

Say NO to the Grand Accord!

Time to take a position. Time to take a stand!



Fifteen months after renouncing nearly all of the wage and benefits agreements at the Agency, AFP's management wants to finish up negotiations and sign a replacement "Grand Accord" by February 9. So far, management has refused to extend talks beyond that date, despite a unanimous request from unions.

A Staff Assembly to see where everyone stands

During a meeting of all the trade unions on January 18, SUD proposed holding a Staff Assembly of all employees the week of January 23 with three objectives: informing staff, letting each union express its position on the Grand Accord and organizing a unified movement.

If certain unions were favorable to such a proposition, **we are still waiting for firm responses** about a **joint call** for holding such an AG, which many employees want to clarify the situation as the end of the negotiations approaches. Here is a summary of SUD's position:

1/ Staff asked to make too many sacrifices

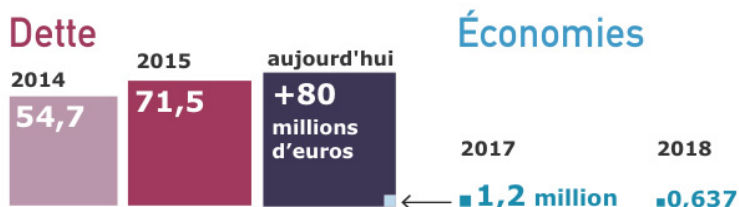
Management's proposal boils down to making us **work more**. Our wage scales, which have been frozen for more than 4 years, remain in the deep freeze and management's vaunted profit-sharing plan has been dropped from the accord. SUD's demands, which management has rejected, are:

- **No increase in working hours**
- **Keeping the current number of RTTs**
- **No introduction of forfait jours contracts**
- **20-year career plans with automatic promotions for all categories of staff** (like for journalists)

2/ This cost-cutting plan won't save AFP

Management's latest statements leave no doubt about the character of the Grand Accord that it wants to impose on AFP's staff:

- **The is just the umpteenth cost-cutting plan**, which requires us all to make more sacrifices, which will have a considerable impact on our working conditions and health.
- **These sacrifices, often considerable, won't solve AFP's financial problems**, as the expected savings (1.2 million euros this year and 637,000 euros in 2018) are minuscule compared to AFP's debt (71.5 million euros in 2015)
- **There is no promise of an end to the tunnel of sacrifices for AFP employees.** On the contrary, it is evident this cost-cutting plan will be followed by others, further eroding the capabilities of AFP to provide a complete and objective service that is independent of political and financial groups. AFP's management acknowledges these risks, but it says it is willing to accept them.



(/...)

3 / Legalizing dubious practices

That leaves management's final argument for a new accord – that it will provide it with legal security. Management has recognized – finally – that many of its HR policies do not conform with the law in France and elsewhere in the world. The objective is to reduce these legal risks at the lowest cost possible.

Take for example management's flagship proposal in this regard: the **forfait jours**. This type of contract fixes the number of days one works per year. There are no set working hours and thus no overtime. Management wants to force many cadres and almost all journalists on French contracts onto forfait jours contracts. Journalists and many cadres will continue to work **long (if not longer) hours** and in management's view they will no longer have any legal recourse.

However in management's rush to impose these contracts, without sufficient protections and onto all journalists, it will likely end up with a new series of lawsuits which could also cost it dearly. Management also recognizes this risk, but intends to push forward anyway.

Fear of the void?

What will happen if no accord is signed?

Some have already begun talking about the threat of a big void if no agreement is signed to replace the old wage and benefits accords, and that this vague threat justifies signing a bad deal. *SUD* doesn't share this fear.

The absence of a substitution accord will be more of a problem for management than staff. Why? First, because it is a defeat for CEO Emmanuel Hoog, whose management roadmap (the Aims and Means Contract) foresees the signature of the Grand Accord to buckle the belt of the Agency's financial framework. Without an accord signed by unions, management will have to take unilateral measures.

If there is no accord, instead of applying the minimum required under the law, management has promised publicly to **apply its draft accord as it emerges from the negotiations**.

For staff, it is much better that this unacceptable text is applied unilaterally than with the consent of the trade unions who seem oddly willing to **sign away benefits without even trying to change the balance of power** to obtain the best deal possible out of management.

The greatest danger for staff is a bad deal signed by the trade unions. Management will be able to use the signature of unions on the accord against any employee who tries to enforce their rights in court.

Can we afford not to strike?

The other unions finally need to take a clear position: do they intend to accept without a battle the cuts in benefits the Grand Accord will impose or will they seek to mobilize the staff around the untenable financial situation of the Agency?

***SUD* calls on other trade unions and the staff to prepare for an open-ended strike from January 30 at the latest**, seizing upon the electoral calendar to demand a better financial model for AFP.

Holding a **Staff Assembly for all categories attended by all unions** should be the starting point for such a mobilization.

Paris, 20 Janvier 2017

SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)

