Annual wage negotiations (NAO):

Inflation : +2.8%
AFP wages: +3 times nada

SUD AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

While annual inflation rose to 2.8% in November according to France's national statistics institute (INSEE), AFP has refused a general wage hike sought by trade unions.

During the second meeting of the mandatory annual wage talks (NAO) held on November 25 management refused to increase our wage scales that have been frozen since the end of 2012 (except for the slight increases in 2020-2021 due to the legal battle waged by the CGT, FO and *SUD* trade unions)[1].

Who are they kidding?

Well before the start of the 2021 NAO, *SUD* set out that compensating staff for inflation should be the **minimum negotiating position for trade unions** during the talks. The **unions were unanimous in demanding a wage hike**. And what did management propose? **Crumbs for some and vague promises for 2022**:

- **A one-shot bonus that is probably less than €300 net for the 370 employees paid the least** (out of approximately 1,250 HQ status staff): approximate cost of €200,000 gross.
- **Bonuses and promotions for the most "deserving"**, attributed with no transparency and at a cost of approximately €400.000.
- **Increase in fees paid to text stringers** of 2 to 2.2%: cost not given, but no doubt less than €15,000. Nothing for photo and video stringers!
- **Opening of negotiations on "participation" in January 2020**. This is in the logic of our 2017 collective bargaining agreement that avoids any binding mechanism for general wage hikes.
- **Negotiations following the deal with Google** on neighbouring rights. As the financial conditions of the deal are secret the amount staff can hope for is unknown. A priori, management wants to limit the payments to journalists and exclude other categories of staff.
- **Negotiations on the remuneration of journalists** (in particular certain bonuses), from the second quarter of 2022.

To sum up: several *one-shot* bonuses and few permanent measures are on offer in the 2021 NAO that is expected to cost around €615,000. Compare that with the **"historic net income" of €5.3 million** AFP earned in 2020.[2]

A change of direction is needed!

It's no surprise that management's proposals are totally insufficient and even insulting to staff who kept the agency running despite Covid-19 and the renovations of our HQ.

Based upon information provided by management and our own calculations, here is **the cost of a real change of direction that puts staff above ideological, political and financial interests**:

[1] See our communiqué about the end of the SPQN legal battle - https://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article601

[2] See the AFP communiqué - https://www.afp.com/en/agency/press-releases-newsletter/afp-posts-slight-growth-commercial-revenues-2020-achieves-historic-net-income

⇒ **A 2.8% wage hike *for everyone*** = €2.8 mn to €3.7 mn per year. This isn't a raise; it just compensates for the loss in purchasing power to inflation over the past year. Increasing wages means we're also contributing to higher pensions (which is not the case for the measure proposed by management).

⇒ **A 2.8% increase in fees paid to stringers** = €38,000 per year.

⇒ **Introduction of new levels of seniority bonuses - 21% after 25 years and 22% after 30 years** = approximately €338,000 per year (after the 2.8% general wage hike). This measure would *reduce the wage gap between women and men* as well as *ensure automatic wage increases* during the second half of our careers at AFP.[3]

We don't have the same priorities as Mr Fries

The total cost of these completely logical and reasonable propositions is approximately €3.2 mn to €4.1 mn per year and is less than last year's €5.3 mn profit.

It is also less than what the French state failed to pay for services rendered by AFP in recent years. The **under-compensation of AFP's public interest missions** (MIG) totaled €19.8 mn for the years 2015-2018, or **nearly €5 mn per year!** That is money stolen from AFP and its staff. Money that could have been used to maintain the purchasing power of the Agency's staff and avoid the job cuts under Plan Fries.[4]

But **the CEO has other priorities**. Following the logic of his "Transformation Plan", he no longer seeks to *spread out* but **pay off AFP's debt** by 2027 by imposing further austerity. The planned reduction in debt for 2022-2023 is €16.5 mn, or more than €8 mn per year.[5] That is considerably more than our NAO demands!

A harmful project for staff, but logical in the perspective of a capitalization of the Agency, which will be necessary by 2024/2025 unless it is decided to buck the rules of free and undistorted competition dear to Brussels and Bercy. Fabrice Fries actually announced this in 2018, before being appointed as CEO.[6]

Staff and their representatives are faced with a choice: accept this financial but antisocial logic or, on the contrary, defend our interests as workers as well as citizens attached to the raison d'être of AFP: furnishing a complete and objective information service without falling under the influence of political and financial groups.

That is why *SUD* puts the priority for **the 2021 NAO on preserving our purchasing power in the face of rising inflation.** Concerning the vague promises for sweets linked to "participation" and opaque contracts with tech platforms, can anyone reproach us for being skeptical when all we are being given now is crumbs?

The third and final NAO is scheduled for December 8.

Paris, December 3, 2021
***SUD*-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)**

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[3] See our previous communiqué on the 2021 NAO - https://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article646
[4] See our communiqué https://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article625 - Using the opacity of the cost of the MIG, management and Bercy are claiming that there was an *overcompensation* of the MIG in 2020. This happened as the state was financing Plan Fries to the tune of €17 mn, including €13 mn to pay for the suppression of 95 posts via the "voluntary departure plan" (PDV). We'll no doubt be talking about this issue again as Brussels will insist AFP pay back any *overcompensation* cumulated over the 2019-2023 period (despite the €19.7 mn in *undercompensation* for the 2015-2018 period).
[5] See "Fabrice Fries speech to the National Assembly" on Aurore, December 2, 2021
[6] See our analysis of Plan Fries, which still remains helpful (in French): https://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article532