

Le Populaire de Centre / Publié le 30/07/2019 à 17h55

Environnement

How Aeolian developers put "pressure" on the owners of Haute-Vienne
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Posted on 30/07/2019 at 17h55

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Park of 6 wind turbines Lussac-les-Eglises © Photo Aline Combrouze
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A stake of general interest, the installation of the wind turbines in Haute-Vienne begins with canvassing led by the promoters. A framed practice that sometimes turns into a game of lying poker between inhabitants, elected officials and industrialists.

"Initially, the wind, I was rather for. Owner in the south of Haute-Vienne, Michel is not a greedy ecologist. But his meeting with the Aeolian developers, eager to install wind turbines on one of his land, "a little cooled," he said. He blames them "the pressure, their methods," he says. "Rogue methods. "

The story begins in "April 2014," recalls the retiree. "The developer arrived in his big car, like a dealer," he describes. "He came up with a letter explaining the interest of renewable energies, their need, remembers Michel. Frankly, I agreed. He explained to me that I could have a cash compensation. He spread his map of the land register, vaguely read the pre-lease. On the other hand, he insisted on the 200 € check he could give me if I signed right away. But such a contract is not signed like that. "

"The promoters advance masked"

Initially, it is only a simple passage on his land. Michel inquires, calls the company concerned. "Where I started to doubt was when I asked the person who told me if there was going to be an information meeting. I perceived a very brief silence. She called me. Finally, a second physical meeting takes place, two months after the first one. "I wanted to go on the ground to see the particularities, the sources," says the owner. The project manager came very late and that's where he offered me a wind turbine. "

Confronted with this difficult choice, Michel asks for an appointment in town hall. "I even asked for a consultation, but no one answered me, he continues. I finally had a meeting with a city councilor. And surprise: the project manager was present. The interview will not give anything. "In fact, the promoters advance masked, they walk low and once they have shod a few owners, they can move forward. The financial argument is an asset of weight: "They promise them between 6 and 12,000 € annual annuity. It forms a favorable block, where people will become sheriff's deputy. "

Promoters promise jobs, tax benefits and local officials dive without thinking.

Social relations between neighbors are affected. "When I talked about it at Neighbors Day, it was a cold," explains Jean (modified first name), whose newly built house is located 600 meters from a wind project. What complicates everything and that I denounce is this opacity. Some farm owners accept it because it brings them money, but most do not live there. And the collateral damage is for others. "

While 130 to 200 wind turbines could cover the territory of Haute-Vienne, in the coming years, according to a file that we propose in the paper edition of the People's Center, its practices are not

isolated cases. "I know a granny who signed, but you have to understand, in her field, she had more opportunity to see pebbles than 10" notes, Michel says. "They manage to harass people," says Vincent Malige, coordinator of the Robin de vents association. They do the same thing with the mayors. They promise employment, tax benefits and local officials dive without thinking. "

Mayor of Chateauneuf-la-Forêt, Jean Bariaud recognizes it bluntly. "As always, we are looking for funding and of course, it offers economic benefits. Opposite declared to the project of five wind turbines still in the study stage on this commune of the east of Haute-Vienne, Clément Mathieu regrets this financial predominance. "In fact, nuance this specialist in the study of soil, a wind turbine, we can see what it brings, but less what it costs. And it commits for many years. We want to make money before having an intelligent reflection. "

New Aquitaine: 1,000 jobs in wind power

The issue of employment also comes up frequently. "While most jobs are in Germany or elsewhere," Vincent Malige analysis. Faux, replies Simon Grandcoin, deputy general delegate of the France association wind energy. "Between the promoters, the maintenance, the design offices, the wind creates four jobs per day on average in France," says the lobbyist. Today, in New Aquitaine, there are 1,000 jobs in this sector. "

Vincent Malige, committed citizen, dreams of the big debate ... on wind

Overall, the location of wind turbines suffers from a lack of transparency. "There is a lot of ignorance, a loss of clarity and communication," says Simon Grandcoin. But everything is posted in town hall and when we contact 40 to 50 owners, we can not say that we do it in the backs of people. But sometimes, the promoters play on this lack of communication between the elected representatives and their population, but also between their inhabitants themselves. "When they came to see me, they told me that one of our neighbors had already signed, explains Michel. We called him and of course it was wrong. "Liar poker.

An ethical charter and eleven commitments

The procedure for the promoters is however clear: "It is necessary first that they contact the town hall, explains Simon Grandcoin. Then, the owners, the administration and then, only, we launch the studies. It is impossible to develop a project if landowners are not in favor. "If there are bad behaviors, it's a bit strange, but it's up to the developers to pay attention. "

France éolienne also has an "ethical charter", which can be seen on the association's website, whose members represent 9 out of 10 wind turbines. The document lists 11 commitments, among which "participation and transparency" or "Information and communication. "We are committed to organizing, from the beginning and throughout the project, regular communication with local elected representatives, associations and residents concerned by our wind projects," say the wind companies.

The consultation, it is limited to whether we want the green wind turbine, red or blue. It's totally cosmetic.

VINCENT MALIGE (Coordinator of Robin des Vents association)

"When designing any new project," the charter also states, "we are working in partnership with independent experts to produce a very detailed impact study on natural heritage. We make these results available to the stakeholders of the wind farm project as part of the public inquiry. "But the public investigators are defrayed by the promoters," believes Michel.

Faced with the opposition - or skepticism - of some elected representatives, the promoters have also adapted, if we believe Michel Chevallier, representative of the association ETHER which

works on the east of the department. "Before," he says, "they went to see the mayor, to boast about his financial income, which would compensate for the drop in the house tax (...). Then elected officials voted in the City Council the free access which authorizes the promoters to approach the owners. With that, they have every latitude to do it. But as mayors began to want to learn before going further, they changed their strategy. "

Promoters are now starting to prioritize homeowners. "And once they have several agreements, they will see the elected, who find themselves bound hand and foot, says Michel Chevallier. But they can do almost nothing, it is a private lease ... "The financial attraction plays full, but sometimes is a mirror larks. "We promise the owners 6 to 9,000 €, explains the head of ETHER. For a farmer, it's interesting. But we must be careful, with the price revisions formulas, it goes down quickly, just 1.000 €."

"Do not sacrifice Haute-Vienne
for private interests "

It is also the nature of the consultations which is questioned. "The photomontages that we are shown are totally wrong most of the time, says Michel. They minimize the visual impact. "There is a lot of rhetoric going on," says Vincent Malige. We talk about consultation, participative projects, the adhesion of the inhabitants, but all that is a shame. The consultation, it is limited to whether we want the green wind turbine, red or blue. It's totally cosmetic. "

As in any political subject, everything is a question of general interest. "To reach 37 megawatts in 2030, there is a real course to cross, you have to go fast," says Simon Grandcoin. "We are asking for a moratorium," says Vincent Malige. Do not sacrifice Haute-Vienne for private interests. "

Wind projects mobilize residents

Jean-Claude Leblois, the president of the Department, also asks for "a quick reset, on efficiency, profitability. I am not a systematic opponent, but a dialogue is needed. I wrote a letter to the Prefect in this sense and he agrees to work in this way. In 2017 and 2018, the Region also launched "calls for participatory project and citizen," says Françoise Coutant, vice president in charge of ecological transition. Thirty collectives were created in New Aquitaine. It's rather good. The goal is to involve citizens. We are not in a step where we impose. On the contrary, the territories are encouraged to build their energy mix. "

But the call to the citizens is a double-edged sword. In March, the town hall of Champnétery sent a questionnaire to households in the town: 148 responded including 122 unfavorable to the wind project, 82.5% of opponents. To convince homeowners, money can help. But to convince all citizens, the task looks harder.

Sebastien Dubois