



Untouchable AXA?

The EWC has asked AXA CEO Henri de Castries to give active consideration to having AXA sign up to the Ambedkar Principles designed to tackle Dalit (“Untouchable”) discrimination in India. Caste discrimination in India is still widespread, despite being illegal, and the EWC want AXA to take a leading role and make a moral stand on the issue by adopting the Ambedkar Principles on employment in its Indian operation, AXA Business Services.



Henri de Castries said that this would need to pursue locally, but none of us are in favour of discrimination and signing these principles would be a good step. He agreed to look at the practical implications of signing the *Ambedkar Principles* and Group HR Director Alain Rohaut agreed to meet with representatives of the **International Dalit Solidarity Network**.

What are the Ambedkar Principles?

The Ambedkar Principles are a set of principles designed by the International Dalit Solidarity Network to target discrimination of dalits through companies trading in South East Asia building on existing laws and policies. The ten principles cover making specific reference to caste discrimination in employment policies and training of all staff on the issue to ensuring suppliers comply with national legislation and appointing a senior manager to oversee implementation of the principles. A copy of the Ambedkar Principles can be found at www.idsn.org.

HDC challenged over Thinc miles...

UK delegates challenged the AXA CEO over the decision not to give Thinc staff the AXA Miles. Henri de Castries reiterated the claim that Thinc needed to maintain its independence and this is why it was decided locally to not give staff the shares. The UK delegation pointed out that there was no reason to exclude the office based staff and that Thinc’s “independence” argument was somewhat disingenuous given the fact that their website clearly states they are an AXA subsidiary. Henri de Castries agreed to ask the UK management to look again at the decision but could not commit to giving Thinc employees the Miles denied them by their management.

AXA Belgium told: “Learn Chinese...”

Henri de Castries told Belgian delegates to face reality when they complained about changes to their salary structure which would no longer guarantee the 6,500 AXA Belgium staff an inflation linked pay rise. De Castries reminded the Belgians of their colleagues in Fortis, where the competitor has had to sell half its holdings to the leading Chinese insurer, stating if AXA Belgium did not take action now to ensure its survivability the Belgians would need to start learning to speak Chinese.

A similar message was given to the Irish delegation on the same issue, with De Castries telling them that better to take the pain now of losing guaranteed above inflation pay rises than have no company tomorrow given the turbulent Irish insurance market.



Move to Land of Proof...

Henri de Castries said that AXA had to move from “the land of promises” to the “land of proof” for both customers and staff.

His presentation to the EWC on the state of the group was generally upbeat given the global credit situation. He likened AXA to a ship that could continue on its course with one or two holed compartments (naming the UK as one of these), though perhaps adding “just like the *Titanic*” was unfortunate...