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Mindless European Union

Posted by Bruno Waterfield on 29 May 2008 at 20:02

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Working here in the capital of the European Union can often be a surreal experience. I am indebted to Devil for cooking up this fine footage of the prancing eurocrats of the future in his kitchen. I have a story in the newspaper tomorrow, showing the truly EU space cadet qualities of Euro-MPs who are lavishing yet more of our money on their absurd pretensions and capers.

EU flags

The new EU campaign is truly bizarre

I have been on holiday in rural France, hence the gap in postings and my return to Brussels reporting has been quite a culture shock, even though I have been here over five years now. As I emptied my inbox, I could not but notice the launch of a new, truly loony “worldwide” EU campaign.

The Assembly of European Regions has the world’s dictionaries, especially Microsoft’s UK spellchecker, in its sights. I quote below and the letter, by Klaus Klipp, the AER’s Secretary-General, was not written in green ink.

“We are writing to draw your attention to the word “subsidiarity”, which we regretfully note is not listed in your dictionary.

“The principle of subsidiarity has been a pillar of social, theological and political thought for centuries, and is these days referred to in legal statutes, national constitutions and international treaties. The EU’s proposed Treaty of Lisbon, for example, mentions the word “subsidiarity” no less than 30 times.

“We are therefore puzzled that the word, despite its frequent use in European politics and law in particular, has been excluded from numerous dictionaries in languages across Europe and the world.

“We are especially concerned by the fact that the European Union, its member states and other nations are expected to respect a principle based upon a word so many dictionaries – and therefore citizens – do not even recognise.”

Subsidiarity in euro-jargon means “the principle that decisions should be taken as closely as possible to the citizen”.

The reason it is not in many dictionaries is that outside the arcane world of EU speak its origin actually lies in equally arcane Roman Catholic, or more precisely Vatican, social theory.

Here is a good definition: “The purpose of subsidiarity in Catholic Social Theory was, on the one hand, to limit the role of government as a whole in order to vindicate and protect the place of private institutions including the Church itself, while, on the other hand, justifying some role for government.

“This notion of subsidiarity was enmeshed in an understanding of society as an organism characterized by a hierarchy of organs. Subsequently subsidiarity has been used as a quasi-constitutional concept in some federal or federal-type political systems to provide a rationale for the allocation of powers between various levels of government.”

These definitions say nothing about democracy. Taking a decision close to citizens is not the same as the accountability of having elected officials who can be fired. Its origins in Catholic thinking are telling: the sheep can not kick out their shepherd at elections.

The AER’s campaign is moronic. But to include made up jargon words, such as subsidiarity, in our dictionaries is actually sinister. It is about the colonisation of language.

To accept EU jargon is to accept into thought the constraints of the EU. To become as flakey and dingbatty as the dancing, singing euro loons in the film. They like the S-word too, you will notice.

George Orwell, in his 1946 essay on Politics and the English Language had it right.

“The decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form,

and so on indefinitely. A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts. The point is that the process is reversible. Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step toward political regeneration: so that the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writer.”

One of Orwell’s rules clearly applies to the Subsidiarity question: “Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.”

This word should be kept out of the political dictionary.

The AER’s implausible campaign took another twist when “Subsidiarity Man”, he must once have been one of those clappy happy prancing types in the first clip, got busted in the very undemocratic EU quarter. Watch his antics below. Bizarre.