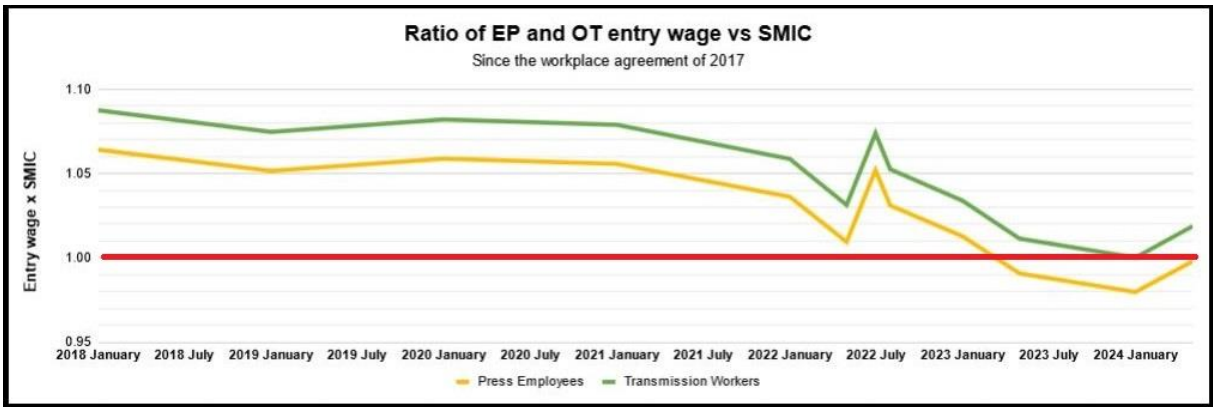
AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

AFP still under minimum wage
Happy New Year 2024!

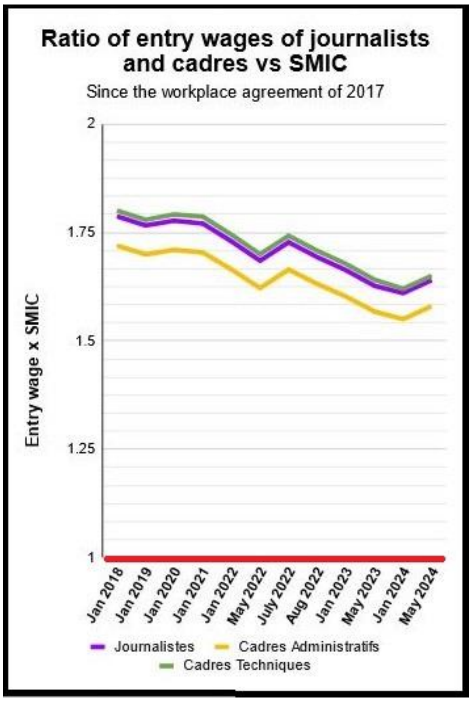
In his New Year's greeting our CEO welcomed the renewal of our state subsidy and its approval by the European Commission. That is undoubtedly good news for the Agency, but his choice to not ask for more means we staffers are stuck with a loss of purchasing power. This is symbolized by the fact that even with the wage hike due in May, the AFP entry wage will still be below the minimum wage. But all of our wage scales have been eroded by inflation, and the effect isn't negligible. According to our calculations, for a RED 4 journalist, the loss of purchasing power is around 275 euros per month after taxes.

In his January 8 message, our CEO Fabrice Fries was right to signal the importance of the state renewing our public interest mission (MIG) via a new five-year Aims and Means Contract (COM) and equally important its reapproval by the European Commission. These two approvals will indeed bring "*clear visibility for our operations*". We don't have the full information about the COM yet, but we already know that it includes an increase in state funding of around 7 million euros per year. The CEO called this "***the exact increase we deemed necessary and acceptable***". That's the problem. The CEO requested additional funds from the French state for the Agency to carry out its mission. That did not include sufficient funding to restore our lost purchasing power. Does our CEO not consider this *necessary*? Is recovering our purchasing power not *acceptable*?

The result is that the increase in state aid is clearly insufficient. Management used this fact to tell trade unions it could do no more than give us a 2.0% general wage hike, and not before May 2024. France's minimum wage, the SMIC, which is regularly increased to take inflation into account, was increased 1.1% on January 1. The result: the lowest entry wage at AFP will remain under the SMIC, even with the wage hike to come. Frankly, this is shameful, even if management will likely respond that no one is hired at that entry wage. Beyond the symbolic significance of the entry wage falling below the SMIC, it reveals the trend that our entire wage scales are being eroded by inflation. If the bottom rung of the ladder is lower, so are the rest.



In this graph, the **red line** represents the SMIC. The entry wage of Transmission Workers (**OT**) remains above the SMIC today, but only by 27 cents… The lowest entry wage at AFP, that for a Press Employee (**EP**), will remain under the minimum wage even after the May hike.

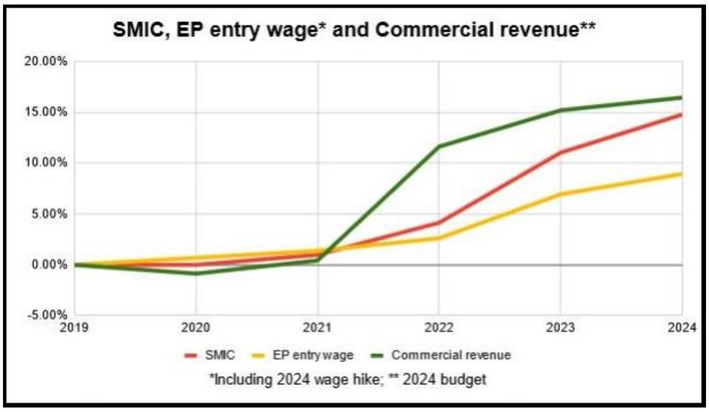


In the graph to the left, we see that the entry wages for Administrative Cadres (**CA**), Technical Cadres (**CT**) and Journalists (**J**) follows the same trajectory as that for the EP and OT. Given the structure of our wage scales, the conclusion is clear: **We have all lost considerable purchasing power!**

How much purchasing power have we lost? The SMIC is a good proxy for inflation since it is regularly adjusted. The SMIC rose by 16.2% between January 2019, the start of our previous COM with the French state, and the start of the new one in January 2024. The entry wage at AFP, on the other hand, rose by 8.9%, including the May 2024 hike.

And what does this mean for an employee? It depends on your wage of course. Let's take the example of a **RED 4 journalist** (12-20 years of experience): **the loss of purchasing power is around 275 euros net per month after taxes** according to our calculations. An enormous amount, considering promotion to RED5 is an increase about 220 euros per month before taxes. One could say that **inflation has, in effect, demoted journalists by a category**. Is this *necessary*? Is this *acceptable*? For our CEO, it apparently is.

So, what is our CEO's plan for the future? *Speeding up the diversification of our revenue with businesses and institutions.* We're certainly concerned that this would lead AFP away from its core mission if we thought it had much chance of succeeding. Management has been trying to do this for a decade with little to show for its efforts unless you toss Google and fact-checking into this basket, and which in any case are not reproducible. But even with the added commercial revenue these past years, management hasn't kept our salaries from eroding.



This graph shows that the growth in our **commercial revenues** have largely outpaced our inflation proxy of the **minimum wage**, and our **wage increases** have lagged. But management will say this increase in commercial revenue wasn't enough to raise wages further. And what about the increase in state funding during the COM 2019-2023 period? **Zero**, if you don't include the exceptional funding for the voluntary departure plan. For SUD, this demonstrates that we need a bigger increase to state funding in the 2024-2028 COM. Especially when you consider that we know that the COM only foresees tiny annual increases in our subsidy. In other words, there is no room for further wage increases other than the one in May until the end of 2028.

For SUD, this is unacceptable, and we need to push management to get a cost-of-living-increase. It is also for AFP staff to say no to the constant erosion of our purchasing power.

Paris, January 25, 2024
***SUD*-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)**