SUD
AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

Inflation, wages: after the party, watch out for the hangover!

As preparations for the "AFP party" at HQ were in full swing on September 21, management met with the Paris trade unions to discuss inflation and wages. The atmosphere was hardly festive given the loss of purchasing power of AFP's staff.

Only hours before the night of concerts and karaoke, management took the time to politely hear out the demands of trade unions as the annual cycle of wage talks (NAO) got under way.

Don't break out the party favors quite yet! The negotiations with the French state on the Aims and Means Contract to support the Agency from 2024 to 2028 are still underway and we don't yet know with 100% certainty the amount of financing for our public interest mission (MIG). In other words, we don't yet know our budgetary margin of maneuver.

A positive point: the French state is ready to increase its funding for the Agency from the previous COM (2019-2023) — which was not sufficient and remained steady despite a surge in inflation unseen in a generation. And the state could also increase the payment for its subscription, which has also remained unchanged for years. Overall, AFP could pocket "several million euros" more in 2024, according to management, with small annual increases thereafter.

However, "the state won't fully compensate for inflation," warned management, which also didn't commit to using this additional money to boost wages.

Nearly 10% loss in purchasing power over past five years

And yet, the situation is pressing! Annual inflation is running at nearly 5% while our last pay rise dates from more than one year ago. And the 70 euros gross we received retroactively from March 2022 (plus a reduction of 25 euros in our complementary medical insurance contribution) didn't fully compensate for inflation for most staff.

If we go back to 2019 (the start of the expiring COM), French contract AFP staff have seen their purchasing power fall by nearly 10 percent, even accounting for the increases we received during the period (see our statement: *Inflation, wages, working conditions: Alors on danse?*)

Despite this unprecedented loss in purchasing power, SUD chose — in the interest of unity — to renounce its plan to reclaim a 10% wage increase to fully restore our lost purchasing power. We joined the other unions on putting forth three demands: **an increase of 5% in the wage and stringer scales, the creation of additional seniority bonus levels, and a sustainable transport allocation**.

Is it crazy to demand a 5% wage hike? No, because many companies are raising wages nearly in line with inflation. A recent study by Deloitte showed that in 2023 that the median increase in base wages was 4.6% in France for workers and office staff, and 4% for managers. Given that we've been shortchanged since 2019, requesting 5% seems very reasonable.

At 20 years: a wage ceiling

Concerning the seniority bonus, it currently maxes out at 20% once you reach 20 years. Many staff find the wages blocked at this level with little perspective of promotion during careers that could last perhaps another 20 years (or more given the pension reform)! Small increases in the seniority bonus are a just reward for the additional experience we continue to acquire.

Finally, a sustainable transport allocation would help those seeking to lower their carbon footprint.

SUD also put forth independently the following demands in the NAO:

- **Introduction of intermediate levels in the wage scales** of all staff categories in order to avoid the current practice of awarding rendement bonuses to carry out these mini-promotions between the existing levels.

- **Increasing the bonuses for certain editorial management posts** (like chef de vacation).

- **Introduction of bonuses for other editorial posts** which have responsibilities but no bonuses (for example, the référents éco and référents multimédia on the desk unique francophone).

- **Making the video** (editors and JRIs) **and photo** (reporter photographe) **bonuses permanent** following a certain number of years in the function to avoid a drop in wages in case of changing post.

- **Extension of the meal bonus for Sundays and holiday days worked to Saturdays** as the cafeteria is closed all weekend. We join the SNJ in asking for the value of this bonus to be doubled to €20.

- **Increasing the "médaille du travail" bonus** from €305 to €600 as this bonus hasn't been increased since the adoption of the euro.

It is important to remember that the only obligation management has in these mandatory talks is that they are held. There is no guarantee of any result. To recover what we've lost to inflation we're going to need the support of all staff.

The next meeting with management is October 6

Paris, 29 September 2023

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