

A botched and revealing election



The Tribunal de Grande Instance de Paris rejected SUD's lawsuit seeking to suspend the election of staff representatives to AFP's Board of Governors. We won't comment on the court's ruling, which was not on the merits of the case. Regrettable from the point of view of the overall interest of the agency and its employees, the ruling does not change our opposition to the grotesque voting rules imposed by the government and CEO Emmanuel Hoog. Here's a recap:

1/ Franaix law¹

This law adopted on 17 April modified AFP's statute and introduced a new funding mechanism, which foresees a financial disengagement of the French state, and which we now know that will only function on one condition: that the employees agree to work more for less (as Mr Hoog and the government are now trying to get us to do).

The SDJ, SNJ, and CFDT supported the law and now crow about have obtained more democracy by obtaining a third employee representative on the Board of Governors, which has been expanded to 19 members. However our two serving representatives on the Board, elected just one year ago, were thrown out of office instead of just electing an additional representative. Where is the democracy there?

2/ The 23 June 2015 decree applying the amendments to AFP's statute²

Putting sexual parity above democracy. Article 11 of the decree requires those seeking the two journalist seats to run on lists of 4 candidates, composed either F-M-F-M or M-F-M-F. If two lists with men at the top win seats, the man from the list with most votes will be elected, but the seat on the second place list will go to the woman even though she was in the second position on the list. The opposite would be true if there are two lists with women at the top: a man would be elected from the second place list. This is a dizzying concept of democracy that should be removed.

When Man + Man = sexual parity. When it comes to non-journalists, the decree specifies lists must be of two men or two women, so that in case of a resignation the replacement is of the same sex. Nice concept of parity!

3/ The CEO's restrictive electoral rules (3 September 2015)³

The 6-month presence criteria. Several employees who have been with the company for decades have been on sick leave recently. This interruption of work means they have been (unjustly in our view) deprived of their vote. Almost all employees on short term contracts have been disenfranchised.

Local staff disadvantaged. Out of some 2,800 full-time staff and regular stringers, 1,500 have French contracts and 1,300 have local contracts. However the Joint Committee tasked with supervising the elections has no representatives of local staff. Only elected French unions have members on the committee.

¹ <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2015/4/17/MCCX1429722L/jo#JORFSCOA000030490304>

² <http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000850483>

³ http://www.sud-afp.org/IMG/pdf/2015_09_03_decision_du_president_elections_ca_2015_.pdf

4/ Inadequate voting information

The CEO's Franco-French electoral rules fail to take into account the multilingual and multicultural nature of the agency, to the detriment of the local staff:

The voting website is only in French. Just try to find the candidate statements if you don't speak the language!

Worse, the **voting instructions** letter, sent in French and English (but not Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese and German) doesn't even mention the candidate statements!

These candidate statements, a key element of making any informed democratic choice, were not sent to voters. Employees have to go searching for them, either on the voting website or on the agency's intranet: ASAP.

Getting onto ASAP is not something all employees can do as some 300 don't have AFP email addresses, including around 40 which don't have any email address. The fact that 10 percent of staff cannot easily

get full information to make an informed choice doesn't seem to be causing much concern...

Indifference, the worst of attitudes*

When one petitions the courts, you don't always win. But it is by taking such a risk that SUD in 2011 was able to win a case giving local employees the right to vote in the election of staff representatives to the Board of Governors.

Today, the right for all AFP employees worldwide to vote in the election is taken as given, but at the time we had to battle against AFP's management, the staff representatives to the Board of Governors, the SDJ and the major trade unions.⁴

Today they are all indifferent to these overly complicated election rules and poor organization, which puts local employees at a disadvantage. But the absence of a real choice between the two lists of candidates for journalists and no choice for non-journalists, plus the low participation rate, show that something isn't right.

Changing the voting rules to guarantee equal rights for all is in the interest of all.

Paris, October 14, 2015

SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)

* Stéphane Hessel, "Indignez-vous !", www.indigene-editions.fr



⁴ See the chronology of the struggle - <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article46>