

Air France announces 5,000 job cuts

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On June 22, Alexandre de Juniac, CEO of the Franco-Dutch airline Air France-KLM, announced 5,122 job cuts, about 10 percent of the workforce, by the end of 2013. This is part of an austerity programme, *Transform 2015*, designed to reduce running costs by 20 percent, €2 billion, by 2014, some half of which will be achieved by slashing expenditure on labour.

There are fears that the company's Irish subsidiary City Jet will be closed down completely.

In response Air France shares rose by 7.65 percent on the day.

The announcement is part of a wave of sackings and closures engulfing France, whose unemployment rate has just topped 10 percent. France's biggest airport, Charles de Gaulle, is a major source of jobs in Paris's working class northern suburbs. It is close to the Peugeot-Citroën plant at Aulnay-sous-Bois, which is scheduled for closure by 2014 with the loss of 3,500 jobs—a social disaster in one of the poorest populations in France.

Le Monde reports: "The surge in fuel prices and ferocious competition from low-cost companies have put Air France/KLM in an extremely difficult situation, with losses of over €800 million in 2011 and a heavy debt (6.5 billion)."

The French state owns 15.8 percent of the company's shares. Air France was opened up to private capital in 1999 by Jean-Claude Gayssot, who was the Communist Party (PCF) Transport Minister in the Plural Left government (1997-2002) of Socialist Party (PS) Prime Minister Lionel Jospin.

According to union estimates 1,700 jobs will be lost through non-replacement of retirees, leaving over 3,300 jobs to be axed: 2,056 ground staff, 904 cabin crew and 450 pilots jobs. This is on top of the 800 jobs lost yearly at the company over recent years. A voluntary redundancy scheme in 2010 cut 1,800 jobs.

The continuous reductions in the work force over the

last 20 years have been achieved on a voluntary basis with only token opposition from the unions. But *Transform 2015* will very likely entail many forced redundancies.

Juniac has threatened the unions that if they do not come to an agreement on the implementation of *Transform 2015*, then no jobs or parts of the company will be guaranteed. "Considering the impact of the necessary reductions in activity and the closure of destinations, forced redundancies could not be avoided," he stated.

On June 22 *La Tribune* reported that 4 unions representing ground staff "which had signed at the end of March a document of agreement on methodology with management are for signing."

The unions will fully accept the cuts, while making a show of holding out for a guarantee of no forced redundancies for the remaining workers until 2015 rather than the proposed 2013.

Le Figaro emphasises that de Juniac has not "dismissed the spectre of a failure of the negotiations with the trade unions, the consequence of which, according to him, would be 'an even greater impact on employment'".

The unions are cooperating fully with management and its "methodology". The results of negotiations will be announced today. They will involve concessions on collective agreements permitting an increase in productivity and greater flexibility of employment, meaning a sharp increase in the rate of exploitation. Pilots' flying hours are expected to increase by nearly 50 percent from 560 to 750 per year.

Newly elected President François Hollande's PS government is giving full backing to Air France-KLM's blackmail and the deals being worked out with the unions. *Le Parisien* reports that "the Labour Minister Michel Sapin, affirmed on Thursday [June 22] that the state 'encourages' social dialogue in Air France so that

the company can adapt and avoid this 'great enterprise' from 'capsizing,' without being involved in forced redundancies, and people being thrown out."

The most cynical rôle is being played by the Stalinist Communist Party (PCF)-dominated CGT (General Confederation of Labour). The PCF daily *L'Humanité* on June 24 devoted an extensive article to the position of the CGT's management and technical staff union, the Ugict. Quoting the assertion of Christian Bourdet, the Ugict delegate to the economic commission of Air France's central committee (CCE) that "the company's survival is not at stake." It adds: "While management wants to impose a 20 percent increase in productivity, the Ugict thinks that an increase of productivity of under 3 percent would be needed to balance the books, at the current price of a barrel of oil."

Bourdet accuses management of only being interested in inflating profits and sharevalues: "Fundamentally, it's the whole financial logic that Air France has got into which has brought us to this situation." Bourdet poses the necessity of the renationalisation of Air France, ignoring the government's austerity programme and the European debt crisis and descent into recession as the world economy slows down and air transport contracts worldwide.

L'Humanité reports David Ricatte, an Air France CGT spokesman, asserting: "Management won't get us to swallow their plan." But in the next breath he reveals that his union is prepared to negotiate voluntary redundancies rather than fight for the defence of jobs. He complains, "We know the share of surplus jobs, but not the contours of voluntary redundancies, or the cash incentives to leave... the social partners are restricted, by the blackmail of sackings, to the rôle of rubberstamping the bosses' decisions."

Ricatte's use of "social partners", the EU bureaucrats' term for the trade unions in alliance with the capitalists, reveals the unashamed class collaboration of the CGT and the Stalinists.

It goes without saying that the CGT will not fight for the defense of jobs. Its only concern is to defend the viability of French capitalism. It has played a key rôle in the election of the pro-capitalist, pro-austerity Hollande as president and has launched no mass struggle against sackings in the air travel, auto manufacture, or any other sector.

On the contrary, on January 31 the CGT launched a campaign for Hollande's election at a meeting in Paris where all the bourgeois "left" and pseudo-left parties (PS, PCF, Left Party, Greens, the New Anti-capitalist Party, Workers Fight - LO) participated.



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