

In-House Elections at AFP: Union Progress Report for 2011-14



Plus an invitation to meet **SUD** in Paris on Monday Sept. 8

In a few weeks' time, all HQ-status staff at AFP will be called on to elect representatives on the Works Committee and shop stewards (*délégués du personnel*) for the next three years. If you work under a French labour contract, we ask you to vote for **SUD**, to help us defend staff both collectively and individually around the world. We also encourage you to contact us by e-mail (sudafp@orange.fr), or to come and meet us in person on **Monday, September 8th at 1:30pm** in the union room opposite the Works Committee, 1st floor of the Paris HQ building.

Despite Adverse Conditions, Some Gains

In a period of widespread austerity, with industrial relations gains dating back from the end of World War II under continuing attack in France, it is understandable that some people might feel sceptical about the usefulness of the unions and their elected representatives. At AFP as elsewhere, we are seeing attacks on social benefits, worsening conditions and the spread of precarious labour contracts. But despite these tough conditions, we believe our actions over the past three years have not been in vain. **Herewith key points from our record for 2011-14:**

Staff Purchasing Power

For over ten years, our employer ripped us off for thousands of euros by failing to apply a basic provision of French labour law, which lays down two different ways of calculating holiday pay and stipulates that all staff must benefit from whichever of the two is more advantageous. The scandal was uncovered by the CFE-CGC union, but once it became known SUD took it on board and campaigned tirelessly for justice.

At the end of 2011, management finally paid back part of the accumulated deficit: over 1,200 staff got a one-off payment, and other people have been compensated since. And our holiday pay is now calculated correctly, especially important given that the method that management had quietly ditched is generally more favourable than the one they were using. The resulting gains, which vary from person to person, have sometimes been considerable. However compensation has been incomplete, and partial. A number of court cases are under way to ensure that our rights as wage-earners are fully respected.

See for example our statement in English at <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article194>.

Given that many AFP wage-earners have reached the limits of their automatic seniority and bonus plans defined under past collective agreements, and that management has practically halted all annual wage increases, the money resulting from the holiday pay claw-back have constituted practically **the only real wage increases** in recent years.

SUD can however claim one other success, as regards the **automatic seniority plan for journalists**. A measure that came into force on January 1, 2013 means that over their careers all HQ-status journalists can now reach pay category 5; for certain people, the previous plan halted at category 4.

For more info on this, see <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article154> (Fr)

Fighting Discrimination

In 2012 all the France-based trade unions signed a **collective agreement on professional equality between women and men**. (The document is available, via the AFP intranet only, at <http://u.afp.com/hK7>).

SUD takes such agreements very seriously; we have long fought against all forms of discrimination. A key example has been our successful battle to remove a clause from AFP's statutes which prevented large numbers of staff from taking part in the election of our representatives to the AFP board, on grounds of nationality. When a journalist decided to complain to France's anti-discrimination watchdog, we took up his case and in May 2011 we finally won a ruling from the Constitutional Court, which struck down the discriminatory article. See our article in English at <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article102>.

Thanks to that long battle, in June 2014, staff of all nationalities and from all categories took part in large numbers in the election of new board reps. for the coming three years. See our statement at <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article269>.

Misery in the Workplace

In recent years another change has taken place in attitudes to an issue that had all too often been swept under the carpet: stress, harassment and other forms of suffering in the workplace. AFP management has been confronted with several cases, both individual and collective, and has finally recognised the importance of such issues, although it has not always identified adequate solutions.

SUD has played a part in this essential, but still broadly under-appreciated, change. We took up two difficult cases of staff members who had suffered from inappropriate measures taken by management. Our shop steward used a clause in French labour law to blow the whistle, obliging management to carry out an investigation and take appropriate measures. (The "whistle-blowing" provision is in Article L2313-2 of the Labour Code).

Thanks to those initiatives an AFP journalist who had been unjustly sidelined was able to resume full professional activities after a year and a half on sick leave. And in the case of a blue-collar worker, also on long-term sick leave, management called in a psychologist specialised in industrial relations, who questioned around 20 staff members and concluded that there were serious problems, and several cases of workplace suffering, in one of the technical services. This story is by no means over: progress still needs to be made in the search for solutions, and on ways to prevent cases of workplace suffering.

AFP's Future

A key issue for the agency over the coming years will be how to finance both its investments and its running costs. In 2011 resolute action by staff, supported by thousands of public figures and ordinary citizens, saved the company's founding statutes from the latest in a long series of attempts to subvert them or water them down. It has since become clear that by getting AFP's mission written even more clearly into the 1957 law that defines the company's statutes, we headed off a damaging conflict with the European Commission.

SUD was not only to the fore in the fight against the proposed amendment to the law in 2011; we also acted to ensure that all the trade unions supported the strengthening of the "general interest mission" that was adopted by the French parliament in 2012. The change allowed AFP to avoid being sanctioned by the Commission over its rules on state aid.

For more info, see our statement: "**A Major Victory, On to the Next Battle!**" - <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article101>. See also: http://www.sos-afp.org/en/draft_law_2011.

It thus happens that the only two changes made to AFP's statutes since they were adopted in 1957—the end of discrimination in the elections to the board, and the inclusion of the reference to a general interest mission—were made either on *SUD*'s sole initiative, or with its strong support.

Keeping You Fully Informed

During the three-year mandate now ending, *SUD* has often played the role of a whistle-blower, on issues such as insecure labour contracts, the wage freeze, the clawing-back of bonus payments and plans to spin off yet more subsidiaries. Not forgetting editorial issues, a constant concern.

We have acted to keep staff continually informed, via:

- Our public web site at www.sud-afp.org. Over 100 new documents have been published there since 2011; whenever possible, we also provide English translations (cf <http://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?mot274>)
- Our frequent statements made during Works Committee meetings. The proceedings of the latter are published verbatim on the AFP intranet - cf. <http://u.afp.com/nv6>
- The written questions we file for the statutory monthly meetings between management and shop stewards (*délégués du personnel*). Those questions, along with management's answers, can be found on the intranet at the following addresses:
 - Meetings for journalists ("*DPJ*"): <http://u.afp.com/nve>
 - Technical and administrative staff ("*DPTA*"): <http://u.afp.com/wsy>

"Representative" and Active

This report would not be complete without a reminder of the electoral platform we defended three years ago: "**Respect for AFP Staff—Respect for Staff Rights!**" (www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article277). Even more important, here are the overall results of those 2011 elections:

CGT 37.9%, CFDT 16.2%, FO 15.9%, SNJ 15.3%, SUD 10.4%, CFE-CGC 4.3%

(Overall results of the first round of voting for the Works Committee, all staff categories combined)

By making it over the threshold of 10%, *SUD* was decreed "*representative*" under French labour law. This all-important qualification is necessary for a union to be able to nominate delegates (in addition to its elected reps.), to take part in negotiations with management and to sign collective agreements.

In a second round of voting in the journalists's college, *SUD* obtained 13.2% of votes.

Our union thereby emerged from the 2011 elections with:

- **Two shop stewards**, out of a total of 28 (14 main delegates, 14 alternates).
- **One Works Committee delegate** out of a total of 16 (eight main, eight alternates)
- **One elected member of the Health & Safety Committee (*CHSCT*)**, out of a total of eight.

Along with the delegates appointed directly by the union, we have thereby been able to count on a team of half-a-dozen people (cf. <http://u.afp.com/h83> - Intranet only) to act for *SUD*, backed up both by the union's members and many other colleagues. All in the name of **S**olidarity, staff **U**nity and **D**emocracy!

Our Lists for 2014. Why Not You?

As we did in 2011, SUD will go into next month's elections with candidate lists for all three electoral colleges: for journalists, white-collar staff (*cadres*) and blue-collar and secretarial (*employés* and *ouvriers*) staff. The corresponding lists are ready, but not yet completely finalised. **There are still a few openings for any colleagues who would like to test the waters of trade-union activism at AFP.**

Many of you may feel that you lack the requisite knowledge of labour law, or that you don't have the time needed for active union work.

But none of us are professional activists: we all carry out our regular AFP duties alongside our union work, which we provide according to our individual possibilities, with a commitment to helping all staff as part of a team effort. Those of us who have more knowledge and experience are therefore on hand to advise and guide new activists.

Appearing on our lists—even low down, in a non-eligible position—can be the first step towards an active commitment, starting this year, or later.

***Calling all HQ-Status staffers:
Get in touch if you're interested in appearing on our lists!***

Paris, September 3, 2014

SUD-AFP Trade Union (Solidarity – Unity – Democracy)

Come and Meet Us!

**All Paris-based staff are invited
to meet SUD's elected delegates and other activists
and discuss the upcoming elections on:**

Monday September 8th, at 1:30 pm

(in the first-floor meeting room opposite the Works Committee in the HQ building)

Sud
Solidaires
AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

Union
Syndicale
Solidaires

Union
Syndicale
Sud
Solidaires
CULTURE & MEDIAS