

Emperor, Here We Are!

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Will the recent Nous Voila election bring stability to France's troubled colonies – or bring her even more grief?

Elections to provincial or colonial parliaments are rarely cause for much excitement in the French empire – the chance to trounce a particularly obnoxious governor, or a mild approval for the latest pork-barrel spending. But the recent election for the Nous Voila regional council sent waves of interest far outside the voters.

One reason was the sheer absurdity of the event. The planet is by the latest joint fleet account well on its way into a pre-terraformed nuclear winter. Even the always-hopeful Zapamoga Wydostanie teams have long given up on finding any survivors, leaving the planet to the blizzards. Yet many election manifests sounded like the tricolore still waved over Nouveau Amman, and much debate circulated about whether recomputing election district sizes was a case of gerrymandering rather than counting up genocidal losses. Survivors are scattered across more than ten worlds, yet tried to elect a shared government that would formally rule over... well, what?

The whole election issue began on Kimanjano, apparently as a sop to the NV refugees. They form a sizeable fraction of the half million displaced people living under often squalid conditions on the less-than-pleasant planet. The Fromme Colonial Government (themselves largely out of a job until General-Governor Duchenne announces that the crisis is over and relinquishes his emergency powers) developed a plan to hold an election of representatives to the Nous Voila government among the local refugees. This was likely more out of a desire to give them an incentive to participate in the locally controversial ID scheme, as well as give them a feeling they had a say about something.

The plan soon ran into problems when refugees on Beta Canum demanded an election. A quick appeal to the Conseil Constitutionnel back on Earth led to the announcement that citizens of NV had a right to vote anywhere they lived. Suddenly all the local colonial governments became eager to comply, if only to get some of the election funding.

Running an interstellar election is a complex undertaking, as the US recently discovered, but the NV election had a myriad complications. What to do about the 10,000 refugees living in Adlerhorst, a nation France does not recognize and has placed under embargo? Was it unfair to allow voting from districts where only one or two survivors were known, who would be guaranteed to become elected if they voted for themselves? Should the counting be done on Kimanjano (where most refugees lived) or on Beta Canum (where the best administration is located)?

Against all odds the election went ahead. The key battle was on Kimanjano for the bulk of the votes. The three main contestants were Jacinthe Chastel, the conservative nationalist candidate, Artur-Louis Trudeau, self-styled statesman and ultra-middle-of-the-road visionary, and Lisette Arnaud, the populist pragmatist. The election campaign was by all accounts nasty, interesting and energetic. Different refugee factions clashed, accusations for collaboration with the hated general-governor, organized crime or rebels rained, and fine french rhetoric regaled the audiences. The final win of Arnaud with a 15% margin over

Chastel was almost a disappointment: many locals wished the campaign had lasted longer for all the entertainment it gave.

It now looks like Lisette Arnaud is set to become President of the Regional Council of Nous Voila. Exactly when this will happen depends on when the colonial electoral colleges manage to cobble together the complete list of parliamentarians - and more importantly, figure out how to make them meet. A virtual parliament would be totally symbolic an ineffectual, debating using message missiles for months over the simplest issues. Bringing the delegates physically together would be costly and require deciding on a suitable location – unlikely given the clear animosity between the Kimanjano and BC electoral administrations. Working together has clearly not brought them closer. To make things even more interesting, there are still dregs of remaining budget for the parliament to spend – and a functioning parliament could likely demand a colonial budget.

From a local perspective the election has been very successful: it has given the refugees a focus and hope, helped promote an otherwise controversial ID program magnificently and even brought up the Kimanjano situation a few notches on the political agenda. At the same time it has been risky: the non-NV citizens envy the democracy they cannot get. It is noticeable that many Frommois attended the rallies – and how hard they applauded when the right to self-determination was mentioned. Many refugees in the ruins of Les Dechets are complaining that they were disenfranchised by military blockades. If this was the general-governor's plan to calm the population it has only half-succeeded – and it has succeeded with the people least likely to be a problem.

The general-governor has had a quiet spring, only marred by attacks against convoys transporting RFID tags and the recent attack on Nous l'Usine (see elsewhere in this issue). The attack set back the work on the crucial Liberation Dam by months and caused a noticeable dip in the interest that has built up over the months since the Pentapods arrived but was not a major threat to his hold on the colony. The election has on the surface helped him. But it has increased the pressure a notch: if things blow up, they will get uglier, if he can keep on top of things, he has gained valuable allies.

The real question is, as always, what the Emperor does. Traditionally he would either appoint a governor directly, or as was common on NV, offer the President the job and letting the vice-President (in this case the voluble Trudeau) become President. Doing the first would be a major snub to the refugees, doing the second would give even more credibility to this exile parliament. If he does not appoint anybody, then that is also a clear signal that he considers the whole event a farce - and that may cause serious unrest on Kimanjano. But accepting this kind of dispersed colony citizenship goes against long-standing French principles of governance. Even emperors are powerless against unintended consequences of small, local decisions lightyears away.