

Long negotiation Ends with big flop!



Negotiations on the remuneration of journalists ended without an agreement on March 24, 2023, nearly one year after they began. Here's a look back at a big flop that says a lot about the state of social dialogue at AFP and the dismal prospects for any improvements to the career plan and wage structure of the agency's journalists.

Why was there a separate negotiation for journalists in the first place? During the annual wage talks in recent years management declined to entertain making major changes to the wage structure and career plans, promising to hold more detailed, category-specific negotiations. It was able to stall substantive talks on the improvement of our career plans for several years in this manner.

Suffice it to say that the expectations were high among the trade unions about these talks and that their disappointment is at a similar level. The talks quickly went south because management raised its idea of cutting the photo and video bonuses which it considered "too high" and harmful for mobility. In return, it proposed to raise the bonuses of certain supervisors (desk heads and their assistants). *SUD immediately denounced this reverse Robin Hood maneuver* (See our statement from last July: *AFP's new Plan Image: Cut photo and video bonuses!* <https://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article679>).

In the crosshairs: photo et video bonuses

But we had to wait until December 2023 (9 months!) to discover the full extent of management's disastrous project: the pure and simple abolition of the bonus for video editors (161 euros per month) as well as the amputation of bonuses for video reporters (322 euros) and photo reporters (467 euros) to 150 euros. A proposal obviously unacceptable for those concerned, even if management promised those who already receive these bonuses would keep them by creating a "closed group," while only newcomers would suffer the loss. In short, *favoring the "old" to the detriment of the "young."* And all this, supposedly, to promote their mobility!

Fortunately (thanks in part to detailed information relayed by *SUD*) *photo and video journalists demonstrated their solidarity and courage by rejecting this proposal in an open letter*, refusing to accept that their future colleagues would be worse off. This very significant mobilization (68 signatories!) prompted management to improve its proposal: future video editors would get a bonus of 120 euros, and future video and photo reporters would touch 240 euros.

Another proposal to entice the unions to sign: a portion of these bonuses would continue in the event of mobility to a non-photo or video post, on the same model as supervisors (30% after 3 years and 50% after 4.5 years in the post). *SUD* has been advocating for this for a long time, but 100% on the grounds that it is an acquired skill and not a function!

Following a consultation organized in February, *this improved proposal was nevertheless rejected by a large majority of the signatories of the open letter*. A choice of solidarity with newcomers that *SUD* can only approve of given our opposition in principle to the creation of “closed groups,” a source of division between employees.

Faced with the refusal of both employees and the unions (including *SUD*), management, crestfallen, put an end to the negotiations. And strangely, while it had set the reduction of photo and video bonuses as a condition raising the bonuses of certain supervisors, *management announced that it was still considering implementing these improvements unilaterally!*

A failure for management, no progress for journalists

While this was a small victory for some journalists, we must not forget the essential: that *management swept away from the start all the requests made by SUD and other unions to improve the automatic career plan for journalists, which stops at category RED5 (after 20 years of seniority)*.

Today, many journalists have reached this level and no longer have any prospect of career evolution, except for the hope of being among the few lucky ones who each year get promoted to RED5+ and RED6, at the discretion of management. *SUD* also proposed introducing new seniority bonus levels beyond 20 years. In vain. Management remains allergic to any payroll increase, especially to automatic increases, just as it was intransigent in the latest talks on wage increases due to galloping inflation.

Basically, management’s policy is to curb payroll increases at all costs to avoid having to ask the French state for more money. In addition, letting wage scales deteriorate gives it more room to favor the advancement of some staff members with bonuses and promotions. Such individualization of pay may in theory reward productivity, but in practice will likely result only in clientelism, with obedient staff waiting for a reward.

In June 2023, negotiations on the remuneration of administrative and technical staff will begin. Will they obtain advances that eluded journalists? We strongly doubt it. Management will surely only offer crumbs. Or maybe more “closed groups”. Only time will tell.

One thing is certain: if AFP staff want to escape the slow and inevitable decline in their purchasing power, they need to show solidarity and mobilize, just as photo and journalists have done to defend their jobs and their dignity.

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SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)

