

**SIRIUS OPEN SOURCE LTD**

Statement on SIRIUS OPEN SOURCE LTD compiled for Roy and Rianne Schestowitz, Sirius Staff Since 2011 and 2013, respectively

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# I Introduction

Roy is a computer scientist based in Manchester, UK. He has been advocating digital security, autonomy and freedom in computing for over 20 years. He has given lectures on a number of topics including computer security since his early 20s and his experience writing about labour and legal rights spans well over 15 years (Roy's only uncle -- and he has no more uncles -- is a court judge). Roy is passionate about the Rule of Law and morality.

Rianne is a computer scientist and the wife of Roy, her loving husband who had joined Sirius 2 years prior to her joining the company as well. The role of Roy and Rianne inside the company is similar if not identical (only the time slots are different), so their grievances are inherently similar. The bosses and colleagues are the same. Hence, this document shares many overlapping observations. They will be presented in tandem.

## 1 Privacy Notice

The document does not infringe privacy. Roy has extensive experience writing about privacy-sensitive issues, including whistle-blowers, so names of clients and colleagues will not be mentioned (even excessively redacted in some cases). Evidence, where ample paper space is needed, won't be shared unless demanded. All statements herein are backed by verifiable material and all evidence is readily available upon demand. Do not assume anything here constitutes mere gossip (we reject weak levels of evidence like hearsay) and provided that all statements are true and any inaccuracies may be unintentional, nothing provided in this text could be defamatory.

## 2 Company Overview (Quick Facts)

The main subject of this document is Sirius, a company registered under several different IDs in the Companies House (depending on the range of years of operation). Currently it is not registered under the same name as it had been registered when Roy and Rianne joined the company. Directors also changed a bit (this typically happens when this company rolls on from one ID to the next). It's possible to also learn a chain of cliques and friends (possible cases of

nepotism and favouritism) by studying connections between and across organisations, e.g. Open Source Consortium. The reasons for the change are not known, leaving us speculating at best. When asked about that in person, the company declined to provide an explanation. Another 'branch' of the company is based in the US, i.e. outside the UK and largely unknown to us (e.g. its financial state). This document won't speculate on these issues and confidential material circulated within the company earlier this year will not be cited (in the interest of confidentiality). Careful attention was paid to confidentiality laws.

### **3 Structure of This Document**

The main sections of this document deal with 1) the company when Roy joined it. 2) the company when managerial bullying turned more institutionalised. 3) the company in what seems like its last gasp (heavy debt that grows rapidly).

## II The Open Source Era

### 1 At the Beginning

Sirius is early Patron (sponsor but a more modern term for sponsorship) of KDE, a prominent European project for GNU/Linux- and BSD-centric desktops and laptops. Sirius is also an early Patron of the FSF, which stands for the Free Software Foundation (listed and thanked by the FSF for several consecutive years, as The Internet Archive's Wayback Machine confirms). The FSF was established in the mid 1980s, i.e. almost 1.5 decades before Sirius was even founded. Many early employees of the company were GNU/Linux users, KDE users, even Debian Developers. They were highly technical people who shared the philosophy reflected upon by these (aforementioned) generous donation.

The company was able to attract high-calibre staff based on these credentials and hard-earned track record. Roy too was attracted to the company based on these publicly- and readily-visible credentials.

People worked overtime to please Sirius clients, some of which were very high-profile. Sadly, as we shall show later in this document, that's no longer the case and hasn't been so for several years. The company is living off or leeching off its (distant) past reputation and is extremely paranoid about people finding out about a rapid pivot across numerous dimension, e.g. in-house technology, levels of relevant skill mastered by staff, overt nepotism, and promotion of technologies not compatible with the company's original mission statement. A lot of the work produced by the company -- and it is no longer so much in-house work -- leverages Open Source/Free software (libre, or free as in freedom) but does not share back the contributions (or mere code changes), even when initially there's intention to do so, even if not for licence compliance purposes but status (companies that share back code and don't just use or exploit code have better karma, averting the image of becoming parasitic to the community).

## 2 An Exercise in Optics

The company's Web site is intentionally outdated. It projects outwards an image of a company that may or may not have existed about half a decade ago. Some of the clients being bragged about are well over a decade old. The intention there is to use past clients, no matter how old, to present a credible, potent, highly-experienced firm with high competency. A lot of the actual work gets done by associates (external contractors), not dedicated staff, and those associates have their own firms, which aren't connected to Sirius at all, except maybe loosely. We're left to assume that Sirius quietly transforms into a sort of middleman or reseller across a number of domains. For instance, there are a number of things Sirius claims to be supporting, but managers inside the company have no actual staff familiar with ways to maintain such things, so Sirius would typically contract outwards or outsource. This is a crucial point. This isn't how the company presents itself to the public.

The company, at least in the past, not only had legitimate credibility in the Free/Open Source software world; it goes beyond that. This is well documented and it's not too hard to find the company's founder cited extensively in the technology-centric media, especially over a decade ago (Roy used to cite him a lot, including in his site, Techrights). The founder is very visible in national and international press.

The company made a name for itself by attending international events and even hosted an event promoting the use of OpenDocument Format (ODF) in the UK. That's vital advocacy of Open Standards at a very crucial point in time (format wars and struggles against vendor lock-in). As we shall see later on, these laudable outreach efforts have played a considerable role in attracting Roy's interest in the company. As an aside, the company first sought to recruit Roy, way back around 2006. The founder of Sirius phoned Roy when Roy was completing his Ph.D. degree in Victoria University of Manchester.

## 3 Humble Beginnings

Roy's loyalty to the company is evident and easily provable considering how long he has served the company. But now it is not the company he entered in early February 2011; nor is this the company Rianne entered in 2013. Much patience and tolerance were needed to justify staying in the company for so long (in 2 months it'll be full 12 years since Roy joined), especially after

unforgettable tirades from management that has since then been (apparently) removed, albeit only after a lot of backlash from a lot of staff. 12 years is a long, long time. Roy worked there from his 20s to his 40s. He had much better job offers elsewhere. 12 years is also the longest any existing worker has served the company. That's very long by today's standards, where employment records are a lot shorter than back in the 1960s-1980s. A lot of people hop between jobs only months or a few years apart. But not Roy.

Both Roy and Rianne have consistently and persistently demonstrated loyalty to the company, sticking to it even when times were rough and people elsewhere offered "better" jobs. This, as a matter of very simple fact, is why there's a benevolent fight for the company and its (original) core mission. It's why internal issues are escalated internally (not to publicly embarrass the company) and misguided directions get highlighted without admonishing anyone.

It's important not to derail core tenets of the company. It's essential for recruitment, which can beget better clients, in turn rewarding the staff, too. People who don't care about their employer simply keep quiet, blindly follow instructions, and don't care about long-term consequences. Those are typically employees that just come and go. They don't offer much value to the company (training takes up a lot of time and it's an investment which goes astray), so they don't fully develop familiarity, skills, personal connection etc. (among colleagues and among clients, who learn to trust the company based on names of long-serving people). Many of them cannot develop software, either.

#### **4 A Fast-Rotting Apple**

Companies succeed and perish based on what people they can attract and what people they lose. In the case of Sirius, much was lost and almost nothing gained in the "human capital" or "human resources" sense. It's becoming a crisis. More on that later.

Over the past decade or longer there has been a change of leadership and severe brain drain. Morale has not been good, to put it politely. The Sirius management figures rely far too much on credibility of a company that existed well over a decade ago -- a company that had a physical office (real location), a clearer and more elaborate leadership structure, and a lot of office staff, not just remote workers. The company had assets, certified professionals in fields of operations (not just technical fields), and therefore it functioned a lot more reliably, e.g. in

the accountancy. There were cheques and balances. There were actual domain-proficient departments and not self-appointed jacks of all trades.

Sadly, what we're seeing or what 'low-level' employees have witnessed so far this year is a growing level and ever-increasing frequency of cover-up (few examples to come later) of what was/is really happening. Those who are portrayed as troublemakers are in fact those who supposedly 'threaten' this veil of secrecy or amicably challenge the company to improve (from within, repeatedly if necessary, in order to spare otherwise-avoidable damage and save face). As internal avenues of grievances are exhausted, people start speaking to friends, even without naming any persons, companies etc. This is a well-known high cost of failing to act upon internal suggestions or constructive complaints, leaving little leeway and inevitably causing a sort of spill-over of woes and gripes. This, suffice to say, is another example of managerial failure. Being unable to listen (not just hear but actually listen) to workers is a weakness. It's not a strength, although it can be rather tempting to simply ignore critics and impulsively alluring to reject criticism as fundamentally "invalid", "void", "hostile", "paranoid", "ignorant" and so on. Egocentric companies end up with no inflation in business, just inflation of the self. That weakens teamwork. A cohesive working environment boils down to collaboration and deep trust, not a bunch of superhero avatars in Slack channels, which to an outsider may indicate that the company is immature, unprofessional, and child-like.

In the past, the company known as "Sirius" (same name, very different people) had more competent administrators (like a person associated with the Ubuntu community back when Roy joined), i.e. folks who actually understood the products and services that Sirius provided. It helps to have such people onboard because of networking and links; they can bring business (around that time Sirius had clients directly connected to Ubuntu; it was a gateway to a flourishing network of other clients). Likewise, some world-class and well-known PostgreSQL engineers were employed by the company; this is a sign of solid corporate leadership, technical leadership, and also a lead to future clientele. Of course almost all of those people have since then left the company, leaving the company with a "skeleton crew".

Having an administrator with no background in computing is not a good idea; clients can sense they're interacting (e.g. over the telephone) with people whose skills are limited to "personal assistant" that soon got promoted to management due to an unfilled vacuum. Potential of career leap may seem nice, but that comes at a collective, company-wide cost. Another aspect of this phenomenon



was in recent years dubbed "imposter syndrome". That can lead to insecurity, which in turn causes backlash, outbursts, and paranoia. It makes any workplace potentially toxic. Any time a company is hiring unskilled people or promoting people in spite of a lack of relevant skills it causes issues on several levels; clients lose respect, workers feel dissatisfied, and job roles cannot be performed (maybe not by intention, but high forms of incompetence are not distinguishable from malice). Due to (corporate) survival instincts, those being scrutinised can turn aggressive very fast.

In the past 4 years staff casually witnessed tantrums (albeit staff was subjected to divide-and-rule tactics, impeding communication between staff or across teams); that typically came from above, not from below, e.g. managers resorting to bullying. General consensus within workers' circles is that at least some of that stems from some people's desperate desire to cover up their lack of capabilities. This is very dangerous to any company, including those who do the bullying (after all, without the company they too would be unemployed). Those who stand to lose the most are long-serving staff, whose CV is closely connected and long-connected to that one firm. Those who just come and seed destruction can move on and repeat the same modus operandi. Short-term workers have a different set of personal interests. That's just how it is.

## **5 Blindness to Criticism**

The foundations of the company need to be protected, not the personal agenda of pertinent, individual workers and/or cliques/factions of workers. Lack of communication blinds us to our weaknesses. Over a decade ago when the company-wide Jabber server was disabled (probably to prevent unity and sympathy among staff) workers' ability to interact with colleagues was curtailed, leaving everyone in a position where supporting clients was a lot harder. The widespread belief at the time was that the server was intentionally offline (nobody wanted to talk about it, let alone lie) because the company faced a lawsuit from a couple wrongly accused/dismissed (at least one of them). Roy and Rianne have supported blind people's charities for nearly a decade already, so recalling how the company treated a blind colleague, likely an innocent colleague, is a bit of *deja vu* in light of later sections of this document. Roy and Rianne poured in a portion of their income (received monthly from Sirius) into blind people's charities after the company, Sirius, had unfairly dismissed a legally blind -- and much-liked among her colleagues -- vulnerable lady.

Sirius was not always criticised or fearful of criticism, certainly not as a whole (criticising one particular aspect of Sirius is not the same as just rejecting Sirius as a whole). In fact the company used to boast true transparency (also full access to the wiki, which Roy helped manage/install), like telling workers not only which clients were paying but also how much they were paying (so it was possible to understand the commercial side of things). In some sense, workers felt connected to the company, not left out to hang. Internal presentations in the company, or even the habitual workshop, gave all workers a lot of information. The accountant and other people met staff in person, offering good advice on a number of things. Not much was outsourced or left behind walled gardens.

Things have changed a lot since then.

## 6 Pension Not Now!

There's no more in-house accounting, the person who set up the pension scheme also left, and all workers' pensions got outsourced to some other company (so the pension scheme is now fragmented for long-serving staff).

Years ago several colleagues, including Roy and Rianne, were cautioned by the pension provider that the pension was not being paid; it wasn't an isolated incident as this happened for several consecutive months and on numerous occasions over the years. The simplest and plausible explanation is that the company (Sirius) had financial difficulties, but the "official" explanation was that the portal had technical issues in it. There are several inconsistencies in the latter explanation, for reasons beyond the scope of this document. Later difficulties cemented the belief that under the surface there was a crisis of another nature. It may be possible that there were technical issues coming back every now and then (for almost a year). If so, staff should have been notified and fully informed, sparing the need to go through the hassle communicating with barely-accessible pension companies, sometimes behind the managers' backs (this is bashful both for workers and for the pension providers). This seems like a managerial failure. Speaking of failure to pay, it's crystal clear that the company (Sirius) failed to pay providers of services or clients' providers of services. It's like not paying the webhost for a very long time. These chronic issues of either neglect or miscommunication should be brought up; but in Sirius it's seriously unwelcomed.

It may seem appropriate to note that one administrator has been on maternity leave and as a result staff has received no payslips for months already (it's a strict legal requirement by the way). As a matter of fact, prior to that everyone received physical copies by post. Then members of staff were assured electronic versions would replace them. Then... they stopped coming. And then, only upon polite prodding they started coming again, sometimes in bursts several months apart (not every month). Nowadays staff may receive nothing at all as evidence of pay. There are many gaps in the sending of such payslips, even electronically. Who has been given the responsibility and where is the accountability? Staff should not have to repeatedly ask for payslips; it ought to happen automatically without the feeling that it requires perceived 'nagging'. Roy and Rianne were chasing this many times as payslips had stopped coming. This even needed to be escalated upwards (to the CEO) before things got belatedly done, at least temporarily.

Inconsistent operations or 'compliance in intervals' had already become routine. Communication had been diluted into subtle hints and sporadic innuendo. Engagement with clients had descended to storytelling, with very rare admissions of guilt or apologies. Some clients demanded a refund (all their money back) for Sirius failing to fulfil its side (contractual obligations) of the deliverables or service levels.

## **7 "Rules for Thee and Not for Me"**

As noted above, with further examples to come later, management was given the liberty to make up all the colourful excuses and no disciplinary procedures were pursued when managers failed to do very essential and sometimes utterly simple jobs (sending payslips is very trivial). In the commercial world this qualifies as gross incompetence. As shall be explained later on, the management oftentimes seems or feels like it's "missing in action", like spending several weeks stalking staff, fishing for 'dirt' online and inflating or taking out of context the content (which does not infringe privacy, let alone company policies).

Companies worldwide must recognise that every staff member has a personal life too. We don't live in bunk beds inside the office. Similarly, managers fundamentally enjoy and have a personal life. How would managers feel if staff spent weeks digging years into the past into anything they ever said, even in small private conversations? Or even in public, e.g. the Sirius founder's Twitter

account promoting an insurrectionist, Donald Trump. There seems to be disproportionate selective enforcement and symmetric relationship; the bosses can do anything they want, even violate their own rules, whereas precarious staff is treated as disposable and presumed guilty at all times (e.g. judged based on prejudice and vindication without due process and without regard for access to lawyers, i.e. qualified legal advice). More on that later, for this is a key motivation for this document to put together and carefully crafted with privacy in mind.

## 8 Openwashing Ltd.

It may seem absurd that a CEO of "Sirius Open Source" uses only Non-Open Source software, also known as proprietary software, i.e. in practice he rejects Open Source (championing macOS, Chrome and not Chromium, lots of "cloud" things that are proprietary and exceedingly privacy-infringing), but this is what we have come to expect in a company building a facade based on past branding/reputation rather than the present. This point was covered earlier.

As an aside, lately the company posted links to anti-FSF defamation tabloids via the company's Twitter account (Roy and Rianne did not comment but only took note), even though 1.5 decades earlier the company had financially supported the FSF. What happens when a company does not understand what it sells it may end up advocating Windows/WSL (helping Microsoft's attack on GNU/Linux) or even using Windows with some 'Linux' thing in VirtualBox instead of the real thing? Welcome to Openwashing Ltd. formerly known as Sirius Open Source. There might even be some Open Source people inside the company. Might. Maybe...

"Sirius Open Source" should be about more than the branding. People who actually use Free/Open Source software know that it is doable and know how to implement as well as recommend it (like the founder did; he gave many talks on the matter). Contrariwise, people who don't use Free/Open Source software simply insist it's not doable and sometimes say things like "this is just how the world works". This kind of defeatism paralyses a company that built its whole image around "Open Source" (even paying to advertise itself accordingly), which needs to be championed for 'Team Sirius' to distinguish themselves (there's plenty of competition; niches or sub-segments are simpler to complete for). Sirius as a company must not resort to false marketing, using the brand "Open Source" while in fact openwashing, neither caring about freedom nor

using an OS (operating system) that adheres to freedom or autonomy and sometimes sends a lot of sensitive data to firms in foreign states. That includes some of the core clients' data.

## 9 Acronyms Lingo

Speaking of "GDPR" or "ISO" without even grasping the meaning behind laws and regulations is "cheap talk". Without comprehension of the issues, this boils down to 'name-dropping' (like "GDPR" or "ISO"). Currently, the company would gladly take technical advice from people who openly admit they don't care about privacy. So instead Sirius falls back onto formalities and processes rather than any real grasp of the underlying issues. Sirius track record will be demonstrable based on recommendations from past clients; with or from at least two clients we might only get an alarming reminder that their systems suffered a security breach while we supported them. The clients' names are, as usual, omitted here, but this is very well documented. There may have been more security incidents that were hidden or concealed both from clients and from Sirius staff. Considering the atmosphere of secrecy and hostility towards inquisitive staff, it seems likely more incidents occurred but weren't reported at all (or reported very selectively).

Speaking of formalities and processes rather than actual substance, the company Sirius was pursuing ISO certification only amid some issues with NHS and its highly sensitive medical data -- including several incidents staff witnessed where people's privacy was accidentally compromised, either by Sirius or by the client (personally identifiable data divulged). To make matters worse, many times data was not being shredded like it was supposed to and the client complained. If better leadership was in place, this would not have happened, jeopardising the credibility of staff.

## 10 Account Management Practices and Data Sovereignty

With quite a lot of clients, and several can be vividly recalled, Sirius failed to remove access credentials (or accounts) for staff that had already left Sirius. 'Low level' staff cannot access systems at a level of user management, so this was demonstrably a 'high level' failure. Sometimes clients complained about such gross incompetence (if clients could even figure out who still works for Sirius; remember that Sirius misled them, as shall be noted again later) and

potential security breach by former and possibly disgruntled Sirius staff, but nobody (as far as we know) was being held accountable. The aforementioned sections noted that accountability only ever works in this hypocritical and vertically-inconsistent fashion. Double standards became the new company standard, enshrined covertly but not formally. Managers never offered the courtesy of taking full responsibility. Too much pride to acknowledge mistake and lapses.

As the above shows, there are endemic problems caused by mismanagement or a lack of charismatic-yet-humble leadership (maladministration), maybe even a lack of staff that possesses ample experience managing a team of more than one person. These are very essential skills which mandate suitable recruitment. It may not be cheap, but it is vital.

Sirius has user credentials scattered all over the place, not all in OpenLDAP as done in the past (when more competent people managed the company's infrastructure). This will, inevitably, result in epic blunders. That keeps happening. Again and again. In fact, user credentials management at Sirius has been partly outsourced to third parties -- a taboo subject. No more GOsa, go USA (most data and authentication sent across the Atlantic).

The motivations seem petty, e.g. sharing accounts to save money despite clear security requirements that exist to explicitly not do this. Is ISO being treated as merely a box-ticking exercise, not followed up by any potent audits? If so, are we entitled to brag about some ISO compliance? Any time Roy attempted to bring up the subject the management became paranoid and threatening. This sort of resistance to ethical and moral objection would be strongly discouraged in companies capable of self-appraisal.

A colleague once mentioned in an E-mail that some colleagues may have needed to share an account with another person, all in the name of saving money. This kept happening for years despite such ISO requirements supposedly being fully in force. Account sharing was sometimes imperative, as individual accounts did not exist. In other words, all colleagues use the same username for some tasks; sometimes this was only belatedly addressed, partially and virtually post hoc.

Password management in the company has long been a painful affair. From non-secure connections to a lack of VPN for access to passwords the company moved to outsourcing. This was a case of "bad optics", pragmatic issues aside.

Sirius could self-host similar software that was Free and Open Source software, but the company had a mindset of outsourcing almost everything to proprietary offerings from another country. As noted separately, Roy raised alarm over this several times, noting or pointing out actual data breaches of a very large scale, but no action was subsequently taken. The assurances were empty and arguably arrogant -- a refusal to listen to vigilant security experts who extensively covered those issues for decades. Asking a company itself whether it suffered a security breach and what the severity truly is like asking an American president what happened in the Oval Room.

## 11 Band-Aid Instead of Robust Policies

Speaking of security breaches, some of the company's Ubuntu servers are using very old -- even way outdated -- versions, as noted by the company itself (it's also controlled by a host in another country, which poses another attack surface issue).

Security isn't taken seriously enough and VPN is presented as ad hoc Band-Aid. VPN is not the solution, it's a hallmark or a symptom of neglect at the intranet (internal) level. Firewalling and restrictions, for instance, have unusual exceptions. Since "Google is your friend", for instance, Google IP addresses are allowed. As if Google never spies or collaborates with spy agencies (or even suffers security breaches). So Sirius VPN does not trust BBC network, but does trust (or whitelists) Google/Alphabet.

The neglect extends outwards, i.e. outside internal infrastructure of Sirius. For instance, in the past some staff transmitted in plain text messages (via E-mails) with passwords to accounts and servers of a very large client that is the target of foreign operations and aggressive spies (political espionage operations of this type are very common with clients such as these).

There are even very recent examples, so there's no need to go far back; a colleague who is close to management dared suggest -- only months ago -- that an entire political Web site (including user details, passwords etc.) be migrated by dumping a lot of data into Google Drive, without any encryption either, clearly not comprehending that "Google is your friend" is a laughable fallacy (an understatement; Google is legally obligated, through US Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data Act or CLOUD Act 2018, to give full access to the US government and more).

It wouldn't be controversial to state that such practices can be off-putting to clients, e.g. when decision makers in Sirius have rather poor grasp or appreciation for privacy and security, let alone critical care by introspection (staff cautioning about this is subjected to gaslighting at best or even outright threats).

If Sirius views itself as a champion of "Alexa" and "OK Google", then the company should seriously consider a rebrand.

## 12 Outsourcing Concerns

Colleagues at Sirius have long worked weekends (unlike client's staff, which is typically off work on holidays and weekends; there's no 24/7/365 cover). Some of them finished or started working but could not access an essential gateway machine. When the client does something like an update or makes a release the IP addresses will change, so whenever there is an incident Sirius staff can't restart, forcibly reboot or investigate the machines, that is unless -- or otherwise -- Sirius staff are informed (or wiki/documentation becomes up to date again). From what is known, this is more of this particular client's choice, but Sirius lacks a loophole and that is why Sirius may seem sloppy or slow to update/notify their workers/employees.

This is a typical example of a lack of top-down coordination. How are staff expected to carry out duties if managers don't do their part or fail to understand how these systems work? In fact, when outsourcing to any third party, this may be inevitable; the people who 'manage' the machines have almost no control over them. They merely rent some server space and the hypervisor may change over time, introducing unforeseen but unavoidable complication. This means server can become unavailable, with no resort at all (like accessing the datacentre/s). Back in 2011 and for several years after that Sirius had its own server racks and managed its own instances.

Sirius keeps recommending the outsourcing to proprietary software like AWS and Cloudflare, resulting (sometimes) in a lot of problems. Sirius itself pays in AWS bills almost as much as a small salary. Becoming an AWS 'reseller' makes Sirius far less competitive and vastly less unique; companies like these, including Rackspace, have their own support. They have their own ambitions of



controlling everything themselves. Companies like Sirius should not become transient migrators. Sirius used to offer its own hosting.

This is one of many issues with "cloud computing", including AWS, which also caused significant downtimes for that client (hours-long outages) -- a client that used to have far more control over the hosting. When it comes to certification, the company actively encourages learning "cloud computing" stuff instead of "Open Source" stuff.

### **13 Financial Aspects Revisited**

As noted above, the current AWS fees are extraordinary and as shall be shown later, an ordinary staff salary is almost laughable. For technical people working at hours like these, including weekends and holidays, the salary would typically be double or treble the "market standard" (which for technical people is rather high). To observe that ordinary employees of Walmart (the world's largest employer) get paid more than someone who works around the clock, even on holidays, doing technical work, is just unbelievable. In many US states a starter salary for Walmart staff is around \$30,000 and some Support Team staff at Sirius receives 21,000 British pound, i.e. only a little above minimum wage. It's important to stress that in Sirius the management never experiences those erratic sorts of rotas, including mid-week rotations (moving between 5:30PM-1:30AM to 1:00AM-9:00AM and then back again). People at Walmart don't work overtime or in weekends (if they do, they get paid double or more) and don't have the same skillset. Some don't have college/university degrees (or student debt to pay). How can Sirius justify this, especially the lack of increase in salaries, not just adjusted for level of seniority (or length of service) but also inflation? This impedes recruitment prospects. As noted earlier, it is essential to attract "new blood" for the company to remain operational, and later on it will be noted that basic equipment is not being provided either. Employees need to pay for their work equipment and more. This makes Sirius like a low-cost supplier of cheap labour. At Walmart, there is at least a chance of career progression, e.g. supervisor roles and above. Walmart employees don't receive urgent calls when they're out for family time away from town, asking for immediate help with some technical matters due to an incident. In Sirius, even low-paid staff was subjected to that. Even getting a holiday approved has become quite hard and sometimes approval is received only a day prior (with a substitute unsuitable to actually fulfil the job). That's not enough time to make meaningful travel plans.

From clear recollection, the company has a track record of not paying full travel expenses to some colleagues and one may have sued the company over it, based on another colleague. In Roy's case too, several trips to Leicester (to meet a potential client) around 2014 were never covered (train expenses totaling about 140 pounds). Despite repeated reminders from Roy and repeated assurances from the management (or no reply), Roy never received his expenses reimbursed for either of those trips. At some point Roy simply gave up pursuing that as Roy felt like it required a lot of nagging. Again, where is the accountability for it? That was 8 years ago and still overdue. If not a matter of stinginess, this is a case of gross incompetence and injustice. After about a year it became embarrassing to even bring up the subject again. It's akin to what's known as "wage theft" but applicable to travel (long-distance journey) expenses rather than remuneration. This was still several years before vindictive managers started manufacturing fake 'cases' against particular members of staff in a rather psychopathic fashion (never bothering to even apologise later, as any truly mature person would do). Habitually the company would distort what employees actually said, either on the record or off the record, to manipulate or trick people into saying things, hinged upon loaded statements or distortion thereof. This will be discussed in this document's final section.

## **14 Remote Workers' Procurement and Other Costs**

Equipping staff with suitable assets is a basic, very basic, requirement. Roy has covered the legal aspects of that for many years in his Web sites. In Sirius, the company failed to equip home workers ("work-from-home" staff) with any computers or chairs or anything required to do the work. The managers expect staff to pay for purchasing and maintenance of all work equipment at their own expense in their own time. There's no IT department to help with computer issues or even issue a replacement.

To make matters worse, bloated software which requires very powerful and expensive computers was introduced some years ago. Roy and colleagues also complained about this bloat, but that fell on deaf ears (Roy internally suggested the company can purchase suitable equipment or cover the costs of that). That's aside from the very low (by market standards) salary, adding further burden. More on financial aspects shall be discussed later.

In recent months workers began observing that Sirius had customers with no way to access their systems. So how are workers supposed to deal with tickets they receive? There was expectation of dealing with queries by using "Google" to throw some answer at a client (as if the client cannot access Google), otherwise find an associate or escalate. It was starting to get hard to even tell apart clients and non-clients, as documentation was scarce and outdated to the point where clients were vaguely described and their status was unclear. Sentences like "Google is your friend" were said inside the company (Google is surveillance, it's not a friend) and our skillset ought not rely on using search engines, following a textual script (like clerical staff in a call centre), or mere escalation to some other company. As noted before, many associates are at best loosely connected to the company and are in effect third parties.

About a year ago Roy faced disciplinary action over something unjust (to him). Instead of an independent, impartial tribunal acting as arbitrator it was likely the culprits judging the incident, then resorting to cover-up/distortion over the sequence of events to pass to the blame to 'low-level' staff. This started to become a typical modus operandi, which dated back several years, as a later section will explain in detail.

These issues turned out to be more widespread as staff managed to communicate with one another. For instance, lots of people were having phone issues. The company did not admit this; individual people reported it, then there was blaming of the people unable to use a defective "service" that keeps changing and breaking things that previously worked. Instead of admitting this migration was a mistake and acknowledging prior warning were given, there was only further entrenchment. More details will be given in the last section.

## 15 Examples

In recent years, in addition to the above, colleagues were compelled to become less honest with clients, all for the sake of saving face. In fact, there are countless examples of 'cover-up', but the following portion gives just one example (with redaction for privacy reasons).

Client chasing Sirius twice:

*May I have an update on this please? I am on holiday next week and would have liked this resolved.*

*Thank you.*

*Kind regards,*  
[REDACTED]

Later:

*Just realised that this is still outstanding, any news please?*

*Thank you.*

*Kind regards,*  
[REDACTED]

Sirius staff:

*EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not trust links or attachments without checking.*

*Sorry [REDACTED], the person looking into this has gone on maternity leave so this ticket must have been missed. As far as I'm aware the disk will be replaced by [REDACTED] as its under warranty but we need to know the serial number of the failed disk. Is this something you could give us?*

*Thanks,*

Sirius staff to Sirius CEO:

Hi [REDACTED],

*Can I be honest with him and say I did flag it up but people were too busy? Or something else?*

*Thanks,*

For brevity's sake, this one example may suffice for now.

To be clear, there's lots of wrong stuff here, more so than 'wrong' staff, as this makes pertinent staff look bad, even staff that does good work, causing staff to feel dishonest, in effect lying to oneself and lowering personal credibility among clients. This point will be revisited in the last section.

Nobody wishes to believe he or she works in a company that deceives the press, the clients, and even its own workers. False promises, false explanations and fictional excuses contribute to a climate of suspicion and distrust. A year ago there were unfulfilled expectations of weekly updates about what the company was doing; it only took about a week for such promises to fade away.

## **16 More Examples of Poor Service Delivery**

More recently, there were more incidents of vastly delayed responses. Management received escalations but took no action. Rianne was covering the daytime shift when this (heavily-redacted) ticket was reported (note dates):

*June 30, 2022*

*- Ticket#1013535 — RE: [REDACTED]*

*Ticket acknowledged, escalated to [REDACTED] because we may need [REDACTED] for this. The certificate, on the other hand, is valid and has not yet expired. Perhaps we can start looking for errors in that idp process log files?*

-----  
July 17, 2022

Ticket#1013535 — RE: [REDACTED]

Emailed [REDACTED] regarding the priority of this ticket.

Dear [REDACTED],

This ticket has been open for over two weeks.

Support/[REDACTED] conducted an initial investigation into the reported issue, but we have yet to contact the customer to provide our analysis or recommendations on the matter. When was [REDACTED] available to investigate the problem?

-----  
July 30, 2022

Ticket#1013535 — RE: [REDACTED]

The URL is now working: [REDACTED]. Support has not had the opportunity to update the client (no word other than acknowledging the ticket and conducting some research). I have asked [REDACTED] if we can close this ticket quietly.

Hello, [REDACTED].

The URL that they reported as broken is now fully operational: [REDACTED].

I'm not sure when this problem was fixed. Support has not had the opportunity to update the client (no word other than acknowledging the ticket and conducting some research). I guess we'll just close this ticket quietly.

-----  
October 16, 2022

Ticket#1013535 — RE: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] - is working for me without connecting to the VPN. Same result as what [REDACTED] was getting.

As far as Rianne can remember, she brought this ticket to [REDACTED]'s attention on Slack on that day (June 30th), but as usual [REDACTED] is a very busy man and [REDACTED] is not a big client, so it's not of high priority. One can easily notice how long this ticket remained open/unattended/unnoticed for. This went on for so long (until October). As far as one can tell (based on what's last known), this is still an outstanding ticket. It was open until the very last day Rianne was working in Sirius.

Finally, below is one more incident that shows one client that got truly pissed off. There are many redactions, but if scrutiny arises or one of those implicated are interested, we've got the full conversation. It's meticulously documented for support.

The short story is, Sirius promised a project and didn't deliver it, so the client began to chase Sirius. This is an example where a client has no idea who really works in Sirius e.g. in-house or associates (the Web site misleads about who actually works in Sirius):

Re: [Ticket#1013727] [REDACTED]

10/08/2022

Hi [REDACTED],

*I hope you are well.*

Since our last meeting a month ago, we are already planning and working to update our infrastructure to Ubuntu 22.04LTS and so MySQL servers 8.

In the last few days we recorded performance issues on our master server.

I would like to ask if you can speedup your proposal for your execution and evaluation of MySQLtuner on our master/slave servers as suggested by [REDACTED]. We must maintain our systems stable and reliable until the migration to MySQL8. (estimated by end of this months). Moreover, will give us the opportunity to setup the new servers with the right parameters.

Best regards

[REDACTED]

-----

06/09/2022

Hi [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED],

I think we have a **very bad** [this word was highlighted and bold in the actual message] case of an important piece of work becoming urgent. We have had 5 database issues that have caused issues and outages in the last 4 weeks, including one yesterday.

My understanding was that in the meeting on 7th July, two months ago, you had agreed to prepare an estimate for running mysqltuner on our system. We are now in a situation where things have become critical and our ability to make system changes based on the results of this work is closing. Any changes need to be specified, developed, and tested and that usually take weeks to perform.

**Please can you make arrangements for someone to assist [REDACTED] on the the execution and/or analysis of mysqltuner urgently (today or tomorrow)?** [highlighted and bold in the actual message...emphasizing the urgency.]



Thanks,

[REDACTED]

-----

Hi [REDACTED],

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have both escalated the urgency of this issue and many apologies that we haven't addressed this faster.

We will of course support the urgent work on this mini-project and will just let any paperwork catch-up. [REDACTED] is available.

[REDACTED], could you please confirm your availability the rest of this afternoon and tomorrow from 2pm and we will find something that fits?

Many thanks,

[REDACTED]

09/09/2022

[REDACTED], we would like to run that process in stage first - but we do not seem to have access

-----

Can anyone on Sirius call me on the phone, please?

I cannot be helpful in this way.

[REDACTED]

-----

Hi [REDACTED],

As below, [REDACTED] is going to run this now and attach the output as soon as finished. Would you still like someone to call you?

We can do that now if you'd still like a call.

Thanks,

[REDACTED]

----

Hi [REDACTED],

it was no longer necessary when [REDACTED] confirmed that you were able to access to the system and run the command requested. I have been very confused when [REDACTED] said " - but we do not seem to have access -"

Many thanks to [REDACTED].

Best regards

[REDACTED]

-----

Hi all,

what exactly the problem is? You should have access to

[REDACTED].

[REDACTED]

This is a very recent example. The client said: "My understanding was that in the meeting on 7th July, two months ago, you had agreed to prepare an estimate for running mySQLtuner on our system."

More than two months later there's no progress.

### III The Bullying Era

This section is essential. Without it, the sentiments of Roy and Rianne or their relationship with the company cannot be fully grasped.

Several years ago there was management change. It seems to have resulted in the company becoming a lot smaller and poorly managed. Staff did communicate some of the concerns, as those concerns were shared across teams and colleagues (unionisation is difficult in very small companies). To quote one message seen: "I'm gratified to know you're with us in all this. We're a lot stronger as a group. I regret to see we're all being bullied, typically with bogus allegations and our health is affected. I did face the management over this, albeit privately."

The management likes to think it lives in a tall tower on a hill, enjoying total control over minds and hearts. But when many people get treated very unfairly and truly badly they're likely to talk to one another.

Preliminary research helped elucidate pertinent facts about the company. There was a list of things we know and things we would only speculate about at that point. Facts:

- When Roy joined the company his per-hour rate was higher than now (almost 12 years later). Some colleagues receive different pay for the exact same role. For instance, some years ago it could be confirmed that some overnight NOC staff received a salary of 21,000 pounds per annum, whereas colleagues got paid about 25% more. They did the exact same role.
- a key colleague no longer appeared to be in the company, as confirmed (we believe) by the VPN renewal table. Roy warned or politely cautioned management not to lose technical staff and named him specifically.
- One colleague once spoke about being "shareholder" or similar with the CEO, but this was not communicated to any of the colleagues.
- The CEO was angry at a long-serving colleague when he left, one might only suppose due to the very short notice. Managing core functions at the company became almost impossible and some clients could not be served, resulting in

complaints later mis-attributed (wrong people blamed rather than those who lost the principal colleague).

- The Sirius office was, at that point, virtually empty and must have cost at least a grand a month just to rent (workers were almost sure it's rented, as the shutdown in 2020 helped confirm). This seemed like a mis-allocation of funds or priorities.

- Company meetings were canceled without any reason given -- not a positive sign at all.

- No transparency about departure of workers. One had to guess or rely on gossip.

- Some colleagues, who had more inside information (because of physical office access), decided to leave the company

- Moving to AWS was about lowering costs, but those costs have (expectedly) risen to something comparable to a salary, set aside issues associated with autonomy, privacy etc. This was short-sighted.

- Moving or changing the NOC's night cover from 4 people to 3 people was also about lowering costs, but that meant really awful and unhealthy sleeping patterns for all those involved. Despite assurances this would improve, nothing ever happened and no redemption came. People who work in daytime cannot fully understand what it involves to work overnight and change the night hours half a dozen times a month (like jet lag, maybe even worse due to short intervals).

- The new manager knew the Sirius CEO for a long time (circumstances or context not fully known but it may be professional, like the Open Source Consortium, which the CEO claimed to be the leader/founder of but apparently wasn't; there was a mis-representation in the press; Roy met the person behind the Open Source Consortium, who wished to point out he had wanted to sue the Sirius CEO for defamation over it but said it would be too expensive and thus unworthy of pursuing).

- At some time around that point the Director of the company (in the UK) was US-based and even insinuated to staff that many NOC operations would be shifted to the US (that never actually happened).

The company had not shared with us financial information or contract details (amounts of money) in about half a decade. Financial statements are publicly available, however, in the public domain.

Apparently there was something in the wiki when the CEO's ex-wife was around, but it's all gone now. Is the company heavily indebted to a bank? According to the latest statement, the company is very, very deep in debt. Notice witness in the financial documents of the bank: the office manager. Even at that point the company understated the severity of the situation as debt grew every year despite a significant cut in the number of salaried staff. Some names/signatures are rubbed off, but maybe those aren't relevant. The CEO's ex-wife is not listed in some of the recent documents. One is left guessing aimlessly. Transparency would be much appreciated.

The office manager refused to tell Roy why the CEO had relocated or was based in the US and was repeatedly evasive when Roy asked. Workers were not told why the company changed registration (like a new company minted; new contracts needed to be signed), so some speculated that post-divorce ownership may have been a motivation. Those were dark times for the company with many questions hanging and an absent CEO, at one point showing up in a rib shirt for a company meeting online. This felt rather inappropriate.

Those observations may not be pleasant to see or hear. But those are very important and they hopefully help explain a certain change in attitude. For instance, the company's use of Slack probably violates privacy law associated with some of our clients, never mind our own. We are aware of several colleagues who may have left due to management being rude and unpleasant.

The harshest bit was, after key colleagues had left the bullying from management intensified, taking out frustration on the wrong people. For instance, Roy and Rianne were sent to be interrogated. The HR agency that interrogated Roy and Rianne (this lasted for nearly 3 hours!) totally sided with Roy and Rianne and asked important questions about the management; the HR people urged Roy and Rianne to keep record of everything and assumed this thing was likely politically-motivated (or similar). In other words, this backfired spectacularly on the accuser and moreover cost the company a lot of money, never mind the moral damage. No clarify or apology was consequently issued to Roy and Rianne. The accusers were not punished this this misuse of company budget and one remains on the payroll to this day. What are decent

people supposed to expect from a company that treats veteran (long-time staff) like that? By that time, Roy had been in the company about 5 times longer than the principal accuser. Roy was encouraged by HR to keep documentation for self-defensive purposes, as per this document.

To quote what Rianne wrote to the accuser (with redaction):

Hi [REDACTED],

*I have read the letter. I will send you the schedule for training dates with [REDACTED] as soon as possible.*

*I just want to make a separate point here. The [REDACTED] OpenVPN certificate issue wasn't solely my own fault. I have clearly asked (on the ticket and my handovers) for my colleagues to have a look at it as I don't have experience dealing with VPN certificates. It was being dragged shift after shift only for us all to eventually know that there are only two people who have actual access to do this authority (that is [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], who was \*holiday\*). [REDACTED] couldn't take action on this because he was busy with [REDACTED] /projects and [REDACTED] was on holiday for almost the entire month of [REDACTED]. So this is just clearly a misunderstanding. I did what I was supposed to do and could not do anything beyond that.*

Regarding the [REDACTED] issue:

1. Ticket related to [REDACTED] - this is the reason why [REDACTED] asked for a refund. It's because we got stuck in handling the issue and I know the reason why. It is because, with all honesty, nobody among us knows about [REDACTED] (no actual experience, it's not something we can just look up online, it needs experience) and to be fair we did well on all the rest of the tickets. This is why I'm nowadays trying to learn this thing, just so that next time we will be better equipped. So again, I'm not accepting this as if it's my fault. This is a collaborative job, not to be dealt with by a single person. And I lack [REDACTED] experience.

[...]

Therefore, if ever the company wants to sanction me or send me to disciplinary action, the latter incident was the appropriate one, not [REDACTED] / [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] / [REDACTED] issues. For me this doesn't make sense.

Hope I explained myself according to facts as I don't want to offend people, more so in the company, Sirius. I have been working in Sirius for six years and I made an error affecting one of the biggest clients... only recently. My first ever mistake as far as I can remember.

Roy and Rianne were not alone. There was an orchestrated witch-hunt which impacted the remaining colleagues, one of whom issued a grievance letter:

Grievance concerning [REDACTED]

On [REDACTED], my birthday, I was doing a ticket review and emailed [REDACTED] again to ask her if she'd heard back from [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] about the firewall and cache (Ticket# [REDACTED]) Later that day I had a very aggressive, bullying reply from [REDACTED] who accused me of not reading her email and implying that I make lots of excuses for not doing so. I have since asked her again to respond but so far she hasn't done so. As far as I can tell her aggressive response is just deflecting the fact that she hasn't responded to my repeated request.

Then on the [REDACTED] she emailed to ask if I was completing tasks and I emailed back to say I was, but she emailed again and accused me of not responding to a few of her emails and said that it was becoming a problem. I have replied and asked her for a list of her emails that I haven't replied to but so far she hasn't provided it. This is why I believe she is picking on me – she has just made this up and uses it to attack me.

She also accused me of not watching the monitoring – I tried to explain how it works but to no avail and said I need to learn how to do it from others. I have asked what I need to learn, but so far there is no response.

She's sent me several emails concerning my handovers and each time I have modified them according to what she wants, however nothing is



good enough and I think she is just using this as a stick to beat me with. One of the changes she wanted was to include everything from the previous handover – initially I objected as I said things would get lost but she was adamant and [REDACTED] said to me just copy and paste, which I did. Then a few weeks later she asked me why I was copying the previous handover? This is not allowed now!

She is always putting me down: I did the majority of the work with [REDACTED] but she sent us an email saying “If I am honest I cannot blame her decision. Our customer service with [REDACTED] has been awful. We have taken too long to respond to tickets and even longer to solve them. This will be investigated and actions will be taken.” I sent her a report about [REDACTED] putting the blame mostly onto [REDACTED]’s shoulders but this has never been mentioned.

This is the second time [REDACTED] has started to pick on me. Last time she told me her and [REDACTED] were going on a course to learn how to treat employees with depression. I have asked what she learnt and is putting into practice but to no avail. I find this very upsetting and stressful and this adds to my depression affecting my personal life as well as my work and it is entirely unnecessary. I don’t think it is unreasonable to expect to be able work in a positive encouraging environment free from bullying. I have said several times now that the way to get the best from me is to encourage me and this helps my skills to develop.

What I would like:

- 1) I would like her to withdraw the written warning she gave me as I think it was very unfair as I was only doing my best for the client and it was only [REDACTED] who knew that they had refused caching and the firewall before – how was I to know if it wasn’t on the wiki?
- 2) I would like her to stop changing the format of the handover all the time as I believe she is just using this to beat me with and put me down
- 3) I would like a guarantee that she will no longer make things up about me and accuse me of things without basis
- 4) I would like her to start to encourage us as a team instead of picking us off one by one

5) *I would like to work in a positive environment – [REDACTED] encourages me a lot and this spurs me on in my work*

Roy also expressed concerns, about both moral and technical/legal issues. For instance:

*I am deeply concerned, as the employee who has worked the longest in this company (along with [REDACTED]), that what we do by outsourcing data is strictly illegal and may be in violation of clients' terms (we can get sued by them if they find out and we probably have a legal obligation to inform them of the breach and reset all the passwords for security reasons).*

*My key colleagues, one of whom worked in the company even longer than I have, may have left due to this. It's putting great strain on the company, which apparently refuses to listen to people who raise legitimate concerns, based on technical if not legal ground as well.*

*there's no real intention to move to Open Source like Matrix/Riot, only assurances;*

In later years the nepotism (to be expanded upon in the final section) became apparent. Some people were basically implicitly shielded from criticism.

For instance, one colleague was often late to the shift and did not apologise. Her partner did the same thing -- basically came online almost half an hour late without apology. This is abject disrespect for colleagues, even people who have been in the company for much longer than them. The three-way relationship involved here will be explained later.

The above examples are merely a small subset and some are based on distant but accurate recollections of a rather dark era of distress. When a conceited manager is accusing, without any actual evidence, people of "cooking" while on the job it doesn't sound like management but just an attempt to shame staff. As an aside, it was often unclear what the management itself was doing (if anything substantial at all). There was a sentiment that some management people colluded and perpetrated schemes against individual members of staff,

not limited to Roy and Rianne. This often backfired. There were also examples of retaliation attempts. One common tactic, which can be witnessed outside the realm of high-tech as well, is to psychologically manipulate or assign people nonsensical things, e.g. asking them to perform totally meaningless jobs that don't yield anything at all and don't improve but rather worsen the service, encumbering staff, never to be checked by anyone (as if just to waste time). This happened in Sirius too.

The hypocrisy was not just routine; it was a new standard, e.g. reprimanding people for not picking up the phone fast enough even when there were upstream technical faults (supplier) or when Reception was far slower to pick up the phone, if at all. This sort of hypocrisy or these attempts to shame staff are akin to guilt tripping. Healthy work environments would weed out such behaviour outright.

The morale around that time was low, set aside COVID-19 becoming a growing problem, along with lock-downs. Roy noted that in order to comply with the law he cannot post clients' details on the Slack network. So he chose to obey the regulations and the law, in line with security standards. Stuff like "hi" is probably considered OK and safe enough for Slack, but not addresses, passwords etc. Things have not improved since, as the final section notes again (with examples).

This long section, along with written messages as evidence, is very important. Bad leadership worsened the corporate climate and changed how people viewed the company from within, if not from the outside as well.

This document now proceeds to a discussion about the latest and maybe the final blow. The company already had capacity issues (not enough staff to cover shifts) and now it's even worse.

Roy and Rianne hoped to prevent a 'death spiral' and ironically enough it seems like the company wants to accelerate its own 'death spiral', due to tactless, insensitive remarks.

## IV The Self-Destruction

The company -- and it seems safe to predict so -- has reached a point of no return. A new client, Argo AI, officially became defunct earlier this month. The company's recent meetings (Sirius and Support Team) suggested that they needed to lay off staff but preferred to encourage any of those attending to take voluntary resignation instead, i.e. no compensation. The Support Team is the majority of the company, so this is a very big deal.

It's reasonable to assume the company looked for excuses to dismiss without compensation, seeing its financial state (which is in the public domain for all to see). Staff was repeatedly asked whether it was willing to "voluntarily" resign, i.e. leave without compensation. Nobody ever said "yes", in spite of the question being asked several times. External HR people were apparently (allegedly a company that provides other service to Sirius) advising and steering towards this strategy.

For a number of weeks there was apparently an effort to take this further, looking for reasons to dismiss staff, preferably without compensation. Prior to that, around July, Roy was already caution he had been put on a "shortlist" (a bit of a vague term).

Roy does not talk about the company where he works, at least not by name. He does not mention people and clients of the company. If Roy discusses that with a friend in some chat outside of work, that's perfectly within his rights. If the company does something wrong and Roy then discusses it with somebody, that might even be a positive contribution. Nobody should be above criticism. If Roy discusses romantic relationship between colleagues without even naming them, that's perfectly lawful (there's no need to twist a romantic relationship as "living arrangement", covering up for how inadequate that is). As the main issue discussed isn't the nature of the relationship but the nepotism and abject lack of relevant qualification/s, this is a matter of broader or professional interest. It's not mere gossip and either way, nobody is named. To be very clear, informal IRC chat with one person is not "social media"; pretending that it is would be considered fact-twisting. IRC has been around since the 1980s, Roy has its own IRC network, and there are no companies or "data broker" chewing up this data. The data is maintained in a privacy-conscious manner on a server managed independently. To some people, very fundamental facts about

communication tools leads to evasion of proper understanding, either deliberately or accidentally.

The accusations against Roy mostly latch onto cherry-picking of words, all that while ignoring the underlying substance, which is expressed relatively politely (no expletives, but lots of typos because it's very informal chat). There seems to be a lot of tit-for-tat over the 'teat' (to be clear, the company's high-paid managers were milking Roy for years; Roy's salary would have increased with inflation by about 40% in 12 years, but that didn't happen).

So who's milking who?

The longest-serving staff member sans the company's founder is paid a salary of 26,500 a year for full time work and there's a snag, which cannot be conveniently evaded. Roy believes that the company milks him; no pay rise in over a decade (Roy got paid more when he joined), even amid soaring inflation, no apologies, unwarranted bullying, with bullies not being held accountable. Roy did bring up the salary aspect, but this never gets rectified. After almost 12 years... same salary, but again this sort of misses the bigger picture. Roy feels like "low-cost tech labour", treated poorly and unfairly at times in spite of a lot of factors previously fully conveyed in text (internally). Roy did raise concern -- and only internally -- more times than he can recall. Anything else is a last recourse in a two-person IRC conversation (no names mentioned). Here is Roy's message sent to the CEO earlier this year:

Hi [REDACTED],

*Last night I tried testing softphone calls with 2 of your phone numbers that I have, I think about 5 times in total, taking timezone into account. I could not test with anyone here as they were asleep. One thing I noticed is that my browser still insists on enabling things manually each time I talk. That's just how it works.*

*Yesterday before bedtime I checked my inbox and saw an E-mail with a threatening and combative tone. It was not well received because I hadn't been approached at all before it was sent. It was sent without even asking me for my side (as if due process does not exist).*

*I warned in advance about relying on this product, but I received no reply at all. Those softphones typically work only or "best" with Chrome.*

*This is part of a broader problem and I wish to open a dialogue about a number of other issue. I want to keep this amicable and constructive. Bear with me while I explain.*

*I don't think I've been demanding or unreasonable. I sacrificed a lot for this role. I've accepted a pay decrease for 11 years, even months after I had joined (it did not keep up with inflation and in 2011 when I was moved from weekend slots to weekday+weekend nighttimes -- typically a time slot that means 200% the "normal" rate -- my pro-rata amount was reduced, even after the increase from 25k to 26.5k). I did not complain. And this E-mail isn't about money. That's now what's important to me.*

*As I noted in my reply last night, no training given to staff means that mistakes can be made (passing a document isn't the same as training). Yet worse, from my managers I'm receiving no replies and it often feels like talking to the wall. I don't know why a manager would think that this management style reinforces confidence from staff. At the start of the year he said we'd start receiving regular updates. This did not happen (no weekly updates as promised) and there has been no effort to stick to the company's values. In fact, the message is being diluted and my E-mail messages about this remain unanswered. Remember that [REDACTED] and I are your longest-serving (to present) employees. I'm always happy to receive even just a phonecall to touch base.*

*Then there's the more 'petty' or less important stuff, which I will mention anyway (it's not the reason for this mail, but I want to get it off my chest). The company was not even sending payslips for years, pension lapses added to a sense of something gone awry silently, recently there was a mistake made by [REDACTED], leaving me working 12 hours in a row (no disciplinary action for her, I assume; that's just for us, the "low-level" employees to face). I still haven't forgotten what happened 3 years. There was a climate of threats, directed not only at me but also colleagues; as far as I can gather, there was no accountability for [REDACTED] either, in effect bullying staff, as if some people are exempted from their own standards. And again no transparency; we weren't even told when she left the company.*

*We need to look inward instead of resorting to selective finger-pointing at people who work at 1am for roughly minimum wage, even people with a doctoral degree.*

*If you want to talk about these things, I suggest phone as that would convey and add tone. With text it's too easy to misunderstand and misinterpret well-meaning people.*

The CEO never even responded to this. Did not pick up the phone, either. Roy tried many times. Same outcome.

As noted above, the salary is laughable.

Also, as noted previously, the behaviour of the company in recent years (sometimes lying, choosing unethical clients, rejecting Open Source) is already becoming public reputation damage to Roy and to his work, set aside the company's concern for its own reputation. Roy believes he could sue particular people inside the company for bullying, but Roy doesn't want to bother with litigation, seeing that the company is already becoming a liability to his online reputation by its choice of clients and proprietary technologies, which pose moral issues (clerical job, loan shark, military).

Those who accuse Roy, and moreover lump his wife into it (more on that later), conveniently forget all the many positive things Roy wrote about Sirius in Techrights even years before working for the company. This is what's shown publicly in blog posts, not some assorted chat gossip with a ton of typos.

None of this is about defamation (no falsehoods contained therein), it's all about ego. It's about egotistic people, whose names are never even mentioned, not knowing how to cope with constructive and factual criticism. As noted before, the company is deaf to its own staff. Technical people are treated as clueless. This is a recipe for corporate failure.

To be very clear, the company's clients are never named in relation to the company but in relation to news (they are famous people, public figures). To claim that people with audience of millions cannot be even mentioned in Techrights is outright crazy.

In IRC, the main channel talks about technology, but the company instead cherry-picks some side channel that was deprecated back in 2010. In it, some real issues are discussed, potential misconduct by the company at many levels, even gross misconduct by the company and lies devised to cover up failure to comply with contracts (possible legal breach and actionable). But no person or company gets mentioned, except maybe by accident (very rarely). Roy insists that he did not name people or the companies; the PDFs supplied to Roy support that, as he was always careful. Roy is entitled to an opinion, especially outside work. He used reasonably polite wording.

To be very clear, the job in the overnight Support Team involves about 1 hour of practical work on actual servers (true for NOC colleagues; there's nothing practical to do aside from response to incidents), the rest of time being devoted to tickets, monitoring, response, and discussion with colleagues. Roy did all of these things very well. Roy never posted to social media while on shift. Ever. That much is very evident.

To be very clear, the company defamed the NOC (Support Team) staff, comparing it to "monkeys" in the official wiki (before hiring those "monkeys"). Staff should not be compared to animals; it's not fair to animals and it's not fair to people. This is an example of unprofessional behaviour inside the company. Now the management is running after us "monkeys". To wit, the company name-called Roy even in company E-mail (calling him "paranoid" in writing and over the telephone). This culture issue isn't limited to staff. For instance, the company says bad things in Slack, worse than in IRC, and with identifiable names included (e.g. one manager of a client being called "an arse" by the Sirius founder). This is really bad, this is unprofessional, and this gets transmitted to a surveillance company (Salesforce) in another continent, working for clients like ICE. When one's own chief (and founder) is name-calling the clients by their real name in a privacy-infringing tool, visible to all staff, why are high standards expected from low-paid, exploited, "milked" staff like Roy and Rianne, who already endured unwarranted abuse years prior?

It should be noted that low-quality "gossip" (two-person chat) -- with quantity to make up for the low quality -- don't add up to a serious case of disciplinary action, especially against someone who never even spoke in that IRC network, never mind the channel.

What we see here resembles witch-hunting and is more like stalking and misuse of management time, stalking staff outside work instead of pursuing actual



clients (management should focus on CEO tasks, not spying; that's the job of HR or equivalent).

Roy and Rianne feel like Sirius is trying to cover up and target criticism instead of actually listening to long-serving staff, who spent years warning about several legal and technical issues (some examples hitherto provided in this document).

Rianne is probably the biggest victim here. After bullying by a former manager, who used false accusations against her, the latest CEO is picking photos of her and completely unrelated material, including shamelessly using a charitable cause (supporting koala bears when fires killed them) to cause trauma to those who support them -- that's akin to bullying of the worst kind. To make matters worse, only days earlier Rianne told the CEO that her aunt, the only relative she has in the UK, had been diagnosed with an aggressive cancer and may need holidays to be confirmed (as many had been turned down) so that she can visit and look after her in these difficult times (she has no family to look after her). It seems cruel and merciless for a CEO to pick on a worker who is grieving, stressed over the health of a loved one, and moreover throw adorable koala photos as "evidence" of a supposed 'crime' (basically leveraging the agony of animals to chase down a worker quite so ferociously). It's not reassuring to think that management adopts the mindset of brutes and ogres, picking on staff looking to raise money for animal charities while themselves supporting blind people's and animals' charities (for many years already). While management dwells or relishes in offensive, crude language, even polite terms used by "ordinary" staff gets painted as "rude" if the message itself isn't convenient to the management. There are documented examples of these double standards.

Roy will soon be (or have been) 12 years in the company, but he has already endured some abuse from colleagues, usually bosses. It should be reasonable to expect Roy to be unhappy about lack of response from bosses (sometimes lying about not receiving his E-mails). What sort of company acts this way? As noted above, other colleagues had the same experience (deafness and silence). It's crystal clear, for several purely technical reasons, that messages from Roy were being ignored, not lost.

# 1 Adherence to the Rule of Law and Human Rights

From what can be gathered thus far, the company is shooting from the hip, walking in the dark without any legal guidance. From what's witnessed and what lawyers have made an assessment of, legal protocols are disregarded or simple breached; the managers don't go through HR as they did before (impartial), probably due to cost-related overheads and a lack of budget/money in the company's bank account, as can be seen by failure to comply with very basic legal protocols. Very, very basic stuff.

In a society based on the Rule of Law it is important to ensure, at all times, that laws are being followed, including the freedom of expression. A proper investigative process should be based on law-compliant guidelines rather than made up or twisted as one goes along, based on some personal preferences of a self-appointed investigator. Improvised 'laws' aren't laws but kangaroo courts of theatrical nature with arbitrary routines.

Freedom of speech was in general respected, but only selectively (i.e. rules not equally and consistently applied). Inside work, for instance, some people were allowed to express political opinions, whereas others got reprimanded for making a harmless joke pertaining to Donald Trump (whom the company's founder supports). Is it the case that some workers have the privilege to express political opinions, whereas some are denied that? Is kinship a recipe for immunity, not just a recruitment fast lane?

In the same vein, management can use very crude language at times, but even reasonably polite words used by ordinary staff are spun as "rude" and staff is forbidden from expressing opinions, based on false pretexts of "manners".

As it stands, several employees have a romantic relationship and in spite of inadequate skills one trio of workers (with a very unconventional love affair, akin to a wife swap and love triangle) enjoy privileged access to some systems that more veteran colleagues cannot access. It's perfectly clear that some people make all the decisions behind closed doors and some are denied any influence whatsoever because they are not part of the "clique" or the literal family. Career progression is not based on merits but a facade thereof. If it's about who one knows who (or sleeps with who), then this degrades the image of the company, at least internally. One of the trio suggested lowering the salary of the nighttime Support Team, which her two other halves aren't part of. That's rather offensive

and can repulse those who really deserve double the salary for working overnight.

To quote or to paraphrase Roy and Rianne's replies to threatening messages:

*Dear all,*

*I believe I was unfairly treated on several grounds, including relevant protocols pertaining to several aspects. I will spare you the details but can elaborate if needed.*

*Here is the gist of the issues:*

- 1. No due process*
- 2. Verbal/oral distortion of claims*
- 3. You misrepresented alleged evidence, but conveniently presented it as facts to my wife*
- 4. No hard evidence presented (just a reference to a handbook we lack a copy of)*
- 5. Rather gross accusation inflation against a person whom you did not even speak to*

*There are more point, but I shall keep this brief.*

*The company has a history doing this to couples, e.g. one blind colleague based in Germany; it was very serious and it went to court, based on a trusted source (it cost the company and/or its Directors -- [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] -- a lot of money, as went on for a long time; allegedly got settled at the end but injured the company).*

*We visited lawyers on Friday and on Monday. We spoke about the facts in length and have a good understanding of our rights.*

*We agreed that we don't yet wish to escalate this matter and would rather settle amicably.*

*Regards,*

*Roy,*

*[Your longest-serving employee (aside from the founder)]*

The allegations is that Roy and Rianne do not speak to the management directly, as they wish to instead communicate through a legal representative. Roy has explained to managers that they are not an appropriate tribunal (clearly HR hasn't been properly consulted about this):

*Under the European Convention on Human Rights Article 6 (England is in the European Court of Human Rights) I am entitled to have a representative and access an objective tribunal. You will hear from my lawyer soon.*

So basically they improvise and make it up as they go along, thinking they're a sheriff or something -- very unprofessional.

Why does this happen? It's plausible that tribalism and self-service are the motivation.

The current CEO seems to have zero experience with Open Source, and some workers lack even a relevant degree in a computing-related field (it's all about nepotism -- harsh to hear, but true; it wasn't like this when Roy joined the company).

As noted before, the company is misrepresenting itself to the public. It's portrayed as a cross-Atlantic enterprise and the web site is faking the size of the company, which is like 1 or at most 2 people in the US and only half a dozen in the UK. They mislead existing and maybe future clients.

Other colleagues have long spoken about these issues (also past colleagues), a reputation harm to the company, but they have not been subjected to stalking or singling out. Why? Probably because they left the company early enough.

The company is basically looking for a finger-pointing opportunity, it tries to cover this up, and may conveniently cheery-pick Roy's criticisms, which don't name people or companies.

To make matters worse, the managers accuse Roy of "defamation" even though everything said by Roy is easily provably, just not very convenient. Conversely, the company itself lies routinely; for instance, the managers repeatedly said they would hire in the US; in a later meeting they admitted this was not done.

The Office Manager, the Account Manager, and the CEO don't have understanding of Open Source and some lack any technical background and are thus unfit for the roles they occupy. In some contexts, this is legally actionable and as far as the public knows, there was never a job advertised for those roles, i.e. each of these was just ad hoc appointment. The CEO has a single-page Web site that says almost nothing and has no track record of actual work (in 18 years). It's hard to figure out where all that confidence is derived from.

A company that had properly accredited managerial staff in 2011 is now run like a hobby, or by people who think they themselves are the law. No involvement of HR -- no evidence of it anyway -- so it's all improvised and likely a one-man fishing expedition, trying to become judge, jury, and executioner. This is not acceptable. This needs to be independently investigated.

There are many legal issues with the way Sirius handles itself. As noted earlier in this document, the company did not pay the pension for months at the time, it did not pay a webhost until it was too late, and staff members haven't received paylips for months.

The company conveniently shifts the attention to two workers. Funnily enough, the official Sirius web site still links to the sites they claim to be "defamatory", using Roy and Rianne for self-serving marketing purposes. The Sirius Web site states that Rianne runs TuxMachines, yet it's presented as a "discovery" in the accusations. How is that anything short of satire?

The current CEO's role seems to be something along the lines of those "successful bankruptcy" they teach MBA students about, i.e. shutting a company down on the cheap (like looking for reasons to deny compensation). One might even joke that this CEO is like a "demolition man" for Sirius, spending time stalking staff instead of serving the company (Sirius lost Argo AI and other seemingly 'fake' clients whose systems Sirius never had access to; Argo AI is now formally and legally defunct), sawing the boat beneath him as at the end he too would be left without a job and Sirius as a company too become fiscally defunct.

It feels like Sirius is already so desperate for clients that it is willing to sign contracts at a humongous loss to Sirius. For instance, Sirius recently "miscalculated" with one client (charged 1,000 pounds for a project/client, but later realised Sirius already spent 5,000 pounds on the project, which means the losses are 4 times the revenue). In October the company changed the official company address to its accountancy's address, i.e. the address of another firm. The day after Roy asked the CEO about it; he only got angry and it didn't look good. We were running out of assets and maybe no postbox, either. Letters are sent to staff with no return address. Who runs the show? A private apartment?

Using Rianne for accusation by proxy seems irrational on many levels. It's probably done just for spite and revenge against Roy. The letter sent to Rianne (by E-mail and then by post) is missing context and there are no URLs in screenshots. Without full context or at least a URL it's almost impossible to know what one is looking at. Evidence oughtn't be presented like this and IRC logs might not even be admissible in most contexts.

## 2 Further Discussion of the Issues

There are lots of issues that cannot be brought up without infringing the confidentiality of Sirius clients. However important they are, it's regretful that they cannot be mentioned in this document.

What facts have shown thus far is astounding and hopefully a cautionary tale. No company should hire people and keep them on the same salary in their 40s for the same job they were hired to do in their 20s, not to mention inflation being ignored as if it's not happening. On top of that, bullying is not acceptable, especially in light of working conditions, which may be in breach of British law for some of the aforementioned reasons.

Management figures, lacking any technical skills trying to get staff to study things like containers despite Sirius clients not using these is an unfortunate ploy. They are just hoping to fake their staff possessing some skills and then netting a contract based on it. As we saw earlier, this results in the company, Sirius, hopelessly left to support systems it is unable to support, as the skills being bragged about aren't in fact to be found inside the company. So hopefully that will change. If Sirius does not net contracts based on an old (and long-lost)

reputation for skills it does not have, then maybe staff can actually meet clients' expectations.

The company ought to remove the term "Open Source" from its name; the company has presence only in proprietary platforms but none in "Open Source" ones, except maybe "legacy" systems from the "old" Sirius era. Over time it's gravitating towards 100% proprietary, but people who run the company cannot even distinguish, so explaining the issue can be an exercise in futility. To give just recent examples, Sirius moved to a system of telephony that did not work and did so even faster as a result of it not working (example of extreme incompetence), resulting in poor service to clients that could previously make contact effortlessly. This document won't name the systems, but it's clear that improving the ability to answer calls or communicate was not a priority. 'Freebies' from Google aren't free; they're only temporarily available 'free samples'.

To cite an older example, all the staff hated the timetracker and hilariously enough those who imposed it on staff refused to do the timetracker routines themselves. When challenged on this (highly hypocritical behaviour that harms morale), one of them sobbed and went away, unable to actually justify this arrogant ego trip (imposing unwanted things on people vastly more qualified). The person who sobbed later messed up the salaries (many times), then did not respond for months when question on the matter. This resulted in financial harm. The person responsible for this error was never reprimanded or punished, neither for these mistakes nor for failing to respond, which is very typical in today's Sirius management, even the CEO lying about not receiving E-mails.

No wonder lots of workers left. Those who did not leave constantly face abuse and are being silenced. Dissent in Sirius isn't being dealt with by grown-ups. No wonder associates were openly mocking the CEO for being non-technical and for writing face-saving cruft to clients. In fact, it seems like a lot of people either left or became cynical about the company. Those who stayed (and remains cynical) are now being maliciously targeted and it is truly sad to say that the company became a bit of a hoax, as it is neither about Open Source nor caring about the devoted staff that made many personal compromises, only pretending to care in very shallow ways like annual vouchers (worth less than one shift).

## V Conclusion

To summarise, Sirius should simply admit out in the open: “we've deviated away from our mission,” and moreover Sirius ignores warnings about security (ISO deserves to know about phonies and posers at security).

Roy internally cautioned about this several times over the years. Later, when some providers suffers security breaches (as Roy predicted) Sirius neither reset the passwords nor left the compromised providers.

To reiterate what was stated at the start, what's alleged here is factually correct and evidence-backed. No URLs are provided, but URLs can be provided shall they be requested. Brevity still matters and much remains to be told.

In regards to the weak accusations leveraged to avoid paying compensation to Roy and Rianne, here again is the gist of the underlying issue/s:

1. no due process
2. no evidence presented (or claims merely alluded to without context/link)
3. gross accusation inflation
4. guilt by association (identical letter, too)
5. the company has a history doing this to couples, e.g. one blind colleague based in Germany; it was very serious and it went to court (cost the company or its Directors -- the founder and his wife -- a lot of money, went on for a long time, settled at the end)

The document is far from complete. Roy and Rianne have documents, have screenshots, links to official documents from Companies House etc.