

**NAO 2020:**

# No to eternal austerity! Quality work has a price



Seven years ago, AFP's management decided to pursue its own wage policy, abandoning wage hikes agreed at the SPQN national press industry body. We can only conclude this has been a **wage freeze** policy, as the only increases to our wage scales came after a ferocious legal battle waged by CGT, FO and SUD that forced management into raising our pay.

Some may believe that everything is better as the **SPQN affair** pushed management into a 1.4 percent wage hike (0.7 percent in January 2020 and another 0.7 percent in January 2021) and a partial payment of back wages.<sup>1</sup>

**If the SPQN settlement was a trade union victory**, SUD considers that it only settled the dispute over wage hikes due in 2013 and 2014.

AFP's management must now build a real wage policy that remunerates everyone for their qualifications and allows for their earnings to rise over their entire career. The mandatory annual negotiations with trade unions, the Négociation annuelle obligatoire or NAO, is the time to do that.

## The COM: an engineered "difficult economic context"

From the first NAO meeting on November 9, management pleaded the "difficult economic context" the Agency finds itself in, much as it does every year. It didn't even mention the bonus and promotion budget, the only concrete measure written into the March 10, 2017 workplace agreement (which SUD did not sign)<sup>2</sup> when AFP may end the year with a profit as it did last year!

In other words, no significant wage hikes are on the agenda...

While the pandemic will no doubt have a greater impact on AFP next year, SUD believes **the Agency's financial difficulties are above all due to the austerity measures programmed and imposed by the government and management.**

Between 2015 and 2018, the French state paid AFP 20 million euros less than the cost of the public service mission it entrusted to AFP under its *missions d'intérêt général* (MIG).

For the 2019-2023 period, the Aims and Means Contract or COM signed with the French states plans to freeze the level of compensation while if anything expanding the Agency's mission. How does it plan to do this? By cutting costs via the Fries Plan: a net reduction of 95 posts, reducing expatriate contracts and replacing seniors with young journalists.

In this manner it will be able to save nearly 50 million euros between 2019 and 2023, savings made at our expense and the ability of the Agency to carry out its mission. (See our communiqué: *Plan Fries, 2019-2023 COM: NO to the financial asphyxiation of AFP!*<sup>3</sup>)

<sup>1</sup> Our archive of the documents related to the affair can be found here: <http://u.afp.com/33A7>

<sup>2</sup> The agreement and its annexes, plus our analyses can be found here: <http://u.afp.com/3ydJ>

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://u.afp.com/3yVi>

## Correct injustices, motivate staff

In the absence of inflation (consumer prices have been stable over the past year according to Insee), *SUD* presented three types of demands at the first NAO meeting:

**1/ Offering a prospect for pay hikes:** extending automatic wage increases so employees are guaranteed raises their entire career. Such automatic hikes are also the best measure to prevent various forms of discrimination. Currently the **seniority-based bonus**, or prime d'ancienneté, ends at 20% for 20 years of service. We proposed creating two new steps: **a 25% bonus at 25 years of service and 30% after 30 years.**

**Too expensive?** Well then let's start by creating these two new steps but maybe with more modest hikes. *SUD* calls on management to calculate what a 21% bonus after 25 years and a 22% bonus after 30 years would cost. We'll compare that with the savings made since 2015 and those programmed to 2023!

**2/ Immediate measures:** the most urgent is to protect the most vulnerable among us. *SUD* did not sign the Covid-19 accord as stringers were the only category of staff discriminated against by not having 100% of their wages guaranteed under the temporary furlough scheme.<sup>4</sup> As the crisis continues, we need to ensure **stringers receive 100% of their previous revenue.** *SUD* also called for that to be made retroactive through April.

In the same vein of solidarity and unity, we called for stringers to benefit from the same general wage hike agreed as part of the SPQN settlement: **a 0.7% increase as of January 1, 2021.**

**3/ Other measures,** notably those meant to correct injustices:

- **The possibility for staff not eligible for remote work to carry out their work week over 4 days.**
- **The end of the practice of eliminating bonuses** when promoted to a higher category. The practice means many receive no or little increase in wages!
- **The immediate promotion to the category of a post** when appointed to a job with management responsibilities.
- **The definitive acquisition of certain bonuses** after having received them for at least two years, such as the video bonuses for filming and editing which correspond to skills that require training.
- **An increase in the category rankings of newsroom posts to the levels before the 2017 workplace agreement.** For example, returning the chef de vacation post to category 5.
- **Increasing the monthly allocation of €138** paid to journalists for expenses incurred while out reporting as this figure has been frozen for years despite considerable inflation.
- **Increasing to €500 the bonus** paid when staff receive a Labor medal from the €305 it was converted to when France adopted the euro.

**Do we need to say it?** No matter what requests we make they are a dead letter so long as staff and unions accept the political choices imposed upon us.

Paris, November 18, 2020

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



<sup>4</sup> See our statement: <http://u.afp.com/3PUN>