

Paris newsroom reform:

Doing more with less



In two months time AFP will set in motion the largest reform of its Paris newsroom in decades. A project that is going full steam ahead despite the pandemic and which is beginning to worry the journalists concerned.

Despite efforts by the chiefs of the future reporting "pôles" to reassure journalists, the decisions that are (finally!) being made about the coverage portfolios for each have created angst and bitterness.

The junking of a work organization that **more or less functions well** just months before the French presidential election threatens to provoke disarray in the newsroom and many fear it will lead to more work.

While the reform is supposed to eliminate the blind spots in the current setup – i.e. to cover topics that are currently not getting covered well or enough in management's view – doing so without any additional staff means more work for journalists.

While management has said we will do things differently and certain topics will get less coverage, for the moment journalists have been informed about the new things they will have to do but not about the old things they can brush aside. And **with most everyone having new assignments it will be difficult for people to evaluate the changes and make an increase in the workload easier for journalists to swallow.**

Management's message is one of reassurance, saying the reform will work thanks to everyone's hard work. And they're right: **once again it will be the professional dedication of its staff that will allow AFP to leap the hurdles management has erected.**

And those who become discouraged under the added pressure and lack of recognition will be asked once again to show "goodwill", as they are every time difficulties arise.

But let's not forget that **goodwill has to be earned!** That seems obvious, but let's hope that management remembers it as annual salary negotiations get underway. If AFP is doing well, as our CEO has told lawmakers, that is thanks to its employees as the state has been reducing its support for AFP. The least that management can do is to compensate for the loss of purchasing power due to inflation.

SUD deplores the reform's dilution of the **Social Service**, which for us is a clear indication that the treatment of social issues will be weakened (perhaps that is where we'll do less, despite the promises of management?). We are also concerned about tensions between the new pôles, with the distribution of the workload between them already throwing up sparks.

The reform of the Paris production services comes after the reform of the French-language desks. **The failure of the Desk Unique should serve as a warning:** motivated by the desire to cut posts it resulted in a degradation of working conditions. The productivity gains to permit the reduction in posts were premised upon the greater *polyvalence* or versatility of deskers. The polyvalence ordered from above is a mirage and we have seen the old specialist teams endure.

The coverage improvements management hopes for in the reform of the production services may similarly prove to be a mirage. *SUD* calls upon staff to share with us their concerns and any difficulties encountered in the implementation of the reform. Remote working has weakened the dialog between staff and trade unions but it is at this moment that we most need to renew those ties to ensure proper working conditions.

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SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)

