

REGIONAL MEETING IN BEIRUT, 24-26 September 2003

- Partage de l'information ?
- Protect local project staff !
- Histoire d'eau
- Remembering Marie-Reine, Sergio
- ILO diary

Out and about (L to R):
Mafalda Troncho (Lisbon),
Dina El-Beheri (Kuwait City),
Betul Capci (Ankara),
Amalia de Cuba (Lima),
the Famous Ghassan (Beirut),
Ludmilla Ouskova (Moscow)



Regional titulars' meeting (L to R):
Walid Hamdan (Europe and Middle East),
Martine Humblet (SUC Assistant General Secretary),
Pierre Sayour (SUC General Secretary),
Jean-Victor Gruat (SUC Chair),
Amalia de Cuba (Americas), Basharat Ahmad (Asia),
Charles Kameni (Africa)



EDITORIAL

Partage de l'information: la théorie et la pratique

"La gestion des connaissances est l'élément clé de l'efficacité..." bla bla bla "...culture d'entreprise, partage de l'information, décloisonnement... et patati et patata...". Communication... "GEIDE, KM, IE... patin couffin... Grande famille... Information ne vaut que si elle est partagée..."

Courriel reçu. A: Xyz. De: Abc. Sujet: Avis de recherche. Je suis à la recherche du livre circulé dans le service depuis juillet 2002. La personne le stockant dans son bureau depuis cette date est priée de le remettre en circulation au plus vite...

Brève de Cantine: «J'ai lu un rapport absolument passionnant sur les nouveaux projets de l'organisation blabla... blabla...» «Ah oui? tu me le passeras...?» «Euh, oui, mais... je ne sais pas, c'est diffusion restreinte, réservée à partir du grade P92...»

Integrated Resource Information System... Le projet sera mis en œuvre en juin 2004 et n'excèdera pas le budget prévu. Mais c'est toutefois un projet ambitieux et l'autosatisfaction n'est pas de mise. Une étude fin août devrait confirmer le réalisme de la stratégie mise en œuvre... La mise en service et les tests sur les systèmes déjà approuvés sont prévus pour septembre... On sait déjà qu'il sera impossible pour certains pays de faire partie du réseau... L'implantation du projet sera évalué sur des cibles et de réelles économies pourront être faites à long terme mais il est impossible de chiffrer à l'heure actuelle le montant de ces économies... Le personnel peut s'informer sur le développement du projet en cliquant sur le site du projet IRIS.

Conversation entendue dans un ascenseur: «Ah Salut, quoi de neuf après cet été de canicule?» «Bof, rien de transcendant.



Et vot'projet comment déjà, Amaryllis? Il avance?» «PFFFF, m'en parle pas, y'a plus un sou et tout le monde tire la couverture à soi. Gestion intégrée mon œil ouais. C'est pas demain la veille qu'on travaillera tous en chœur...»

«Que l'on soit G, que l'on soit P ou fonctionnaire national, nous ne formons qu'une seule entité et une seule Organisation ... » (Discours du DG au personnel)

Post-it collé dans le couloir: Mardi 9 septembre: Réunion de service (professionnels 10h, services généraux: 11h).

Janvier 2001: *Projet de la plus haute importance... Interviews... Enquêtes, groupe de travail, implantation indispensable d'un système de gestion du savoir...*

Janvier 2003: *Conclusions des réunions de l'équipe de direction: proposition pour une meilleure efficacité, demande urgente, engagement solennel du haut management... Fin de l'année...*

Vivement décembre!

Les rédacteurs
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EDITORIAL

Information management: Theory and practice

"Knowledge management is the key to efficiency..." blah blah blah "enterprise culture, information sharing..." blah blah "Communication..." blah "KM, CDMS, EDMS..." yadda yadda yadda "We are a big Family... Information is worthwhile only if it is shared..."

Email from: X. To: Y. Subject: Missing. I am trying to locate a book that has been circulating in the branch since July 2002. The person who has been keeping it in their office since that date is requested kindly to return it with immediate effect.

Overheard in the cafeteria: "I've just read this absolutely brilliant report on the Organization's new projects in blah, blah and blah..."

"Really? I'd like to see a copy."

"Er, yes, of course, only... I don't know - says here it's restricted distribution, for grades P94 and higher..."

Integrated Resource Information System... The project is currently on schedule to come on stream within budget in June 2004. But it is an ambitious project and there is no room for complacency. A review at the end of August should confirm the realism of the project strategy... The

knowledge management, premier rouge



building and testing of approved systems is scheduled for September... It will not be possible for offices in certain countries to be part of the network... Implementation will be measured against quantitative targets and there will be real savings in time but it is difficult to put a figure to these savings... Staff can be kept informed on progress through the IRIS web site.

Conversation in the elevator: "Hey - long time no see! Last time I clapped eyes on you, the ILO lawns were still green. What's new?"

"Me? Not a lot. You? That Amaryllis project of yours - going well, yeah?"

"Project? Do me a favour! No funds left, are there? Look at them all scratching each other's eyes out for every last penny. Integrated management? My aspidistra. Not in our lifetime it won't be..."

"Whether we are G-Staff or P-Staff or national professional officers we are part of one single entity and one single Organization" (DG's address to staff).

Post-it seen in the corridor: Tuesday 9 September: branch meeting for Professional staff, 10am; General Service staff, 11am.

January 2001: *Project... Interviews... Surveys... Knowledge management, mandatory...*

January 2003: *Senior Management meeting, meetings, proposals for efficiency, urgent request, commitment from higher management... end of the year...*

Roll on December!

The editors
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AROUND THE CORNER

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMITTEE

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Union is the press organ of the ILO Staff Union. Its editorial stance and contents are determined by its Editorial Board. The communications of the Staff Union Committee, which is the executive organ of the Staff Union, are identified as such whenever they are published in Union.

Mobilization on local salaries (continued)

The International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) met in July 2003 in New York. The issue of negative changes in methodologies for conducting local salary surveys had to be reopened for discussion, thanks to the exemplary mobilization of staff against what they saw as unacceptable attempts to reduce local remuneration across the system under the guise of technical "adjustments".

Hereafter the text of the declaration of the ILO Director General's representative at the July 2003 UN Human Resources Network meeting (bringing together personnel department heads from the UN Agencies) preceding the ICSC session, and an exchange of mail between the FICSA General Secretary and the Chair of the ILO SUC on this issue.

La lotta continua!

Statement made by ILO Director of Human Resources Development on salary survey methodologies in headquarters and non-headquarters duty stations:

"Both the representatives of the ILO administration and the ILO Staff Union are most concerned by the modifications to the above methodologies. Negative reactions from staff serving in ILO field offices throughout the world continue to flood in as part of a movement involving staff from all UN agencies at the duty stations.

"A committed field staff is imperative to ensure high quality of services and good delivery rates by agencies. Without their continuing motivation and dedication to duty, agency field operations will suffer. The changes to the methodologies, particularly the increases in the number of comparators, are likely to have a negative impact on salary levels for local staff and accordingly the UN common system will lose its competitiveness in the marketplace.

"Given the reaction of our staff to the changes, as responsible administrations we must be aware of potential implications, including a deterioration in staff-management relations, all the more so when the decisions made on the revised methodologies cannot be justified purely on technical grounds.

"Finally, it would be appropriate to recall two of the most salient points of the Flemming Principle: *'the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity'* and *'the organizations of the United Nations system must be competitive with those employers in the same labour market.'*"

Exchange of mails between FICSA General Secretary and Chair of ILO Staff Union Committee:

"Dear Jean Victor and members of the ILO SU,

"As you all know there was an enormous global mobilization from all staff, HQ and non-HQ duty stations, who were concerned that the changes in the methodology, if implemented as suggested, could further diminish the relevance of the Flemming Principle in establishing conditions of employment in the

field. We thank the effort of the ILO SU and its members in the field for their hard work. It was no easy task but perseverance, sound arguments and the petitions did pay off. Thank you for the work of the ILO SU here and in the field.

"There were no concessions by the ICSC on the number of comparators or percentage of the public/non-public sector; however, after initial refusal to reopen the debate on the methodology, the Commission did agree to discuss the Conference Room Paper (CRP) written jointly by FICSA and CCISUA with support from the ILO Staff Union. The CRP proposed changes to the actual text of the methodology that aimed to introduce provisions for enhanced transparency, clarity in the allocation of responsibility and accountability, flexibility in the application of revised categorization and retention criteria for public sector comparators, and safeguards to avoid an uncontrolled recourse to alternative data collection techniques. Measures for the improved role and responsibilities of the Local Salary Survey Committee (LSSC) were also presented.

"The agreed changes to the language of the methodology and accompanying comments, as well as the concluding remarks, demonstrate that there were some gains but efforts will need to be made for capacity-building at the field level.

"Best regards,

Maria Dweggah
General Secretary, FICSA
15 August 2003"

"Dear Maria,

"Thanks a lot for the information, and the details in attached documents.

"We are also of the opinion that progress was made, and that the concerns voiced loud and clear by staff across the system actually forced the ICSC into reopening the discussion – which benefited a lot from the outstanding technical preparation by Mauro Pace whom I wish to thank here publicly.

"It was an important objective of the fight to regain lost ground, to ensure that the LSSC be again recognized as the primary body in charge of conducting the surveys. As mentioned in your communication, this now requires that efforts 'be made for capacity-building at the field level'.

"We are ready to discuss plans or proposals for that capacity-building exercise, which I presume could be organized on the basis of proximity of dates for planned salary surveys.

"With best regards,

JV Gruat
Chair, ILO Staff Union Committee
29 August 2003"

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AUX QUATRE COINS

COMMUNICATION DU COMITÉ

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Union est l'organe de presse du Syndicat du personnel du Bureau international du Travail. Son Comité de rédaction détermine la ligne éditoriale et le contenu du journal. Les communications du Comité du Syndicat, qui est l'organe exécutif du Syndicat, sont identifiées en tant que telles dès lors qu'elles sont publiées dans Union.

Réunion des membres titulaires des régions

La deuxième réunion, pour l'année 2003, des membres titulaires des régions s'est tenue à Beyrouth le 22 septembre 2003 à la veille de la réunion régionale pour l'Europe et le Moyen-Orient.

Après avoir fait un tour de table des problèmes rencontrés par les représentants syndicaux dans chaque région, les participants ont constaté de grandes similitudes.

Méthodologie du calcul des salaires. Il a été décidé que, si possible en concertation avec la FICSA, le Syndicat devait organiser des cours de formation à l'intention des collègues devant participer aux enquêtes salariales. En effet, la méthodologie adoptée par la CFPI nous oblige à plus de vigilance et à plus de combativité dans chaque lieu d'affectation afin d'éviter une érosion des salaires.

Cette formation sera organisée pour chaque région en fonction du calendrier des enquêtes prévues. Une formation plus spécifique concernant les ajustements de poste pourra être fournie en fonction des besoins. La déléguée pour les Amériques a remis un document résumé du Manuel des Comités locaux de méthodologies des salaires pour une meilleure compréhension et un meilleur usage de cette méthodologie.

Classification. Cette question reste la préoccupation principale de nos collègues des régions. Ils ont noté une grande subjectivité de la part du management dans l'accès aux grades supérieurs. Les membres titulaires ont notamment constaté une très grande différence de grade concernant des fonctions similaires dans la même région.

Le Syndicat étudiera, au cas par cas, l'étape où se situe le problème de reclassification dans le cadre du *Baseline Agreement* et agira d'une manière appropriée. Nos collègues du terrain placent beaucoup d'espoir dans la procédure normale de reclassification récemment réintroduite. Il a été noté que la prétendue *Class Action* était allée au bout de ses possibilités et qu'aucun recours au Tribunal administratif n'avait été déposé dans les délais impartis pour ce qui est des recours individuels. Ils ont demandé des orientations claires sur la manière d'aborder l'application des accords déjà révisés.

Stratégie du Syndicat. Le Comité du Syndicat a décidé de développer des cours de formation aux formateurs. Il s'agit d'identifier sur le terrain des collègues motivés à prendre plus de responsabilités à l'avenir dans les activités syndicales. Le référendum interne a eu pour résultat, entre autres, de favoriser la présence des régions dans les activités syndicales. Ce référendum a adopté toutes les modifications proposées aux Statuts du Syndicat.

Recrutement, sélection et carrières. Dans l'attente de procédures plus précises, les représentants syndicaux travailleront à la constitution de comités locaux avec les représentants de l'administration dans les divers lieux d'affectation, en suivant l'exemple déjà fourni par le Bureau pour les Amériques (Comité de sélection régional à Lima, et local dans chaque bureau de la région).

Ces comités devraient permettre de traiter les questions de gestion des effectifs avec équité et transparence, notamment dans l'application des règles concernant l'engagement du personnel local.

Sécurité. Les représentants syndicaux s'attacheront à favoriser, voire développer, un matériel de sensibilisation et de formation adaptées aux situations locales en matière de sécurité comme cela a déjà été fait au Bureau pour les Amériques.

Accès aux facilités de prêts. Des informations ont été fournies sur le fonctionnement d'un système de crédits au niveau des Nations Unies (UNFCU) acceptant les demandes de fonctionnaires recrutés localement selon des modalités apparemment favorables pour les fonctionnaires intéressés. Le Comité du Syndicat aidera les représentants pour l'Europe et le Moyen Orient à permettre au personnel d'accéder à cette facilité dont ils ne connaissaient pas l'existence.

Referendum on proposed Amendments to the Staff Union Rules

As indicated in its Programme and Strategy for 2003, the Staff Union Committee submitted to the membership proposals for amending Union rules on the basis of conclusions drawn up by an ad hoc working group established a few years ago by the Annual General Meeting. Owing to the complexity of the subject – 31 questions were asked, covering all aspects of Staff Union organization and functioning – the participation rate was rather low, i.e. 5 % (22 answers from the Field and 54 answers from Headquarters). The 76 responses corresponded nonetheless to a far greater number of opinions expressed than when the rules were last amended by a General Meeting – when hardly a dozen members remained until the end to adopt what were indeed uncontroversial amendments. All the proposed amendments have been accepted, with an average of 52 Yes and 8 No. The resulting rules correspond to what is published in the second column of the document at

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/staffun/info/referendum/rules.pdf>

The new rules notably entail a significantly higher level of recognition for field-based Union members – who are a majority in the ILO staff and in the Union – and shop stewards, plus a number of provisions aimed at improving the democracy and efficiency of the Staff Union. The second session of the General Meeting to be held by the end of October 2003 will solemnly proclaim the adoption of the revised set of Union rules, which will be subsequently published in booklet form and distributed to all members.

Pique-nique musical

Afin de profiter de l'air conditionné et d'agiter un peu la somnolence du mois d'août caniculaire, le Comité du Syndicat a organisé mardi 19 août, au pied levé, un pique-nique au Salon du personnel au R1.

Ce sont près de 30 personnes qui ont profité de l'occasion pour échapper pendant deux heures au stress de la vie professionnelle et partager les plats d'un buffet canadien dans une ambiance décontractée et musicale.

Un grand merci à INTER, qui avait en plus organisé une visite des locaux du Centre Fitness en compagnie de M. Dubuis pour permettre aux pique-niqueurs à se faire une première idée de cette nouvelle activité de l'Association Sports et Loisirs.

Merci aux personnes présentes d'avoir répondu à notre invitation.

REJOIGNEZ NOUS!

• Adhérer • Communiquer • Participer

A giant has fallen: Memories of working with Sergio Vieira de Mello

On 19 August 2003, we were all woken from our summer inertia by news of the bombing of the UN building in Baghdad and the death of over 20 staff, among them UN Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Initially, Sergio seemed to be the only one named, although all the fallen colleagues were trying to serve fellow human beings in a dangerous context. We well knew the enormous risks for international and local staff in crisis response work. Just a few weeks before, a colleague on a project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and his family had been savagely attacked by a band of machete-wielding militia while at home asleep. But nothing prepared us for the shock of Baghdad.

Donato: In November 1997, Sergio was the UN Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs' magazine was preparing an issue on the theme "Missions in Peril". As editor-in-chief, I called Sergio for an article. His immediate response was a piece entitled "Who cares for the carers?" In that article, which now sadly looks like something between a prophecy and a testament, he wrote that "working in insecure environments has almost become a norm. Anything can happen. There are no clear dividing lines between victims and aggressors, combatants and non-combatants". Even more tellingly, he went on:

"The apparent indifference towards the security of humanitarian personnel is striking... Governments are not averse to letting humanitarian staff go where they do not dare send their troops, who are invariably better equipped, better trained and better protected... Those responsible for killing or wounding humanitarian staff are almost never brought to justice... In the absence of a more active support from governments, the question arises how far should humanitarian workers go? Should those agencies begin to refuse to intervene in the absence of adequate security conditions? What would the consequence of such a stance be?"

This was not a rhetorical question for Sergio, who had a precise answer:

"With the departure of UN staff, in the midst of the darkness of a war, a beacon of hope is extinguished for many. Each withdrawal reflects not only on those directly responsible for the attacks, but also on the international community as a whole. It reflects a moral retreat. It is indicative of a rising threshold of atrocities the international community are willing to countenance. Governments have it within their means to reverse this trend and to diminish the risk we are exposed to. It is time they acted."

Sergio was not prepared for a moral retreat, or indeed any other sort. I had a personal demonstration of his courage and determination years before, in October 1994 when he was in charge of civil affairs for the UN mission in the former Yugoslavia. Assigned to the International Criminal Tribunal (ICTY), I was dispatched to Zagreb during the summer of that year to prepare under Sergio's supervision the basis for possible cooperation agreements with the national authorities concerned. He firmly believed that bringing to justice those responsible for war crimes, genocide and other atrocities was an essential step towards peace and reconciliation. When Richard Goldstone, the ICTY Prosecutor, made his first visit to Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sergio used all his negotiating skills to open channels of communication at the highest level. He also managed to persuade Bosnian Serb and Muslim fighters that they had to allow the visit of Goldstone (the man who was going to indict them for war crimes) to a besieged Sarajevo during one of the most tragic moments of that protracted war.

The visit coincided with atrocities being committed on both sides. At the beginning of October, the tension was at its peak and the airport of Sarajevo (the main lifeline for those under siege) was closed for two weeks in retaliation for the first NATO military strikes. Sergio had arranged for two helicopters to bring the ICTY Prosecutor and his group of four accompanying officers to Kiseljak, not far from Sarajevo. A fog so thick that

the pilots were compelled to fly back to Split once we were already over Kiseljak nullified the first attempt. But Sergio did not give up. I was standing next to him when he calmly started negotiating over the radio a new safe air corridor for us to land directly in Sarajevo.

We took off again from Split. Navigating a sea of clouds and fog, we could distinguish nothing outside the cockpit. The pilots obviously had the same problem and for one long hour we felt lost in a surreal atmosphere where the noise of the propellers was the only reminder of the fact that we were in the air. Bouncing up and down, I looked at Sergio who was probably also asking himself if we would make it. He jotted down something on a piece of paper and passed it to me. It said: "We are looking for a hole in the clouds." We finally found the hole and landed in Sarajevo, virtually reopening that tarmac to air traffic. Sergio had managed to persuade fighters on the hills around Sarajevo not to shoot us down, and they kept their promise. Those flying with him have yet to thank him for that safe passage... now that he is looking through the clouds.

Eugenia: I spent two weeks with Sergio in May 1999, as a member of the UN assessment mission he led to Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro at the height of the NATO offensive against Yugoslav government atrocities in Kosovo. Sergio had a presence, extraordinary intellect, stamina and bravery which made some of us feel almost unfit for the task. Our daily 18 hours' work, including intellectual brainstorming, long road journeys in unsafe locations, extensive interviews, late meals, delicate negotiations with various groups, and writing reports into the small hours under the constant noise of bombs falling nearby, was sapping our energies just a few days into the mission. In contrast, Sergio never seemed tired but always alert, friendly and polite to all the people we met even when their hidden obnoxious agendas were apparent. I could never keep pace with his walking. I later remarked on this to a colleague, who pointed out that Sergio regularly jogged.

He had a rigorous approach to gathering the information for which the Security Council had dispatched our mission. Sometimes he would leave the team behind when he judged the location to be very unsafe and go alone with his skeletal personal security. I found this selflessness a testimony to not only his bravery but his total dedication to his work. I came to think of my participation in the Kosovo mission as a privilege, since it provided me with the opportunity to learn from a consummate master of the trade. So great was his passion for crisis response work that he took a lot of risks at the peril of his life.

Immediately after the report had been submitted to the Security Council, he wrote to each member of the mission, adding a personal note in his own handwriting. He had none of the pomposity often seen in people of his stature.

After Kosovo, I had a few very brief encounters, such as at donor meetings on East Timor and last December at a Consolidated Appeals launch on Somalia, Sudan and DRC. What struck me at these events was his towering intellect and the global admiration and respect he commanded.

The incident in Baghdad, while extreme, is a wake-up call for the UN as a whole to revisit its crisis response interventions, especially during conflicts, and re-examine the approaches adopted, the extent of risks that staff should be subjected to, and how to strengthen the protection of staff – international and local.

When those of us in crisis work go to crisis countries, we have a false sense of security that the banner of the UN will protect us from harm, as it testifies to our neutral stance. This incident has shaken us out of our delusion.

On 26 August 2003, the UN Security Council passed a resolution condemning attacks against UN personnel and equating them with crimes against humanity. The text is a compromise; not exactly what humanitarian workers and international civil servants would have wished. Despite the enormity of these crimes, the International Criminal Court has not been called in to judge them; the national jurisdiction of each member State will solely be responsible. Yet for too long, too many UN officers working in all corners of the world in vital missions paid with their lives the price exacted by warlords and criminal regimes. It took many decades to reach agreement on a princi-

ple which should have been affirmed long ago, before the sacrifice of so many enthusiastic peacekeepers and aid workers, before the martyrdom of a modern symbol of heroism.

So far, the latest UN resolution is perhaps the most relevant tribute to Sergio Vieira de Mello, who more than anybody else lived his life through the UN, with his mission clear in his mind and no doubts about his own engagement. But he was constantly preoccupied by the high risks to which UN personnel are exposed and stated many times that “humanitarian agencies should not be left to act alone without protection in a conflict environment”.

For us, in life or in death, Sergio will forever be a mentor.

Eugenia Date Bah and Donato Kiniger-Passigli ■

Protecting local project staff: Another ILO failure

Senior ILO officials Walid Hamdan and Mike Shone, both members of the ILO Staff Union Committee, recently undertook an eight-day ILO Needs Assessment mission to Baghdad together with the Chief of the ILO Task Force for Iraq, Yousef Qaryouti, who is also the Chairperson of the ILO Staff Union Committee in Beirut. The three were extremely fortunate to have left Baghdad before the blast that destroyed the UN headquarters, where they spent considerable time. They flew out on the day the Jordanian embassy was bombed, and travelled to the airport wondering just what the plumes of dense black smoke were that they could see en route.

Fully insured – almost

Members were aware that they and their families were covered by the provisions of Annex II of the ILO Staff Regulations in the event of any unforeseen accident during their mission, but nevertheless in travelling on the official UN Air Service¹ they were all taken aback at being obliged to sign a waiver certificate which reads, inter alia, “neither the carrier nor any of its officers or employees, in any circumstances whatsoever, [shall] be liable for any loss, damage or destruction to property or any passenger and/or any injury or death to any person from any cause whatsoever”.

The ILO mission had been met at Baghdad airport by Martha Teas, formerly with WFP, who was very helpful in providing contacts, having worked closely with the ILO in her former duty stations in Cambodia and Laos. Tragically Ms. Teas was one of those who died in the bombing. Many others were seriously injured, including UNDP Country Director Nada Al-Nashif, who had spent so much valuable time assisting the mission.

Mission members were greatly shocked by the news of the bombing in Baghdad and at the same time angered by the poor security at the UN headquarters which allowed this tragedy to occur. Numerous previous visits had made it clear that from the very outset the security measures in place were lacking essential elements. In hindsight, this fundamental absence of basic minimum security can be seen to have made the entry of the suicide vehicle so easy.

Fortunately the ILO local staff engaged in a Community Rehabilitation project were not hurt in the blast. They are currently employed on Service Agreements without the protection of the Malicious Act Insurance that is available to other UN agency staff, and this is of great concern to both the ILO Mission and the ILO Beirut office, which is endeavouring to change the existing contracts.

ILO local project staff denied Malicious Act Insurance. Why? And why do other agencies now lead the way where the ILO should be the role model?

ILO stands alone – doing nothing

At a recent UN inter-agency briefing at the WHO in Geneva on Security Awareness, the instructor announced to the assembled

representatives of various agencies that the ILO is the only major UN agency which currently does not provide Malicious Act Insurance protection to its local project staff engaged under Service Agreements (SAs). While this announcement was news to some, others in the ILO, particularly in the Staff Union, have been aware of this for some time. During the past nine months they have been trying (so far without success) to get HRDD to remedy this situation, either by instructing field office Directors not to use SAs or by providing this basic insurance protection. The current situation is untenable for the ILO, an organization which espouses Decent Work and yet denies some of its own employees the minimum protection available in other UN agencies. HRDD says it is a question of cost, and that in any case Professional and General Service staff are covered by the Staff Regulations Annex II insurance provisions for service-incurred accidents and illnesses – although one has to wonder about the applicability of such protection when flying on the current UN Air Service. Others in the Administration claim that local staff willingly sign up to such Service Agreements and simply need to look after their own insurance. One set of standards for the Ps and Gs and another for the local project staff, all working in the same environment. Is that fair? Or is that discrimination?

Decent Work – for some

Yes, converting SAs to National Officer contracts would cost the ILO and its donor-supported projects more. But surely there are some basic Decent Work principles involved here, and a clear policy statement is needed now from HRDD. Currently the ILO has Professional staff in many high-risk countries such as the DRC, Afghanistan, the Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and Palestine. They cannot operate without the effective support of the local project staff who are regularly called on to work in high-risk areas, often on their own, such as western Nepal, Mindanao in the Philippines, northern Sri Lanka, Iraq and the DRC, not to mention post-conflict countries in Latin America. There have recently been some terrible incidents affecting the lives of the families of ILO staff engaged under SAs, who have suffered as a result (for reasons of confidentiality these details are not disclosed here).

As the ILO has gradually been taking an increasing role in the front line in crisis countries and has now made special funding allocation for Crisis Response projects, more ILO local project staff are being exposed to risks without the protection of Malicious Act Insurance. It is high time that the ILO woke up to its responsibilities, caught up with the rest of the UN family and tried to regain its respected role as a leader in Decent Work and conditions of employment for common system staff. But can we really expect any timely changes from the current Administration? Experience shows otherwise.

Mike Shone and Walid Hamdan ■

¹ Similar conditions also apply to the UN Air Service into Kabul, used regularly by ILO P staff.

The logo for the Staff Union, featuring the word "union" in a stylized, lowercase, blue font. The letter 'i' is unique, with a blue circle above it that overlaps the top of the 'n'.

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Imprimeur: Imprimerie Genevoise SA, 12 rue des Mouettes, 1227 Carouge

Régie Publicitaire: Publi-Annonces SA, 25 rue Jacques-Grosselin, 1227 Carouge

A Marie-Reine Bleuze

« Et ce bien idéal que toute âme désire
Et qui n'a pas de nom au terrestre séjour »
Lamartine, *Méditations poétiques*

A toi qui l'as quitté trop tôt, le terrestre séjour, je dédie ces mots de l'Alphonse, tu sais, ce type un peu romantique et tout triste qui pleurerait au bord des lacs...

De ton céleste séjour, désormais, je suis sûre que tu me lis. Notre petit univers paperassier parfois trop policé ne résonne plus de tes éclats de rire, et ça fait comme un grand vide. Comment te le dire? Tiens, même si je m'efforce de continuer de tenir mon rôle dans la bande dessinée peuplée de personnages plus ou moins agités dans laquelle nous vivons quotidiennement, j'ai quelque chose d'un Rantanplan flapi. Le sage Seepah-Kom-Ilfô lui-même, ce gourou du document parfait que j'avais inventé pour t'amuser les jours où tu « prenais vapeur » devant certaines mesquineries, s'est fracassé dans un accident de lévitation.

Je ne veux plus me souvenir de tous ces moments où j'ai assisté, témoin impuissant et bouleversé, à l'inexorable progression de la maladie. J'ai admiré ton courage, cette force qui te faisait rire de tes malheurs, plaindre ceux qui souffraient du même mal et

compatir à la fatigue des médecins qui te soignaient. Tu n'aurais pas voulu que l'on se complaise dans la tristesse, alors je préfère garder de toi une image gaie.

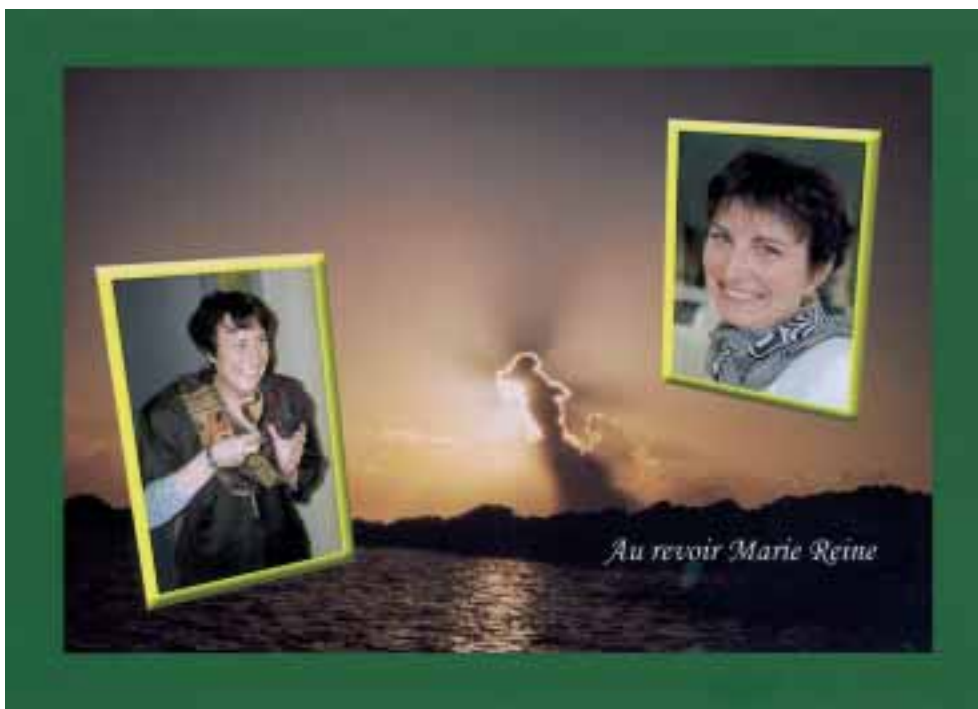
Un matin, alors que j'étais dans ton bureau occupée à t'écrire un message, tu as surgi, walkyrie scotériste aux joues rougies par le grand air; tout en me disant bonjour, tu t'es précipitée devant ton miroir pour constater que tes cheveux étaient plutôt raplapla – maudit casque! –, te saisir sur-le-champ d'une bombe de mousse coiffante et t'en servir si généreusement que, en un clin d'œil, nous fûmes toutes deux constellées de taches de mousse blanche, la moquette aussi, ce qui déclencha une de ces grandes crises d'hilarité dont tu avais le secret.

Car tu étais ainsi, surprenante de naturel, capable de susciter selon les jours des gags ou des « crises d'amélioration », au grand dam des « pousse-papier » résignés. Dans le travail, tu étais notre Jules Vallès en jupon, insurgée permanente contre les injustices, les incohérences, les faux-semblants, les non-dits, et prête à réorganiser l'Organisation, vaste entreprise s'il en est...

Gageons que, là-haut, tu t'emploies à convaincre l'Eternel qu'il faut changer le monde, et pas plus tard que tout de suite!

Mais, ici-bas, ce que tu nous manques...

Patricia Philipps ■



Fiscalité

Le 14 janvier 2003, un tribunal constitué en vertu de l'Accord de siège de l'UNESCO a rendu une sentence arbitrale concluant que la clause de l'Accord qui exonère les traitements et émoluments versés par l'Organisation ne couvre pas les pensions de retraite. Vous pouvez obtenir, sur demande au Secrétariat de la Section des anciens de notre Syndicat, un résumé de la sentence et un aperçu des premières réactions qu'elle a suscitées. Cette affaire vous concerne, actifs comme retraités, car, pour l'essentiel, la clause d'exonération est la même dans les Accords de siège de l'OIT et de l'UNESCO. Vous devez donc savoir que cet arbitrage n'a pas réglé la question du statut fiscal de la retraite en France par suite des restrictions inexplicablement imposées au tribunal. Ainsi, il a dû limiter son examen aux « anciens fonctionnaires »; or l'article pertinent de l'Accord (22)

visé les « fonctionnaires régis par le Statut du personnel » et, aux termes de celui-ci, il ne peut s'agir que des fonctionnaires qui ont quitté l'UNESCO avant l'âge de la retraite et n'ont pas été réintégrés dans un certain délai (normalement deux ans); certains peuvent toucher une retraite différée.

La question du statut fiscal de nos retraites en Suisse, de même, n'est toujours pas réglée régulièrement. Elles y sont imposées depuis 1985 alors que notre Service juridique dit n'avoir pas trace dans ses dossiers d'une certaine interprétation de l'Accord de siège de l'OIT que les tribunaux de la place invoquent pour justifier cette imposition.

R. Cuvillier ■

ILO DIARY

The best part of a lifetime embedded in the mainstream

- Sorry about that interruption – urgent phone call from a field office. Now, where were we? Oh yes...
- **When management agreed to donate a set of used computers to a charity for street children in Brazil, the official behind the initiative was understandably delighted at the Office's generosity. Not for long. The administration's point man on the question refused point blank to free up anything more high-performance than a load of old Pentium IIs gathering dust in the corner. Since these antiques are two a penny even in impoverished South American countries, the outcome had to be Thanks – but No Thanks. Oh well. It's the thought that counts, right?**
- More on the curious case of the retiree hired to write the official history of the ILO. To perform this vital task the Office had hired a lady – for lady she undoubtedly is – who was already 11 years old when the Organization was founded in 1919. If the Diary's bulging (albeit empty) postbag after the news broke here in June last year is anything to go by, many staff members could not wait to get their hands on this momentous tome. Some of them even intended to read it (*this joke dated circa 1929 – Ed.*). So prepare to be disappointed – because there will be no book. When the hapless historian submitted her first three chapters, the contents provoked much wailing and gnashing of dentures among a cabal of grizzled ILO veterans. No doubt jealous because no one had asked them to write it, they seized on a couple of minor inaccuracies to pronounce the whole enterprise unsalvageable. Result: the author was thanked for her trouble and paid off. All that effort for nothing! Well, almost nothing – US\$15,000, to be precise. Barely enough to cover expenses, is it?
- **An ILO fire drill is always a welcome diversion, enabling one to break off from vital work that was due yesterday and assemble by the lifts with raincoat, handbag, carkeys and – drat! Forgot the housekeys – to be reminded of the main causes of fire: candles, kettles, coffee machines, failure to switch off the computer, and so on. No doubt in other, less progressive organizations, employees also need to be warned about the dangers of smouldering cigarette butts and dropped matches. Fortunately, however, we have a smoking ban. So there's no need.**
- The saying "there's no flies on him/her" is a compliment that once could confidently be bestowed on all ILO senior officials. Alas, no more. Ilote hears that the insect infestation that one year ago was making life a misery for colleagues on the 8th floor has now spread to other levels. OK, so foodstuffs in the R1 kitchen have been seen covered in swarms of creepy-crawlies: that's one thing. But that the office of an important departmental director on the 4th floor now looks much like Jeff Goldblum's laboratory in *The Fly* – well, that's quite another. There's worse, however – much, much worse. For whenever the same departmental director goes to wash his hands (and face it, with all those flies buzzing around, you'd want to quite a lot, wouldn't you?), he has nothing to dry them on. You see, the roller towel in the men's room hasn't been changed since mid-August. Which has put his proboscis well out of joint. And staff in the Pavilion thought they had it bad having to bring their own toilet paper...
- **Talking of which, say what you like about the good folks at DCOMM; they are nothing if not indefatigable. Despite a series of knockbacks (rejection of the new logo, teething pains with the *ILO Media Handbook*, etc.) they keep on coming up with bright new ideas to keep us all on message. The latest is a doozy. It's an illuminated red plaque bearing the (old) logo in blue beside the inspiring slogan: "pour lutter contre le travail des enfants, signez l'appel de l'Organisation internationale du Travail". And where will you find it? Why, engraved into the urinal in the R1 North men's shower room, of course. That ought to prick a few consciences.**
- Racing to an important meeting on the third floor that started 15 minutes ago (if all the ILO's Rolex clocks were not systematically set 10 minutes slow, it might have been possible to be

only 5 minutes late like everyone else), the dehydrated diarist makes a relief stop at the water fountain. At the press of a button, a viscous brown liquid squirts forth and settles, glutinous, on the parched tongue. Far from pretty to look at, it is nonetheless somehow curiously refreshing, offering a kind of interior thalassotherapy. For a brief, atavistic moment, Ilote is transported back in time, to the primeval swamps where unsuspecting innocents would lap at the muddy waters while carnivorous reptiles lay in wait to swallow them whole with one snap of their lethal jaws. Ah yes, the meeting! Thirst quenched, pausing only to wipe the lips with a discarded page from the *ILO Media Handbook*, a reinvigorated official strides out imbued with new hope. Does the organization realize how delicious is the earthy nectar that flows through its intricate plumbing system? Surely someone has the vision to see that people would be prepared to pay, say, 10 centimes a cup for this stuff!

• **And while we're giving credit where it's due, is it too late to thank HRD for its 2002 Christmas present to fertile male staff? All records were broken in rushing out the circular on "Work-Life Measures" announcing a 24-month experiment on paternity leave that had begun one year before, on 1 December 2001. This column has no idea whether ILO employees whose loins had borne fruit in the interim were able to avail themselves retroactively of this innovative benefit when they found out about it. But at least one official did manage to exercise his right before the circular came out, possibly because he was the only one who knew of its existence. Who was that alpha male? Wild horses couldn't drag the name out of the diarist.**

"Ilote" ■

(Editor's note: Ilote's ramblings in no way reflect positions adopted by any Staff Union committee. All contributions welcome. Write in confidence to ilote2002@hotmail.com)

Histoire d'eau

I am glad to note that the Office is taking measures to protect us from the water in the fountains to which we have previously had access – it is removing the water fountains (on 3rd and 6th floors, for now) and replacing them with coffee machines. BUT, in order to ensure that we do have access to water, we will also have the right to buy tap water through the new distributors for only 10 centimes a cup, as opposed to the nasty free stuff we have had until now.

It was explained to me that the water fountains had never been cleaned and were therefore dirty – well, I'm glad to have that cleared up. The need to replace them, and charge for the water, instead of cleaning them is obvious, isn't it?

I have some further suggestions to protect our health further. First, we are given the option of getting water from the taps in the toilets, even though – a danger highlighted in the explanation I received from INTER – some people might actually put their mouths and their saliva right up to the tap and leave germs there. Obviously a bad option. I therefore propose that the internal services ensure that the water in the taps is slightly warm, to discourage us from drinking it, and leaving our germs there. And we could be further protected if just the tiniest bit of salt were included in the water, to encourage us to drink the healthier water from the machines – for 10 centimes a cup, of course.

Pay toilets are the logical next step, so that our health is even better protected. In the spirit of gender equality, the facilities in the men's and women's toilets should of course be "equalized", so that there is not an unfair financial burden on half the office.

Lee Swepston ■

• "A sufficient supply of wholesome drinking water or of some other wholesome drink shall be made available to workers": Hygiene (Commerce and Offices) Convention (No. 120), 1964, Article 12 (*Ed.*).