



## **FOR AN INDEPENDENT AFP THAT RESPECTS ITS STAFF**

For many of you, these elections will mark the first time that you are being asked to vote for your staff representative on the AFP board of governors. The unjust nationality clause which previously excluded non-European staff from voting in these elections has been struck down by the French Constitutional Council. I am proud to have played an active part in the long legal battle which culminated in that ruling. All AFP staff, whatever their nationality, are now eligible to elect their representative to the board. Which means that this election now comes up to the standards we should expect from a worldwide news agency such as AFP. I hope that this democratic step forward will result in gains for local status staff around the world; I believe they should have the same rights as "headquarters status" staff.

In pushing the case all the way to the Constitutional Council we had to contend with the opposition not only of AFP management but also of many staff representative organisations. Today I am seeking your votes for the post of non-journalist rep on the AFP board of governors. If you elect me to that body I propose to bring back the fighting spirit that was a feature of AFP's birth as a modern news agency. I promise to be unyielding in my opposition to any attempts to weaken or undermine the structural independence that is written in to the 1957 Statutes. I also undertake to consistently demand respect for AFP's staff and to defend their - your - interests.

### **Fighting Spirit**

In the space of less than 18 months, AFP staff have mobilised to block projects advanced by two successive CEOs with the aim of smashing our 1957 statutes. At the start of their mandates both of those chief executives swore that they would not touch what one of our historic CEO's - Jean Marin - liked to call "the Statute of Liberty." That text, enshrined in French law, has allowed AFP to defend its ranking as a worldwide news agency for over a half-century. Our two most recent CEOs, Pierre Louette and then Emmanuel Hoog, reneged on their early promises, yielding to the voice of authority. The first in obeying without hesitation the French government when it ordered him to draw up a report aimed at showing that the agency simply had to be changed into a joint-stock company. The second in bowing down in advance to the presumed demands of the European Commission; an ultra-free-market entity whose strictures are being rejected by ever-growing numbers of European peoples from Reykjavik to Madrid and from Lisbon to Athens.

On each occasion, thanks to the action of the joint HQ status trade unions, staff across the board acted in unison to show the spirit of resistance that was so lacking in our CEOs, blocking the attempts to bring AFP under the control of political or business interests.

### **Independence**

A founder-member of the Association to Defend the Independence of Agence France-Presse (ADIAFP), I see the independence of the news process as a principle of supreme importance. Information is essential if all citizens are to be able to fully exercise their democratic rights with full knowledge of the real issues. News published by AFP reaches several billion people, either directly or via the publications that use its services. It is therefore of enormous importance that such news should be of high quality, meaning that it must be absolutely independent of all business or political interests.

If the statutes which underwrite AFP's independence are to be changed at some future date, a number of preconditions must be fulfilled. One is that the proposed changes should not in any way weaken that independence. Others are that the changes should be part and parcel of an authentic strategy for the

company; that they should be first approved by AFP staff in a referendum and that the ensuing bill should be passed by a very large majority in the French parliament. All those conditions were met when the current statutes were enacted in 1957; there is no reason that they should not also be respected today, 55 years later, by whoever wishes to change the basic principles of AFP's existence.

## **Respect for Staff**

AFP must remain independent. That does not mean that it should be above the law. Which is why SUD-AFP, the trade union in which I have been active for many years, has gone to the courts to ensure that, from now on, all AFP staff are eligible to take part in this election, without discrimination. "SUD" stands for "Solidarity, Unity, Democracy".

If I am elected, I undertake to stand by my convictions and to go on doggedly defending the interests of AFP staff. I will regularly consult the trade unions and other staff representatives, and will work as a team with the other elected rep - for journalists - on condition that he or she defend similar principles.

Each year the 15 members of AFP's board of governors, including the two staff representatives, are called upon to give their opinion on the company's draft budget. Despite the fact that the document submitted for the current year clearly pointed to austerity and regression for staff interests - notably implying a wage freeze and ever-more recourse to casualised labour contracts - the board approved it unanimously, with the current non-journalist rep voting in favour. If I am elected I will not hesitate to vote against any budget proposal that does not provide enough resources to finance the agency's material and staff needs.

Jacques Duvivier

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*I am aged 61 and have been working at AFP since 1982. My current job is as a technician in the back-office production (SEBP) department charged with maintaining the servers at AFP headquarters. Since 2008 I have also been a magistrate in the Paris labour court (Prud'hommes) system, a post to which I was elected under the banner of the SOLIDAIRES union confederation of which SUD-AFP is a part.*

*For the benefit of both previous voters and the around 160 non-journalist staff members who will be eligible to vote for the first time in this election, I would like to point out that you will be choosing not a trade union but a candidate. There is no rule stating that the non-journalist representative on the AFP board has to be a member of the union that has traditionally been dominant among technical and administrative HQ status staff.*

*What counts in your choice of a candidate is not his or her trade union label, but his or her personality and what he or she says, writes and does.*