

HQ renovation:

Goodbye siège... And please stay home!



We've packed our boxes, said our goodbyes to the headquarters we've always known... and the experiment with home confinement continues. We have months of remote work ahead of us, possibly until 2022.

The Covid-19 crisis is partially to blame, but not alone. The renovations planned for the HQ building mean staff have to mostly work from home as the offices at rue Vivienne cannot hold everyone, whether or not Covid related measures are in place.

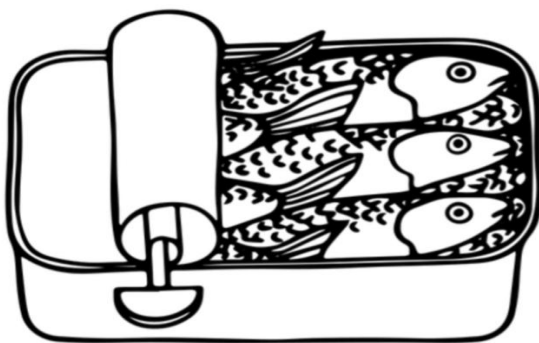
The télétravail agreement negotiated by management and trade unions has somewhat improved remote working conditions during the period of renovations of the HQ building, with a small budget for buying office equipment and a modest monthly payment of 10 to 30 euros for expenses.

SUD considers this agreement - which we did not sign - as being too far below what staff are entitled to under current law and suffers from a lack of providing anything for remote work during "normal" periods (*See our communique on remote work: <https://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article632>*).

The cherry on the cake was that management obstinately refused to discuss during the negotiations the working conditions at Vivienne, considering it a different subject although the HQ renovation could not take place without Vivienne and massive recourse to télétravail!

Degraded work conditions

As to be expected, we are discovering now that the work conditions at Vivienne are not great.



Open space Vivienne

Only on March 2 did workplace representatives learn that there were no plans to keep the cafeteria open in the evenings to provide a place for people to take their break and eat, and that there were an insufficient number of spaces to eat lunch given Covid restrictions. Given the lack of space, there were no provisions for staff who bring in their own meal to eat. There was no question of letting people eat at their work stations as they are too close together if people are not wearing masks.

Of course, the issues were subsequently resolved, but these were elementary issues that should have been planned for well ahead of time to ensure decent working conditions.

Faced with criticism, management used its magic phrases: "We'll adapt if necessary. We'll be agile..." But it is clear to us that if such basic things are not adequately planned for, then staff will "choose" to work at home, even five days a week. This is the forced télétravail in all but name that we worried about during the negotiations.

For those who go in to work at Vivienne, the experience risks being unpleasant, with too much noise (TVs, people holding discussions, making telephone calls) and a feeling

of being too packed in as the 50 percent occupancy rule was dropped from the beginning of March.

Management says it respects government rules on the distance between staff, but it is a perverse effect to fill up an office with more people just as more contagious variants of Covid-19 are sweeping through Paris.

An avalanche of reforms

To these uncomfortable work conditions and the psychological exhaustion of remote working we need to add the reforms that management has been adopting at a frenetic rate. Workplace representatives have been unable (or unwilling at times) to slow or block them.

SUD in particular opposed the transfer of two posts from the French overnight desk in Paris to Hong Kong (which continues the erosion of posts from France), as well as the reorganization of the newsroom into production "poles" that results in disappearance of a distinct Social service (see our *communiqué* from December 5, 2020: <https://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article630>).

These new reforms won't enter into force for months, but this forced march of changes does not bode well for the future. The reforms, both big and small, will result in profound changes in how the Agency works.

Management asks for our confidence as it says the changes are "common sense". However, the reform creating a single francophone desk in Paris - where the ultimate goal was to reduce staff - is a perfect counter example. In place since the beginning of February, no one can say the merging of the Inter and France desks has pleased the editors who are now at times overwhelmed (adapting domestic French copy for foreign clients is no longer BPA's job) and who have to deal with complicated copy flows and technical manipulations. Moreover, no one is responsible for economics stories and to add insult to injury, there have been repeated Iris breakdowns.

For the acolytes of the "modernization" of AFP, all of these changes are self-evident and inevitable. We hear a lot these days that the Covid-19 and the Agency's financial situation force us to take certain steps. Or that this is what our clients want. And don't pose too many questions, lest one call into question the judgement of management.

However, at AFP we are supposed to decrypt the language of politicians and business leaders. We shouldn't abandon that good practice when it comes to the plans of our own management.

Defend our working conditions and our jobs!

***SUD* is there to listen to you.**

Share your observations and suggestions!

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Paris, March 22, 2021

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

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