

Working less becomes possible!



Devoted to their jobs, attached to AFP's public interest mission, most employees don't count the hours they work. AFP's management thinks this devotion is unlimited, but its plans are not finding an enthusiastic welcome among the staff. While the new collective agreement was signed by unions with a majority, as it represents a step backward there does not appear to be a real consensus on working time among staff as there was under the old accords. Some are finding an unintended consequence of the Grand Accord: they can finally scale back their work hours.

Management's objective is obviously to reduce the wage bill, notably by making us **work more** (less vacation for workers and technical staff, less RTTs for all, more than 35-hours for people on the forfait jours, etc.). But for many of us it is quickly clear: **remaining on the regular work week will allow cutting back on excessive working hours.**

- As June 1, the date of entry for the new working time measures, approaches **some employees are already cutting back on their work hours** and discovering just how much of their free time and energy they were giving to the Agency, which is a now just a commercial firm like others (as management has pointed out thanks to the reform of AFP's 1957 statute¹).
- Some journalists in production services and bureaus are ready to stay on the regular work week instead of taking the forfait jours.

Example for production journalists choosing the 39-hour work week

If they continue to work as they have before, that is 45 hours per week minimum in order to ensure that AFP fulfills its public interest mission.

- 45 hours: 39 hours + 6 hours overtime per week
- That is 24 hours overtime per month (not including weekends on permanence)
- That is 240 hours overtime per year (for 10 months of work)

The 240 hours of overtime, according to the rules fixed in the Grand Accord, be compensated as follows: 220 hours recuped and 20 hours paid double **AND** recuped.

That makes 31 days of recups per year² (in addition to the 7 RTTs and vacation) and roughly an additional 900 euros (for a category 3 journalist)

39-hour work week	Forfait jours	Difference
31 Recups + 7 RTT = 38 days off	12 RTT = 12 days off	26 days per year

Production journalists who opt for the forfait jours and working 45 hours per week are giving up 26 recups and the payment of roughly 900 euros per year. We understand clearly why management considers "*the organization most pertinent given actual practices is accounting in days worked per year*" (=forfait jours).

"Get used to working less!"

You may find our calculations surprising, but we note they are **theoretical**. That is because employees asking about how overtime and recups will work under the regular work week are hearing from management: "*You need to get used to working less!*" In other words, the marching order is: no overtime!

¹ See <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article311> (in French)

² 39hours/week = 7.8h/day. 240 hours divided by 7.8h = 30.76 days, rounded to **31 days**

Thus, the Grand Accord will result in a reduction in work time for those who have been working long hours that opt for the regular work week. This will be a welcome shift in the work-life balance for many.

Disarray in the services

Management hopes that faced with the loss of RTT days connected with staying on the regular work week that cadres and journalists would overwhelmingly choose the forfait jours. But in reality we are heading towards a **sharp division of staff** which threatens to lead to disarray in different services and a troubling increase in work for office chiefs.

Instead of spending their time doing their jobs -- whether editorial, administrative, technical or commercial in nature -- **office chiefs** will be overwhelmed with busy work. They must meet with staff on the forfait jours five times per year about their work load. On a daily basis they must supervise the work of staff on the regular work week. They must continually prioritize tasks where possible and will have to decide where the Agency can do without covering events. If they receive approval from management they could ask staff on the regular work week to work overtime, or if not assign the task to someone on the forfait jours.

Employees on the forfait jours risk seeing their amount of work increase, contrary to the promises of management. This is true even in services that work shifts (for example the desks): **employees on the forfait jours cannot refuse to extend their work day to replace a colleague who is absent.**

All this risks to undermine carrying out of our public interest mission, poison the working atmosphere in services, and cause unneeded stress to staff.

Stay on the regular work week!

The best way to protect our collective interests against the disarray that the forfait jours will create is to stay on the regular work week, and to stay united. Remember that we have the choice between the regular work week and the forfait jours, and it is for management to respect that choice.

The unions that signed the Grand Accord took allowed the introduction of a new work arrangements and social relations that do not correspond to the needs of the Agency, unless you consider that AFP no longer has a public interest mission requiring it "*to provide French and foreign users with exact, impartial and trustworthy information on a regular and uninterrupted basis*" (AFP's 1957 Statute). The signatories also chose to divide staff at AFP into three categories, those working 35 hours per week, those working 39 hours per week, and those on forfait jours contracts working up to 48 hours per week. **SUD will continue to fight for equal treatment of all staff at the Agency.**

The key element of the Grand Accord -- the forfait jours -- cannot be legally reconciled with the working practices of most journalists and cadres at AFP. SUD is preparing legal action to confirm that before French courts. The fundamental issue at the Agency remains the **lack of financial and human resources**, and to solve them we need a **renegotiation of the Aims and Means Contract with the French state and the Grand Accord.**

Paris, 15 May 2017

SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)

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