

Purchasing power, Neighboring rights, IA: An autumn full of challenges

After a summer marked by a whirlwind of news, persistent heatwaves, and mega-fires, it is time to get back to work. This return comes at a crucial moment for the Agency, with several negotiations and projects underway that will directly impact AFP employees.

SUD reviews the key issues for the coming months:

NAO

The first meeting of the mandatory annual negotiations (NAO) took place before the summer, and the trade unions presented their demands. These discussions, which focus primarily on wages, resume on **September 17**; management is expected to indicate at that time which issues it is willing to negotiate.

For SUD, the top priority is to recoup the 13% loss in purchasing power experienced since 2018 (according to our calculations). This loss is not merely a statistical abstraction; it affects our standards of living. Furthermore, the growing difficulty of finding decent housing acts as a barrier to professional mobility, to the detriment of both employees and the Agency.

While this certainly cannot be achieved all at once, it is essential that management acknowledges the need to restore our lost purchasing power and plans for wage increases over several years. Currently, our interests regarding pay are considered only after management's priorities have been met. This must change – especially given that management's financial flexibility will improve as the Agency pays off its debt in 2028.

Neighboring rights

Our agreement on neighboring rights expired in December 2024, with a final payment of €275 per journalist (for a full-time position) made in February 2025. Management waited until the last minute to launch negotiations for a new agreement and has since dragged out discussions to avoid paying journalists the "appropriate and equitable" share (as required by law) of the revenue collected from platforms.

A major problem is that the 2022 agreement was bad: we received a much lower percentage than our colleagues in other French newsrooms. Today, management is shedding crocodile tears and threatening the unions: by demanding a payout rate equivalent to that in effect at other media outlets, we risk facing a redundancy plan. That is the current state of labor relations at AFP: a shakedown!

SUD realized as early as last year that management was dragging its feet during negotiations. However, the unions that signed the 2022 agreement wanted to bring in the SCAM, which manages our authors' rights, to assist us. After a year of fruitless discussions, only two options remain: signing a substandard agreement (which SUD will again refuse) or referring the matter to the Commission on Authors' Rights and Neighboring Rights (CDADV), which can issue a ruling in the absence of an agreement.

A new meeting is scheduled for **September 14**.

In early July, management unveiled a draft action plan following the results of the Sextant audit to address the identified psychosocial risks (PSR), with further work on the project scheduled for the autumn. SUD considers the proposed measures insufficient and, in some cases, ill-advised. The plan amounts to little more than an HR development program that is largely disconnected from the audit's findings. Ideas involving the micromanagement of employees and basing advancement on the vague concept of "soft skills" will only serve to increase workplace stress. The facts cannot be ignored: deteriorating working conditions, a lack of recognition, reduced opportunities and career mobility, and the erosion of the quality and scope of our benefits are all causing workplace distress. This summer, French-contract staff got a taste of the treatment local staff have long endured: a complete lack of transparency regarding recruitment and mobility terms. Those interested in jobs with the new mobility status found it impossible to properly prepare for interviews or make informed choices. We even learned that some managers are brushing off employee questions by referring them to ChatGPT! Does this not represent a major psychosocial risk that management is adding to the already alarming picture painted by the Sextant audit?

Artificial Intelligence

During an extraordinary meeting of the Social and Economic Commission (CSE) in May, management presented the findings of the Sopra Steria study on integrating artificial intelligence into journalistic practices. Although management describes the recommendations as merely "potential avenues for exploration," it makes no secret of its desire to rapidly introduce AI into the newsroom. However, it has been careful to avoid mentioning the cost of this strategic direction. Perhaps it will finally reveal its hand at the next extraordinary CSE meeting scheduled for **September 18**.

The threat posed by this technology is real, not virtual: hundreds of thousands of euros of extra AI costs are being partially offset by cutting fixed-term contracts (CDDs) through the end of the year! Beyond the money spent developing tools with no guarantee of reliability, there is also the worrying risk of losing skills and the very purpose of our work. As for the much-touted "time savings," these will undoubtedly lead to job cuts. Given that AI is already causing job losses worldwide and our management is desperate to cut costs, how can we ignore this threat?

And what about the trust our users place in our ability to provide "accurate, impartial, and trustworthy information", as our statute requires? The solution proposed by management – meticulously labeling the source of every "building block" of information to feed machines and AI systems – still risks undermining that very trust. During a CSE meeting dedicated to this topic, management openly admitted to leaving our traditional clients by the wayside; in their eyes, AI competition is akin to natural selection! Too bad for them – the priority is for AFP to survive! Yet, the business model for selling information blocks to AI companies remains a mystery for now: What are the prices and guarantees for AFP and its employees, especially given that the issue of author/neighborhood rights has yet to be resolved?

Underlying these seemingly separate issues is a common pattern: shifting the cost of management decisions onto staff, curtailing career opportunities, and failing to provide responses commensurate with the worsening psychosocial risks. In the face of these challenges, it is vital that employees make their voices heard and collectively defend their interests, their working conditions, and the future of the Agency. SUD will continue to champion these demands. Together, we can make a difference.

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SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)

