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As the Struggle Continues

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“France’s government needs to take a harder look at its latest competitiveness agenda, now that researchers have had time to study the impacts of such policies elsewhere. It should strive for the best of both worlds: to produce research that benefits society, balanced with support for the well-being of those on the academic front line.”
(Nature 2020: 8)

- 1 It will soon be a year since the editorial staff of the EJTS joined the mobilization provoked in France by the draft “multiannual research programming law” (LPPR), which goes hand in hand with the project to reform the French pension system. The first result of this mobilization, which lies at the heart of our activities, was the “Research in danger” issue we published last summer: A blank issue, devoid of research, to serve as a warning sign against the scientific sterility foreseen by the LPPR (EJTS 2020). Six months later, the law—now renamed, as a sort of admission of short-term thinking, the “research programming law” (LPR)—was passed, its contents even worse (cf. CPESR 2020).
- 2 Has the case been heard? This issue, “In Struggle”, is our collective response. Criticizing a law such as the LP(P)R in a country such as France required seeing situations with which we are familiar in light of other national or regional contexts; and in so doing, to befriend researchers with experiences from other worlds. The heterogeneity of these interventions is tangible even in their different writing formats: The witness account rubs shoulders with the meandering interview; the graphical analysis follows the manifesto. And yet, the authors knew that they were taking part in collective labor. Even as they were writing, they were reading each other. Such cross-reading is what this issue invites. It bears witness to the links that were established or reactivated thanks to the movement, and which, in turn, will constitute future mobilizations.
- 3 The designers of the LP(P)R in France have said it over and over again: Their primary concern is the “risk of France lagging behind in terms of investment,” a lag that makes

it urgent to catch up with the “most advanced countries” (LPR 2020, appendix report: 3 et seq.). However, these same countries also supposedly represent a “standard international practice” from which France is an exception (ibid.: 39). Quite logically, therefore, the solution would be to align our norms (of recruitment, remuneration, management, evaluation, etc.) with the supposedly standard norms of these model countries.

- 4 But which countries are those? The list is not fixed. Nevertheless, the report annexed to the bill invokes, among the rare sources it cites, “a study carried out by the scientific advisers of the French embassies in eight key research countries: Germany, Australia, United States, Great Britain [sic], Japan, the Netherlands, Singapore, Switzerland” (ibid.: 5). This study was requested in 2019 by the working group “Attractiveness of jobs and scientific careers” mandated by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in order to prepare the present bill (Berta, Mauguin and Tunon de Lara 2019). The members of the working group were inspired to carry out a “benchmarking exercise”, but not without underlining “the diversity of models”, thus explicitly recognizing that the notion of “standard international practice” was only a regulatory fiction (ibid.: 14). It is by seeking to reproduce the reasoning of these colleagues, colleagues who had become advisers to power, and to widen the circle of countries cited as models, that we have worked. As the authors of the *Nature* editorial suggest, the international references on which governments and institutions today claim to base their policies require “a more careful examination, now that researchers have had the time to study the impacts of such policies elsewhere”.
- 5 In short, the struggle we are talking about here involves the pursuit of critical work (cf. Doussot and Pons 2020). The scientific and journalistic bibliography is abundant; one cannot limit oneself to reading embassy reports (which are inaccessible to the public, to our knowledge). Critique means questioning and a conflict of values: We cannot rely on the schematism of “benchmarking”, which undoubtedly facilitates managerial control but also eliminates the uncertainty necessary for scientific discovery. This struggle cannot be reduced to the current circumstances that made it visible. It has always been there, and it always will be.
- 6 We run a journal; we do science. And we intend to continue.

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Mots-clés: journals in struggle, open university, endangered sciences, scientific publishing, indexing, multiannual research programming law (LPPR), benchmarking, standard international practice