

# Work *more* for *less*? Why?



**The negotiations on the so-called Grand Accord are going nowhere: management wants to increase working hours but provides neither concrete plans nor convincing arguments.**

Working hours and times, the vacation days and RTTs that employees on French labor contracts currently enjoy are based on agreements that were signed at the beginning of the 2000s. While practically nothing has changed in the past 15 years in terms in AFP's internal regulations, the legal landscape has evolved considerably: the number of years needed for a full pension has risen repeatedly in successive reforms. **Working more has already become a reality.**

An important change has nevertheless occurred at AFP: the work intensity has increased considerably for many employees, notably (but not exclusively) on editorial desks. While the number of journalists has remained relatively stable, AFP has launched new activities (AFPTV, social networks) that have been staffed by redeployments.

## **AFP staff with French contracts (CDI+CDD on 31 December each year)**

	Journalists	Employees	Cadres admin.	Workers	Cadres tech.	TOTAL
<b>Posts created in 2000</b>	<b>+50</b>	<b>+8</b>	<b>+6</b>	<b>+9</b>	<b>+6</b>	<b>+79</b>
2002	875	172	114	173	123	1457
<b>2014</b>	<b>866</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>1415</b>
Difference 2002-2014	-9	-27	+30	-36	0	-42
<b>Difference 2002-2014</b>	<b>-9</b>	<b>+3</b>		<b>-36</b>		<b>-42</b>

*Table compiled by SUD based on RTT agreements of 2000 and annual social reports*

**RESULT:** Understaffing and added stress, while the increased use of short-term and local contracts means job insecurity for others. Inequality has increased.

- The labor agreements that management renounced last November, but which are still in force while negotiations continue, provided considerable protection to employees working shifts (desk journalists, employees and laborers).
- On the other hand, production journalists (beat journalists, video reporters, journalists posted abroad or to regional bureaus in France) and many middle managers work long hours and are often on-call (for which most are not compensated).

## **Everybody loses, but especially the young**

The Hoog Plan (the Grand Accord) takes advantage of these inequalities to try to divide staff. If some initially hoped that the negotiations could result in a better balance, forget it. Management isn't going to cut the benefits of the relatively privileged to improve the situation for others -- CUTS WILL HIT US ALL and any balance will be at a lower level.

The essence of the Hoog Plan is to *work more for less money*. For the moment, the proposals weigh heavily on working more. A quick recap of management's proposals:

### 1/ Comp days, RTTs

- Management considers that desk journalists, employees and workers work an average of 35 hours per week or less. Its latest proposal would leave them 4 comp days per year in place of 18 RTTs per year for journalists and 14 for the other categories. The work week would pass to 39 hours.
- Production journalists and cadres, whose working hours frequently exceed 35 hours or even 40 hours per week, they will work even more as they will get only 7 comp days instead of 18 RTTs.
- This brutal cut in days off for everyone (as many as 14 per year) will be only modestly compensated by new seniority comp days: 2 days after 5 years working with AFP, 4 days after 10 years and 6 days after 15 years.

### 2/ Annual leave

For journalists, employees and admin cadres the number of days of annual leave remains the same at 44 days. For workers and tech cadres it falls to 44 from (from 50-54).

### 3/ Work more

If management finds a majority of unions to sign its proposed agreement (or forces it through via a referendum if the El Khomri labor law reform is adopted), then the cuts in benefits will apply to all. If there is no agreement, then employees who began working before 9 November 2015 will keep their current amount of annual leave but risk losing their RTTs. Thus new (younger) staff will have less time off.

## Management refuses to disclose figures

What justifies the cuts in benefits? When SUD posed that question at the last negotiation session, Director General Remi Tomaszewski only gave vague explanations and refused to provide any financial figures for the cuts in benefits.

When one reviews their different statements, one can only conclude we are faced with **a lack of transparency**, and hence **a lack of sincerity**, by management during the negotiations concerning the economic justification for and the financial figures underpinning their plan. Here are the arguments that management has advanced:

#### • "We need to limit increases to the wage bill"

But hasn't AFP brought its wage bill under control since the introduction in 2003 of the first Aims and Means Contract with the French government. We've had four years of pay freezes so far: 2009, and then from November 2012 till today.

Mr Tomaszewski also evoked the high cost of provisions for untaken holiday and RTT days, although he acknowledged this has been drastically reduced by better management.

#### • "Conforming with tax rules is costly"

SUD has for years criticized the "often immoral, sometimes illegal" practices that AFP has adopted (mostly, but not exclusively) in employing people abroad. When the

scandal erupted in 2010 concerning the calculation of our vacation pay, CEO Emmanuel Hoog ordered an audit of its practices. We informed the auditors of our concerns, such as on the payment of expatriates, but what changed?

Now, years later, management is finally tackling these issues -- and wants to make us pick up the tab by working more for less.

- **"Our benefits are no longer realistic in this economy"**

This is the argument that gets raised when management seems to want to avoid a real debate on the issues and the choices the agency faces. Our benefits were last revisited 15 years ago. Did they put AFP into financial peril then? They only became an issue when the Hoog Plan was first announced in 2013<sup>1</sup>.

## Political choices, not economic performance

Management has also shied away questions concerning the debt of the agency and its investment vehicle, AFP Blue. But most of all, they are irritated when one questions the real reason behind the Hoog Plan: the reduction of the French state's financial support for AFP.

**If AFP has trouble today balancing its budget, it is not due to an exploding wage bill, nor due a decline in sales, nor even constraints imposed by European competition law (which we've criticized elsewhere<sup>2</sup>). The trouble is essentially due to decisions of the French government:**

- Under an agreement reached with Brussels in 2015, **the French state has the right to subsidize 100% of the cost of AFP's public interest mission.**
- **However, the French government, in the Aims and Means Contract signed in 2015, progressively eliminates increases to the subsidy.** After 1.8 percent annual increases in the previous Aims and Means Contract, they drop to zero in 2018 under the new Contract. Moreover, there is no guarantee that AFP will get the planned amounts<sup>3</sup>.
- The 2016 budget figures show that **the government is already not fully compensating AFP for its public interest mission.** Even with the unplanned disbursement of 1.6 million euros, the French state is not hitting the legal ceiling of 100% compensation of the public interest mission.



<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article213>

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article324>

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article299>

# Cards on the table, Mr Hoog!

Everything indicates that the Hoog Plan is aimed at making staff compensate for the loss of subsidies from the French state. The risk of the Hoog Plan is that it will touch off an infernal spiral where each time we make savings for the agency the state takes them away.

It is essential that the CEO return to the negotiations (he has attended only the opening session) so he can answer the key questions:

- **What is the amount of savings to be generating by the various measures proposed in the Grand Accord, in particular by increased working hours?**
- **How much of those savings does AFP stand to lose due to the French state under-compensating the agency for its public interest mission?**
- **Is management planning to bring itself into compliance with tax laws by cutting benefits – i.e. robbing Peter to pay Paul?**
- **How does management plan to get the agency out of this crisis? Or, when will we begin negotiating Hoog Plan 2?**

**Without answers to these questions, the negotiations on the Grand Accord will remain hobbled by a lack of sincerity.**



At a time when hundreds of thousands of employees and youths are taking to the streets in defense of the labor code, it is clear that AFP's future is directly linked to the government's austerity policies: a reduction of public spending and dismantling legal guarantees of benefits in order to boost the competitiveness of companies.

Our salaries and benefits are at risk from these changes and AFP staff will be directly impacted by the outcome of the public opposition to the reform of the labor law.

## **At AFP, as elsewhere, we need to push for alternatives!**

- **End austerity!**
- **Withdraw the El Khomri reform to the labor law!**
- **Halt tax fraud, no gifts to CAC-40 CEOs and their shareholders!**
- **Don't concentrate wealth, spread it!**
- **Boost hiring, cut the work week to 32 hours!**

Paris, 7 April 2016

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

