

Alert! AFP dismantling its social info service!



Under the pretext of “reorganizing” its Paris newsroom, AFP will dismantle one of its greatest assets that is also essential to carrying out its public interest mission: an independent service covering social issues.

The dozen reporters in this service offer an expertise unique in France on subjects as essential as they are complex: the mechanics of the laws that underpin the social welfare state (or unravel it in recent years), the politics of the major labor union confederations, unemployment and poverty, public services including the health system, violence against women, retirement, demonstrations, strikes and layoffs at big firms.

The interaction between the different teams in the Social service help its journalists take often abstract policy debates and render them in concrete and human terms. Here are management’s much-touted “synergies”! But instead of reinforcing them, management is destroying them to conduct a reform that it can barely defend.

What is management’s project? To finally dismantle the Social service. An objective of at least the past several CEOs, the plan corresponds to a neoliberal view that subjects social issues to the economy. In its 2020 version, the reform will reorganize the newsroom into eight new thematic divisions in which a mention of treating social issues is sprinkled here and there. For example, labor issues in companies as important as Air France, Peugeot-Citroën and SNCF will be covered by the Planet division (ah yes! – planes and cars pollute the planet).

SUD believes that the culture and expertise of the Social service will be lost in the shuffle. Journalists charged with covering the environmental and economic aspects of transport will have little time left over to cover the social issues.

It is a simple fact. When mass layoffs are announced it is much easier to call the company spokesperson, who is trained in communications, than it is track down the gaggle of shop stewards walking the halls or the factory floor breaking the bad news to staff. One of the advantages of having a dedicated Social service is that journalists have the time to develop a network of valuable sources who can be called upon when news breaks. News that is not of only national interest, but often international interest as well.

(/...)

Taxis or platform drivers blocking the airport? AFP was able to contact a dozen of the drivers there thanks to having covered their earlier demonstrations. The human resources chief at Air France has his shirt ripped off as he flees angry employees? AFP obtains an "exclusive" interview (as editorial management likes to crow in its meetings) with the employees implicated. Railroad workers trash SNCF's headquarters? AFP breaks the news. Both resulted from contacts developed when covering previous meetings and demonstrations.

That is a public interest mission. And that is what they want to destroy. When presented with these criticisms during the meeting of the CSE (Social and Economic Committee), the Director of Information just remained silent...

Public interest mission in danger

The breakup of the Social service is just one piece of a larger puzzle. The reorganization of the newsroom, in addition to its ideological underpinnings, is also a consequence of the **Aims and Means Contract** (signed with the French state) and **Plan Fries** that are leading to jobs cuts (the team covering transport is losing one post) and have essentially financial and quantitative objectives (see our communiques on the subject¹).

In announcing the news of his brutal attack on the newsroom, the Director of Information thought it best to omit the fact not one employee representative on the CSE supported the reorganization. He wrote that they rendered a vote without mentioning how they voted. For the record: out of 18 votes, 16 were against and two representatives abstained. To his disdain of employee representatives, add disdain towards all employees with disinformation by omission.

SUD voted against the reform and remains strongly opposed to the project. It is bad for AFP, for our media clients and the public as it is contrary to providing a varied and complete information service.

Paris, December 5, 2020

SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)



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¹ See in particular our statement about the Aims and Means Contract, which we obtained and published - <http://u.afp.com/3yVi>