

PCS, Annual Conference, Brighton, 16th, May 2007

« International rally »

Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends,

On this day when a new president is coming into function in France, I feel like saying, as a « joke » : « Welcome to Sarkoland ! »...

On behalf of EPSU and the FGF-FO, my union in France, allow me to bring you my warmest and most fraternal greetings.

First of all, I'd like to tell you that I am really glad and honoured to be here with you to take part into your annual conference and especially for this international « workshop ».

As you may already know, I am the president of EPSU, but as French trade unionist, I also work for the Fédération Générale des Fonctionnaires Force Ouvrière, affiliated member of EPSU, which represents the State civil servants.

This short speech will be focused on 3 main points :

1. a brief outline on the situation of Civil service in France at a time when Sarkozy becomes president, with a clear will of keeping on reforming, decentralising, privatising public services and civil service.
2. the need for setting and developing relationships between sister's unions throughout the European Union
3. the role played by EPSU to develop its social agenda and demands, facing conservative powers in the European Parliament and the Commission, trying to create more and more solidarity between its affiliates.

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1. In February this year, almost all the unions representing the French civil servants decided to go on strike and to organize demos all over the country to protest against :
 - The failure of social dialogue regarding wages increases, bearing in mind that since 2000, we have lost more than 7% of our purchasing power,
 - Job cuts or no replacement of civil servants, mainly in 2 sectors : Education and Department of Finance. Within the next 4 years, 40 % of the civil servants (State, Local and Regional Government, Hospital) will be retired.
 - The increase of precarious jobs, outsourcing, privatisation, bad working conditions.

We are waiting for a new government to be appointed, but according to what has been said during the last campaign for Election, we can guess that we are not on the way...

for the best ! The current ministries are expected to be « remodeled » through mergers and so far, we don't even know whether there will be a ministry for civil service or not.... Nevertheless, we hope to be able to re-open the negotiations so that our demands will be taken into account.

2. Let's jump to the second point :

Why do we need setting and strengthening transnational relationships ? I feel the answer is rather simple : because we are facing the same problems, the same challenges. The policies impulsed by the governments in the EU member states are widely inspired by the same ideology : NEO-LIBERALISM, which means less public administration, less public services.

Among the labour movement, we can see that our demands, our fights are similar : decent jobs and wages, decent pensions, quality public services for the citizens.

At this stage, I'd like to mention how much we appreciated the participation of the PCS delegation into our demo in Paris, last 8th of February. I also want to mention that thanks to a contact made last year during your conference with the driving licence examiners, my French colleagues could be in touch with their British counterparts to share experiences, trying to see how to work together at the European level to lobby and influence the policies regarding road safety and driving licences. This shows that despite the barrier of language, historical or cultural differences, joint work and joint actions can be undertaken !

3. And last but not least : the 3rd point regarding the role of EPSU, recalling a recent statement made by Carola Fischbach-Pyttel, the General Secretary : « EPSU has essentially developed over the last 15 years. We have a well developed sectoral work, we have been able to develop social dialogue in a number of areas, we have developed a collective bargaining network, (...) we have improved our lobbying and campaigning capacity and in April last year, we launched the EPSU quality public services/quality of life camapaign. So far, we have had over 60 national and local events in over 20 European countries, which shows that accross the European Union, more and more actions are taking place which underline the basic desire to see public services celebrated, not crushed ».

So, let me wish you all the best for your conference, long life to PCS, long life to our unions which « make us strong » (as a famous song uses to say...), long life to public services and don't forget signing the ETUC petition !

Thank you for your attention.

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