

AFP Trade Unions Condemn Plan for a Cut-Rate Journalism Subsidiary

- Call for Staff General Assembly in Paris, Tuesday June 10 at 2:30 pm -

Herewith a translation of the statement issued by four unions on June 3:

Management has told the Works Committee of its plan to set up a subsidiary of the AFP Services unit, to be called **AFP-Media Services**.

In the document submitted to the committee on May 22, management noted that the existing “AFP Services” subsidiary “*was originally aimed mainly at a market made up of non-media companies and institutions.*”. However, “*the way news on the web has developed has led to the emergence of a new demand from media companies for editorial teams capable of customising content for them*” (our translation).

According to management, the activity in question opens up “*great commercial prospects.*” AFP Services is already providing it for two clients, the French-language web sites of the mobile phone operator Orange and the RTL media company. For the past year, journalists working on full-time short-term contracts, “*assisted by freelancers*”, have been providing the service. As of May 2014 there were six of them.

This raises a problem: under French law, a company that earns less than half of its turnover from media clients cannot employ staff as journalists. This rules out AFP Services, an AFP subsidiary which to date has worked mostly either on public relations for non-media clients or for the European Commission; the latter being currently its main customer.

Which is why the young people employed on insecure contracts to provide “editorial services” for Orange and RTL for the past year are still waiting to receive their press cards.

In AFP management’s view, the creation of AFP-Media Services as a “*media subsidiary*” of AFP’s “*corporate*” subsidiary is “*the only way*” to ensure that these young journalists are recognised as such by the granting of the press card.

Why We Are Firmly Against The Plan

The CGT, FO, SUD and CFE-CGC unions are against this project because:

- The unions have always fought to prevent “corporate” activities being carried out within the framework of the agency. That is notably why they opposed (in vain, alas) letting the subsidiary created to that end take the name of “AFP-Services” and also having staff under contract with its AFP parent take part in its public-relations activities.
- Despite this opposition, the activities in question, provided by AFP Services, have now expanded to include the provision of tailor-made content for clients such as Orange and

RTL. In its document, management envisages broadening the range to take in *"TV channels for on-demand services such as "live standups" and exclusive content provided by journalists in France or abroad."* Although they fall into the category of media content, such products are not part of AFP's "general interest mission", as the editorial line is laid down by the client. We are therefore looking at special interest content, which management wants to provide via a subsidiary of a subsidiary.

- The unions backing the present appeal cannot accept the degraded and insecure conditions imposed on the staff called on to provide these services, today for AFP Services and tomorrow for its sub-subsidiary. These include insecure labour contracts with poor wages and conditions, not to mention the absence of press cards, which is supposedly the sole justification for setting up the new unit. It should be noted that most of the young people in question have passed the tests for the "AFP Grant" scheme, and accepted the work in question in the hopes of thereby getting a toehold within the agency.
- For these reasons, **the signatories of the present text refuse the proposed subsidiary**, which would have the effect of creating and perpetuating inside the mother company – and on the same premises – a kind of low-cost unit based on unacceptable terms and conditions. This would be likely to spark an internal "race to the bottom" in competition with the staff of the parent agency. **We call on management to drop the plan, and to give the staff involved in media activities for AFP Services the same status as all other AFP journalists.** As full-status staff, they could then be "seconded" to AFP Services if needed – as is already the case for the staff running the subsidiary.
- Similarly, **the signatory unions clearly state our opposition to the creation of ever-more subsidiaries.** This policy is currently being proposed by the French MP Michel Françaix, whose report on the future of AFP proposes to externalise the agency's technical services. It also underlies moves afoot by the European Commission to give a very restrictive definition of AFP's "general interest mission." Such initiatives could lead to AFP being sliced and diced into ever-smaller units.

**We call for a Staff General Assembly
on Tuesday, June 10 at 2:30 pm (1230 GMT)
on the first floor of the Rue Vivienne premises**

At the assembly, we will inform staff of various initiatives, such as:

- **Demands for interviews** at the prime minister's office, the ministry of culture and with deputies and senators.
- **A proposal to take the case before AFP's higher council.** This watchdog body would be asked to rule that journalistic activities carried out under the AFP brand-name to serve special-interest needs are contrary to article 2 of the AFP statutes.

Paris, June 3, 2014

The CGT, FO, SUD and CFE-CGC trade unions at AFP