A really Nice assembly

Every three years AIIC holds its Assembly, which this January took place in Nice. As a governing body the Assembly has to approve the actions of its officers since the last Assembly and decide on strategy for the coming three years. It hears from various committees, elects officers and approves the budget. But really the event is an excuse to catch up with your friends.

Philip H. D. SMITH.
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January is the time for renewal, for de-cluttering, de-toxing and eyebrow taming. To this heady mix is added every three years the AIIC Assembly. What do you mean, you hadn't noticed?

The association was to hit the ground running with an Assembly Blog providing a blow by blow account to unfortunate members detained on the beach in Brazil. The literary burden was to fall on my slim and girlish shoulders. Well, okay Luigi Luccarelli helped by writing all the articles and working the computer, but I had got myself into the zone by buying a new camera to capture the quivering delight of an Assembly. They say that pride goes before a fall and we tumbled headlong because we could not upload our pithy prose owing to a technical hitch. Those on the aforementioned Brazilian beach surely wept bitter tears at missing our edge-of-the-seat reportage. Once the system was restored we played catch-up by trying to bring members some of the flavour of the meeting plus photos of colleagues. If you can name them all you're not getting out enough.

My first port of call was the Private Market Sector meeting. These are the hardy souls who ply their trade outside the warm embrace of the international organisations - the Free Marketeers. This year they (we - I too bask in their heroic glow) did some soul-searching about how we work with interpreters who are not members of AIIC. People had in the past asked about joining and got the cold shoulder and had therefore given up. We should all look deeply into the mirror and search for signs of guilt. Competent interpreters should be encouraged and we learned some good practice from the German region on how to join forces with them. I have to admit to a sneaking admiration for the German region because by the time AIIC gets round to discussing something they've been doing it for seven years. It was agreed that we should make an effort to establish good relations with non-members and, by our actions, encourage them to join. A Brazilian colleague suggested baiting our hook with a "proactive seduction programme". Where can I get tickets?

Competitive tendering has become the bane of many a carefree life. You know what it's like. Your in-laws are about to arrive, the cat has been sick, your eldest child says you must listen to her play the piano NOW MUMMY, your husband left the house hours ago to buy milk and has not come back (the useless lump), the baby is developing a cough and an administrative assistant at the National Authority on Administrative Effectiveness (motto: Get Weaving) is asking on the phone if you've duly completed the nine page compliance sheet on your company's cultural awareness policy. Saying "I speak four languages, have lived in seven countries, read newspapers produced by all the G8 members, can change a sparking plug with chopsticks and have been on anti-malarials since I
was 7" will cut no ice. The Private Market Sector is now on the case.

It has been suggested we could use AIIC's ready-made network to find people who want to exchange houses or endearing children. Some members think that adverts for second hand bikes would detract from the image we strive to put across, but in all fairness I don't think supporters of the idea were thinking about bikes, but more along these lines:

Will exchange *Learn Portuguese* (good condition, some caipirinha stains) for a copy of *German: a lifetime's work*.

Our moody, monosyllabic teenager has told us she will blossom into a garrulous sweetie but only in French. Any serious offers considered.

House swap: would you like to experience the cradle of the Industrial Revolution? Will exchange our bijoux residence in Gasworks Mews for anything on the Côte d'Azur. The arrangement includes the use of car and supply of air freshener.

For sale: four poster bed, 115 years old. Would suit antique lover.

**The Assembly**

*Thursday*

Bet you thought I'd never get there, so taken was I with the minutiae of the private market.

An Assembly considers in-house stuff like our rules and recommendations as well as looking at long term strategy. This time the two major policy debates were: professional secrecy and interpreters in conflict zones. FYI the latter is not an AIIC committee.

I'll readily confess that I am not very good at the rules and regulations stuff - I have striven to improve by buying books on organisations and business, even a small pamphlet on optimum stapler deployment, but to no appreciable avail.

At the Assembly we tend to look back, considering our achievements since our last gathering, and forward to what we'll do over the next three years. Our Presidents are well-travelled souls who cover planet earth spreading the word about interpreting and AIIC. As countries develop there is a greater need for interpretation; clearly the fastest developing market now is for interpreters from and into Chinese.

Avid readers of these pages will know that AIIC has been seeking recognition and protection of the profession for quite some time - but our hopes of achieving it via Unesco appear to have ground to a halt.

Do you remember a project called Teranga whereby established regions adopted emerging regions to help them with the change from a command to a market economy? My region (UK & Ireland) adopted the Czechs and the Slovaks and have been gently upbraided for our lack of activity. Had we known that Teranga is Wolof for "free lunch" we'd have got out of bed.

One of the best things about the Assembly is meeting up with your friends. Someone asked me if you have to sit with your region, but I like to sit with people I don't see much between assemblies. That way I can gossip about the region.

On Thursday evening the Swiss region arranged a brief and moving commemorative event for Wadi Keiser who died last July. Wadi was a stalwart of the profession and a gentleman of the old school. He earned more than our esteem, he earned our affection. The event ended with a photo of
Wadi waving to the camera. He was bidding us all goodbye.

Friday

On Friday afternoon we had to elect a new president and had four candidates. If things go on like this we'll be holding primaries. Each candidate had set out his/her stall in the Bulletin and each had a few minutes to address the excitable crowd.

The candidates - lacking babies to kiss - spoke about the future. This is a touchy subject for a group of people who don't know in January what they'll be doing in September. Yet the future has to be considered seriously given that we are no longer a group of spring chickens. This fact was brought home to us when a young colleague (under 40 the pesky fellow) asked us to raise our hands if we were in our 30s. As you'll have guessed few went up. There was a scattering of people in their forties but most at the meeting were over 50. The message is clear. Future Assemblies must be in places with no stairs.

Saturday

Habemus blog. There was a global sigh of relief from all continents as the Assembly blog finally went live. Your two bloggers did not notice at first as we were deep in conversation about the beaches of Thailand and the history of the string vest. We quickly made up for lost time by blogging all our notes, jottings and gleanings.

The Assembly spent a lot of time dealing with resolutions. The most exciting was about setting up an independent body to oversee disciplinary matters. Nominees are presumed to be wise, so having served on the dictionary committee would certainly be advised. They must combine implacability with fairness and bring their own handcuffs.

We also experienced the heady delights of the budget. I had been poring over my copy for, er, minutes before the debate opened. It seems like we've been in good hands and have deftly sidestepped financial toxicity.

There was a little more voting. Now we vote electronically but in the past we used a system of coloured voting cards. It was delightful and picturesque. Votes for me were puce.

Sunday

This was the day of our big debate on interpreters in conflict zones, meaning those who fall into interpreting because they happen to speak English or French and live in a place where people are fighting. AIIC may be able to help in many ways but the general approach is best summed up by the first line of the resolution: we want to "draw attention to their fate". We also need to remind our governments that it is wrong to expose their interpreters and their families to risk and subsequently offer them no protection. The resolution in support of these interpreters was passed overwhelmingly and the project passed to a working group comprising some serious AIIC heavyweights (I speak metaphorically). The debate was sober and balanced and I thought I detected a slight shift in the profession's tectonic plates.

There were several resolutions; after all it was the New Year. The trick will be to see if we keep them. My own region tabled a motion on governance, which is a word we like because it allows us to talk about blues skies thinking and future-proofing. You'll thank us when within five years the association is blue-skies proof.

The Council will decide where the next assembly will be held but we received a tasty invitation from Thailand for 2012. Do you think the airport will be open?
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