.

The contention that electronic surveillance is an essential, or even an important, tool for police and security operations has never been proven. Most felons are convicted on the basis of their own confessions, on the testimony of witnesses, or on forensic evidence. The evidence obtained by electronic surveillance plays a very minor role in putting dangerous people in prison.

Therefore, electronic surveillance should be permitted only under the most restricted conditions when it has been proven to be the only way of protecting citizens from real threats.

There are several attempts underway to manipulate staff. The least dangerous probably takes the form of glossy print and electronic publicity material distributed by the Institutions which does little more harm than to waste a bit of the taxpayer's money since no one pays attention to it anyway.

Another relatively harmless attempt is sometimes made by members of such semi-clandestine organizations such as certain Masonic lodges and, perhaps, the Opus Dei. We affirm that they have the same right to express their views as all other people, we would just prefer it if they did so openly.

A bit more problematic is the close link between the Belgian *Mouvement Réformateur* and one of the Brussels unions because MR has at least two loose planks in its party platform. It is strongly francophone, which runs counter to the multilingualism which the EU and its institutions need in order to thrive. The other problem is that it calls for deep tax cuts which will quickly turn into further cuts to our salaries and benefits. Perhaps the MR-linked union would receive even more support from staff if it declared these goals openly, but we doubt that.

Another tricky influence is that of Athena which publicly promotes the equality of all official languages of the Member States, an acceptable goal, though not ours because we consider all 5 000 human languages to be equally valuable. (If

restrictions become necessary, they should be decided democratically by the people directly concerned, not by politicians and bureaucrats in some remote capital city.) .

Unfortunately, Athena has shown a much harsher face in private and semi-public communications. There, the agenda appears to be very Euro-centric, excluding of course the English language since it criticizes what it considers as "pensé unique, langue unique" referring exclusively to English language and culture.

Athena, by way of A&D-B, has gotten 1.7% of the vote at the last Brussels CLP elections, so it is a minor annoyance for us. But the ideas about a clash of civilizations which it discusses out of the public's view could lead to real trouble for the EU and its Institutions. Basically they have the perfidious Anglo-Saxons playing a role very similar to that of the Muslims' in Samuel Huntington's neo-conservation war manual.

Perhaps the most disturbing discovery that we have made, to date, is that participants in certain Commission public relations oriented events, such as the so-called "Staff Forum" and the "Ethics Day", were carefully screened beforehand in order to eliminate colleagues with critical questions that might be difficult to answer in public. There were even attempts to influence the written questions that had to be submitted beforehand (!) to a certain DG's General Assembly several years ago. These malpractices are bad for staff. When one considers the important role that the Commission plays in preparing EU legislation, one worries that there may be attempts to manipulate not just the staff, but all the EU citizens. The next question is "Whose interests are being promoted?"

6. WE ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES

Most workers are under the same pressure that we are feeling; work longer, harder and smarter for less pay, a lower pension and an evaporating layer of social protection. The fact that we are better off than most workers simply means that we have more to lose and the plutocrats have more to gain at our expense. Remember; the money taken from us goes to billionaires, not to Bangladesh. The best way to help those workers who are worse off than we is to support their demands and actions, not give way to our bosses.

Among the many open possibilities there is www.labourstart.org which works as an Amnesty International for unionists and other workers who are fired, threatened, imprisoned, tortured, injured, and sometimes butchered.

There are plenty of organizations with a total of tens of thousands of members who seek to weaken and eventually displace the current rulers without establishing some new kind of dictatorship.

Some of them are :

- 6.1. www.cgt.es
- 6.2. www.cnt-f.org
- 6.3. www.iww.org
- 6.4. www.wobblies.de
- 6.5. then there is the famous www.attac.org .

Of course, no two of these groups agree 100% with each other. That is a good thing because intellectual incest leads to degeneration and decline.

The main point to remember is that given the will, it is possible to practise patient subtle resistance within the framework of democracy.

7. CONCLUSION

The obsession with finding a compromise with the bosses no matter how outrageous their demands are has led to both less security and less pay. If we try to fight back we may win or lose. If we surrender unconditionally under the thin disguise of social partnership, we are lost.

There is no rational excuse for long term defeatism. The slave masters, aristocrats, absolute monarchs, fascists and Stalinists of the past were more powerful than today's plutocrats. They have gone the way of the mighty dinosaurs. Competition and the progress of technology lead to ever more sophisticated forms of work and to organizations that can be run efficiently only with and by the people who do the job.

Solidarity, Independence and Democracy can get us all a better life if we apply these key ideas to our everyday work. They are much too good to be left to mere politicians!

Secretary General,
Michael ASHBROOK
15/10/2007

President,
Reza FARDOOM
15/10/2007