

Veni, Vidi... Vici?

Polański & the Académie des César

MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

The authors prepared this case solely as a basis for class discussion and not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. Although based on real events and despite occasional references to actual companies, this case is fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons or entities is coincidental.

Act I

On the 29th of January 2020, the nominations for the César Awards were announced. The film *An Officer and a Spy* received 12 nominations by The French Academy of Cinema Arts and Techniques.

This announcement left no one indifferent in France. Reactions from different stakeholders rapidly followed one another. The Academy was forced by the pressure to state their exact position and reasoning behind their actions.

Feminist associations have condemned this decision as they consider unacceptable that Roman Polański, with his criminal sexual history, is selected to be honored. In order to show their disagreement, some associations have taken action. As *Osez le Féminisme!*, which by means of an open letter signed by different organizations and personalities, has called to boycott Polański and a demonstration during the César's Ceremony on the 28th of February. Apart from that, several associations have asked the members of the Académie des César not to vote for *An Officer and a Spy* in the second round of the César's voting.

The French Government has also shown its rather critical position regarding the nominations. France's Minister of culture, Franck Riester, claimed that the Academy is free to choose and he is willing to defend creative freedom as eagerly as combat sexist behaviors and sexual violence.

The Secretary of Equality, Marlène Shiappa, expressed her condemnation claiming that French cinema is showing an ambivalent position by nominating Polański and the actress Adèle Haenel, who recently announced that she was sexually abused as a child. According to Shiappa, French cinema still has not completed its revolution and has a long way to go in order to combat sexual and sexist violence.

In answer to the critics, Alain Terzian, the President of the César, said that voters "should not take moral positions" in matters of cinema and argued that it is not the role of this institution to "adopt a moral stance" for awards.

The reasoning behind such a stand is the fact that Polański's alleged criminal history was well known before and despite it, he was awarded important awards. As in the case of *An Officer and a Spy* which was awarded in the Venice Film Festival. Taking that into consideration the organization expected the usual course of action, which is a bit of criticism and buzz around the award that will not influence much the ceremony as such.

Act II

On the 10th of February 2020, more than 400 personalities from the film industry published an open letter in the French newspaper *Le Monde*. The aim of this letter is to request a deep reform of the Académie des César, especially concerning the methods of governance of the Academy and the democratic operations that govern it. The signatories - including well-known names such as Céline Sciamma, Laurent Cantet, Omar Sy and Léa Seydoux - not only accuse the Academy of being opaque regarding its accounts, but also for not adapting to the new times and not functioning in a correct manner. The Academy reacted by publishing an official statement on its website, promising the implementation of reforms in the statutes after the ceremony.

On the 13th of February of 2020, all the members of the Academy's board of directors resigned. This massive resignation was done in response to the severe criticisms of Polański's nominations from different environments (ministry of culture, feminists associations, etc.). However, that was not the only reason, the constant criticism towards the Academy's lack of transparency and governance also contributed to this decision. This dissatisfaction was shown in the aforementioned letter sent by professionals from the industry. In the official statement the Academy wrote: "To honor those who made films in 2019, to regain serenity and make the cinema festival a celebration, the board of directors (of the film academy) made a unanimous decision to resign"¹.

This decision was supposed to calm and stabilize the situation as well as allow the César to maintain its status of a great celebration of cinematography. By resigning the board decided to simplify the problem and use the scapegoating strategy. In this particular situation the self-scapegoating. It allows the board to take the blame, which is to prevent the problem to harness the César's awards reputation and at the same time present the board members as honorable and selfless.

Despite all the hustle around the awards, it was decided that the ceremony would take place as planned. The decision was based on the fact that the ceremony was already arranged and the board members are not involved in the practical details of its running. Therefore, as planned, it will take place on the 28th of February.

During the ceremony of the César on the 28th of February, the movie *An Officer and a Spy* won in three different categories from its twelve original nominations. The movie was awarded for the best costumes, the best adaptation, and the best director. The last two prizes directly rewarded Roman Polanski's work on the movie, which further intensified the criticism towards the Academy.

¹ <https://www.academie-cinema.org/annonces-type/communiqués-de-presse/>