

2016 wage hike:

# Another broken promise?



During the July 2015 strike against the renunciation of our wage and benefits agreements, AFP's management generously promised a **0.75% salary increase** this year. SUD made sure to remind management of this promise when the annual wage talks (NAO) opened this week.

Will the boost to wages, which was written into the 2016 budget, end up being a general wage hike, individual raises, or a mix of both? AFP's HR director didn't want to respond, promising answers during the second negotiating session scheduled for September 28.

We of course also wanted to know – **does management still intend to honor its promise** on the wage increase? The HR director also formally batted that question to the next meeting. But his discussion about AFP's delicate finances, the difficulty of putting together the 2017 budget and an upcoming court ruling on September 29 concerning sales staff left the clear impression that a wage hike is a mirage. So why schedule the meeting on the 28th? To have **a good pretext to give us nothing yet again** and crow about how management is meeting its legal obligations to hold wage talks?

## Their unscrupulousness, our sacrifices?

**Does AFP's financial situation justify extending the wage freeze for a 5th consecutive year?**

When our CEO Emmanuel Hoog celebrated AFP's conformity with EU competition rules, accepted a profound revision of the agency's 1957 statute, then signed a new Aims and Means Contract (COM) with the French state, he assured the staff that the changes would **secure AFP's finances**.

A good number of staff supported those "reforms" or expressed only tepid and partial objections. Today their disenchantment must be bitter. AFP's new financing system is leading the agency **straight off a cliff**. All the problems that they now "discover" were in fact long known.

Unsurprisingly, the NAO meeting confirms that the architects of the agency's systemic crisis intend to make its employees pay to resolve it. It is already clear that respecting tax laws internationally will translate into spending cuts at home. Staff are also being asked to bear the costs of early retirement packages. Not only has our work increased as departing staff aren't replaced, their additional benefits have been included in the calculation of the wage bill, thus blocking a wage increase for those of us who remain.

## Just a little more now!

Another observation: not only is management asking us to make sacrifice upon sacrifice, it has provided no credible plans to save the agency. An example: in April 2014 the CEO presented a package of possible measures to cut costs and free up funds that could be used in part for wage hikes. The plan at that point was to **limit the growth in AFP's wage bill** to 1% per

year. And what has in fact happened: the wage bill for AFP headquarters status staff has not been limited to marginal growth, but **has in fact been cut**, by 0.8% in 2015.

There is worse: while management has stepped up cuts that directly impact production and work conditions (such as slashing mission budgets and added hassle to expense claims), it has for over two years chosen to ignore a huge and painless source of savings. One the CEO's 2014 proposals was to limit the number of days that employees can put in their holiday and RTT bank (CET) to 100, which was estimated could result in nearly 1.16 million euros in savings per year.

There was no need to renounce 117 wage and benefits agreements to make those savings because the unions were nearly unanimous in their support of the measure. But management was dead set on negotiating a new overarching wage and benefits deal. As a result, the agency has easily foregone a couple million in savings, if not more.

*SUD proposed the immediate signing of an agreement limiting CET accounts to free up funds for a wage increase.*

### **SUD's demands for the NAO:**

- **A general wage hike.** For example, €150 per month, a reasonable figure given the erosion of our purchasing power over the past several years and the burden we've had to bear of spending cuts. (*We're waiting for management's responses on a number of questions to specify a figure*)
- Stringers and apprentices should also benefit from any wage hike.
- All of the money available should be used for a general wage hike. No to raises for a few.

Beyond the NAO, *SUD* emphasized the necessity of improving the career plans of journalists and cadres. Far too often journalists find themselves ending their careers at RED5 or RED5+. We want automatic passage to RED 6. The career plan for cadres doesn't include hardly any guaranteed advancement.

## **Neither fatalism, nor resignation!**

No matter what wage demands are put forward, management is unlikely to give us anything unless staff show they've had enough of making sacrifices without any counterparties. There is room for progress – only 3 unions bothered to show up at the first NAO negotiating session.

That is doubtless a reflection of the current situation. Between the meagre results from a series of partial strikes and widespread defeatist sentiment, there is reason to be disappointed. But **our collective interests at stake in the coming months are too important to lower our guard.**

**For trade unions to be effective we need more support from staff.**

**For an active union that embraces all employees, join *SUD*!**

Paris, 16 September 2016

**SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)**



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