

How to improve the status of the elected official?

Socialist Party - Section of Palaiseau - Essonne

Are our deputies representative of the French population? Do our municipal councils reflect our fellow citizens in the communes?

Are we all equal when it comes to running for an elected term of office and staying in office for five to six years? Do women take an equal place with men?

The legislative baggage frames the status of the elected official, but is it sufficient? Can't it be improved?

On many occasions, this subject has been the subject of debate: in the Senate in 2013, still in the Senate in 2018 (working group) as well as in the Association of Mayors of France (AMF).

According to the *Observatory of Inequalities*, while 4.6% of MPs are employed, none are workers, while the category of employees and workers represents half of the active population. Conversely, managers and senior professionals account for 76% of elected officials, or 4.4 times their share of the workforce.

Moreover, it is very difficult, when one comes from a working-class background, to enter the National Assembly. To be a candidate, one must belong to the networks of power and forge ties that go beyond the political sphere (friends, work relations, etc.), and know and dare to express oneself in public.

At 39.5%, the proportion of women, although up, is still lower than it should be.

At the level of local mandates, the situation is different but remains unsatisfactory.

Senior managers represent 31.6% of regional councillors, 22.6% of departmental councillors, 14.7% of community councillors and 11.8% of mayors, while they represent 9.3% of the population.

Farmers make up barely 1% of the population but 13.7% of mayors, due to the very large number of rural communes. On the other hand, employees and workers, respectively 15.8 and 12.1 percent of the population, have a very small presence in local authorities. Women are equally represented in local government, but not in positions of responsibility, due to the parity required by law. Thus, only 10% of women are mayors.

For private-sector employees, political involvement involves a high professional risk. It is not always easy to make oneself available at the same time as one's professional life, and if one stops working completely in favor of the mandate, it can be very difficult to return to work. This is not the case for civil servants who can be placed on standby, nor for certain liberal professions who have the possibility of subcontracting part of their activities during their mandate.

Moreover, the "professionalization of policies", a consequence of a lack of renewal of actors, leads to complex and debatable situations, especially when failure and non re-election to "retrain" these professionals, who have lost their foothold in working life.

Finally, there is the question of indemnities, if any. A Member of Parliament, whether he or she is in the opposition or the majority, is properly compensated, allowing him/her to give up his/her professional activity in order to assume his/her mandate on a full-time basis. The same does not apply to local mandates. Regional and Departmental Councils compensate all their elected representatives at varying heights (depending on the number of inhabitants), with increases depending on

delegations. These levels of compensation are sometimes acceptable "to live on" but not always. As for city councillors, compensation varies widely but is almost always at a level that can only compensate for part-time work.

Intuitively, one can sense that the problem is complex and that an improvement in the status of the elected official cannot be achieved with a wave of a magic wand. Moreover, any evolution will have to be financed.

It therefore seems essential to bring together the different actors in the same group and to give this group the time necessary for in-depth and meticulous work. Specialists in labor law, representatives of different socio-professional categories, representatives of companies, representatives of different types of elected officials will have to work together with an obligation of results, as this subject cannot stop at the debate.

The Association of Mayors of France has worked on the subject and made 12 proposals to improve and strengthen the status of local elected officials:

1. The introduction of a mandatory minimum training budget set at 20% of the maximum compensation provided for in the texts.
2. The extension of the beneficiaries of the "local elected official" grant to all municipalities with less than 3,500 inhabitants, while maintaining the criterion of a tax potential lower than the average tax potential of the stratum.
3. Recognition of the right to the maximum compensation provided by law to guarantee local executives fair compensation for expenses and loss of income related to the effective exercise of their functions.
4. Clarification of the legal nature of the office allowance by the creation of a text of law clearly stating that the office allowance received by the local elected official can in no case constitute a salary, a salary or any other remuneration.
5. An interministerial circular to monitor the effective application of the time off recognized for elected officials under the law.
6. Extension of the right to suspend the employment contract to all assistants.
7. The introduction of a right to cash benefits for elected officials who are forced to leave office for health reasons.
8. The adaptation of the right to disability pension for elected officials who contract to reduce their professional activity.
9. Community assumption of the personal liability insurance of the mayor.
10. The strict application of the law in matters of contempt of court against persons found guilty of contempt of court against a mayor or his or her deputies in the performance of their duties.
11. The improvement of the pension scheme for elected officials, either by recognizing the tax deductibility of supplementary pension contributions, or by increasing the rate of IRCANTEC membership fee.
12. The implementation of a system of "special end-of-term allowances" to provide financial assistance to elected officials seeking to return to work.

These proposals are a starting point.

Training is mentioned in the first proposal, but it would be advisable to go further with pre-term training; it would allow those who "don't feel like going" to help them plan for an elective mandate. The Socialist Party already offers training in this sense, so one could imagine a generalization of such training, in addition to those offered by the parties.

On the compensation aspects, it is necessary to be more proactive, especially for elected officials with a large delegation in large cities. This situation necessitates abandoning part of its

working time for the benefit of his mandate. One cannot imagine a loss of income. Moreover, securing the income of elected officials would avoid a regrettable accumulation of local mandates (municipal councils, community councils, intermunicipal unions, etc.), which does not promote either representativeness in these assemblies or the efficiency of elected officials.

In these troubled times, both in terms of health and the functioning of our democracy, it seems appropriate to rework the status of the elected representative with a view to improving it, and isn't our Socialist Party the best place for this debate?