

Short description of what happened

In 2019 Inès Léraud, a French independent journalist, was sued for defamation by Christian Buson, a Breton agri-food business owner following her investigation, published as graphic novel Green seaweed – the forbidden story, into the proliferation of seaweed in Brittany. The case was dropped a few days before the start of the trial. In May 2020, another defamation case was brought against Léraud by the business tycoon Jean Chéritel following the publication of her investigation entitled: Hidden work, label fraud: the multiple abuses of a Breton agro-industrial group.

Full case study

Independent French journalist Inès Léraud is being prosecuted for defamation by business tycoon Jean Chéritel, CEO of the Chéritel group, following the publication, in March 2019, of her investigation entitled: “Hidden work, label fraud: the multiple abuses of a Breton agro-industrial group”. The trial is due to take place on the 20th and 21st of January 2021.

Léraud’s investigation was published in BastaMag on 26 March 2019 and shed light on the alleged illegal practices of the Chéritel group, an important fruit and vegetable wholesaler in the Brittany region. She denounced, for example, the workers' working conditions and the CEO’s attempts at silencing critical voices.

Chéritel has been condemned several times by the courts and has prosecuted for defamation a regional newspaper, the daily Le Télégramme, in 2015, about the illegal employment of Bulgarian workers by the group. The case is under appeal.

It is not the first time Léraud has been sued for defamation because of her work on the agri-food industry in Brittany. At the end of 2019, Christian Buson, a Breton agri-food business owner, launched a lawsuit against Léraud after she published an investigation in the form of a graphic novel, entitled “Green seaweed - the forbidden story” about the proliferation of seaweeds in Brittany. These seaweeds, which are toxic and have caused the death of several people and animals, proliferated notably because of the pesticides that the agri-food industry uses and discharges into the sea. The case was dropped a few days before the trial, which was scheduled on the 7th of January 2020.

In addition, in June 2019, Inès Léraud's project to translate her book into the Breton language was abandoned by the regional publishing house, which was allegedly under pressure to keep its regional

subsidies from the Brittany Regional Council. More recently, the weekly French newspaper *Le Canard Enchaîné* revealed in March 2020, that Inès Léraud's planned appearance at the Book Fair in Quintin, a city in Brittany, was cancelled after an elected representative of the municipality intervened.

Inès Léraud is supported by a number of journalists' organisations which qualified the legal actions against the journalists as SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) with the objective to intimidate and silence. In May 2020, more than 240 journalists and organisations co-signed an open letter to denounce the attempts by agri-food industrialists and some politicians to muzzle the press. Another opinion published in the daily newspaper *Libération* voiced its support for the journalist and denounced these intimidatory actions as attacks on the freedom of information.

22.01.2021 UPDATE: Inès Léraud was due to appear before the 17th chamber of the Paris judicial tribunal on 28 January. However, the pursuer, Chéritel announced that they were dropping the lawsuit.

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