

Remote working:

## We gain more days, but we've got to pay for them?



Management and trade unions have been discussing an expansion of remote working at AFP, both during exceptional situations such as pandemics and renovations as well as in normal circumstances. Here is an update on the progress made and sticking points in the talks.

### How many days?

Management offered administrative and technical staff the possibility, for those who want, to work from home two days per week. Currently, the collective bargaining agreement of March 10, 2017, the "Grand Accord", only allows working from home one day per week. The offer means these employees could spend 40% of their working time at home.

Management is less generous (egalitarian?) to journalists, who are offered one day per week plus 20 days per year (equivalent to 1.5 days per week). Management explains the difference in treatment by the need to ensure effective cooperation in reporting teams and dynamism in our coverage.

We'll leave it up to you to judge whether you find this reasoning convincing or not. In any case, it would give a journalist on the forfait jours contract the possibility to spend roughly 30% of their working time at home.

### Equitable. Did you say equitable?

Who isn't for equity? But what is equity? Since the signature of the Grand Accord, equity among the staff of Agence France-Presse has taken a punch to the gut. The Grand Accord, which *SUD* did not sign, introduced (among other measures):

- The forfait jours contract, creating a division between employees eligible for the contract that gives an additional 12 days off (in return for no overtime pay) and those who remain on hourly contracts;
- New "low cost" wage scales for administrative and technical staff hired after the Grand Accord went into effect.

For *SUD*, we've known better in terms of equity and equality.

### The risks of remote working

No one disputes the advantages of working from home during a pandemic. Not having to use public transport during these difficult times is a real advantage. But the recourse to working from home on an extensive basis should remain exceptional.

That is because remote working doesn't offer just advantages. Far from it. Employees risk becoming isolated and feeling they are no longer part of the team at work. This is a psychological problem in its own right, and one that makes it more difficult to resolve any professional difficulties by relying upon the solidarity of colleagues.

We simply do not have enough experience and perspective on the impact of remote working today. Moreover, remote working on an extensive basis could contribute, intentionally or not, to outsourcing jobs in the future. That is why we believe it is best to advance cautiously on the issue.

And while the debate has run in circles on the number of days we should be allowed to work remotely, we've talked little or not at all about other important aspects.

### **The employer must provide proper equipment**

Everyone who works from home should have at least a second screen to be able to work in decent conditions. Given that laptop screens are small, we consider it indispensable.

### **"Home" expenses, a sticking point**

When one travels into the office to work, it is the employer who picks up the costs for electricity, heat and water used by the employee during the day. It should be the same for remote workers who while they are working at home are consuming more electricity, heat and water than they would if they had gone into the office. Management is only offering €200 over five years to cover purchases such as an ergonomic chair. We consider this grossly insufficient.

### **Questionnaire, sworn statement should be binned!**

*SUD* has called for management to abandon its intention to have employees fill out a questionnaire where they evaluate their own skills to work remotely. This approach is unacceptable for us. If employees don't have necessary skills or autonomy to work remotely then they should receive the necessary training and not be excluded by a ridiculous self-rating system.

Similarly, employees should not be required to provide a sworn statement their home electricity system meets regulations as most are not qualified to make such a determination. Both of these requirements put employees in an uncomfortable position and should be abandoned.

The next negotiation session is set for November 4. *SUD* does not reject outright all of the proposals management has put on the table, but we need to see some indication that our concerns have been heard.

Currently, management believes that operating expenses such as electricity and heat should be covered by remote workers, arguing that remote work is being done on a voluntary basis at the request of employees. However, in the current situation some of us are remote working for health reasons. And management forgets that in a few months it wants us to work remotely on a massive scale to renovate the headquarters building. It is unacceptable that employees pushed into remote working in such a way are not compensated for their operating expenses.

**Don't hesitate to send any questions or comments to *SUD* at: [contact@sud-afp.org](mailto:contact@sud-afp.org)**

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



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