

Air France management threatens pilots as strike enters second week

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Air France management reacted yesterday to the pilots' vote to continue their strike for a second week by presenting an ultimatum demanding they end the strike and making threats laying the basis for legal action against the pilots.

Since September 15, Air France pilots have been striking against wage and benefit cuts, as Air France plans to expand its low-cost operation, Transavia. Over 80 percent of pilots voted over the weekend to continue their strike until Friday. Yesterday, 60 percent of Air France flights were cancelled.

Yesterday, Air France-KLM CEO Alexandre de Juniac offered to delay full implementation of the low-cost plan until December, while insisting that the low-cost plan was necessary to ensure company profitability, and would be pushed through. He issued an ultimatum against the strike, which is costing Air France €10-15 million per day, in an extensive interview in the daily *Le Monde*.

He said, "This morning, with Air France CEO Frédéric Gagey, we made a final offer to the SNPL [National Union of Airline Pilots] to end this strike that, to me as to the vast majority of Frenchmen, appears unjustified. We are proposing to suspend until the end of the year the creation of Transavia subsidiary companies in Europe outside of France or the Netherlands. This will give us the time to carry out a deeper dialogue on our plans and to build the necessary guarantees with the trade unions."

De Juniac made clear that he was demanding pilots accept the Air France low-cost plan that would impose deep cuts in wages, benefits, and working conditions. He said, "I ask Air France pilots to accompany us in our ambition to accelerate the development of Transavia in France. This means recognizing the specificities of low-cost operations: a homogeneous

fleet, rigorously controlled costs (including pilot costs), and a flexible and reactive organization."

Asked by *Le Monde* what he would do if Air France pilots refused, de Juniac indicated that he would void all existing agreements on the relationship between Air France-KLM and Transavia: "At that point, we would be forced to scrap the agreement on the development of Transavia. We cannot be limited to 14 planes [in Transavia's operations], it is halting this development, which is an urgent necessity. We want to pass to 37 planes by 2017."

It appears de Juniac is threatening to employ the strategy used by German airline Lufthansa to shift business overnight to Transavia, where workers work 45 percent longer hours, but are paid 20 percent less. "The German company," the conservative daily *Le Figaro* noted, "facing several strike movements by pilots in recent months, radically restructured its short- and medium-haul business, transferring the majority of these flights to its low-cost Germanwings division."

De Juniac thanked France's reactionary Socialist Party (PS) government for supporting Air France's plan to drive down wages, in a bid to boost the company's profits and competitiveness against other airlines. "We have the total support of the government, which has expressed itself unambiguously," de Juniac boasted. "On the substance of the dossier, it is convinced of the necessity of our growth plans, which will permit us to create 1,000 jobs in France, to buy planes, to put them on French airports, to strike back against foreign companies."

Air France is also trying to set the stage for repression of the strike. In a transparent provocation, it is threatening legal action against striking pilots for trying to discourage scab pilots from breaking the strike. On Sunday, Air France's human resource management

sent an email to all its pilots, writing, “Several non-striking pilots informed management of attempted intimidation by other workers ... such behavior is punishable by law.”

The industrial action launched by Air France pilots reflects broader anger growing in the working class across France with the Socialist Party (PS) government’s agenda of slashing labor costs, outlined by Prime Minister Manuel Valls. The main danger facing the pilots is that the unions leading the strike support imposing low-wage conditions on the workforce. They therefore oppose mobilizing the working class against France’s hated PS government in defense of wages and working conditions.

The SNPL and SPAF (Union of Air France Pilots) unions are supporting the company’s plans to move to low-cost operations, but advancing the chauvinist demand that all new low-cost jobs be in France. SNPL representative Guillaume Schmid criticized “the lie which consists in saying that we oppose the development of the low-cost airline Transavia France. We would prefer that there be 50 planes operated by Transavia-France and none at Transavia-Europe, which threatens French jobs.”

They are also criticizing de Juniac for not consulting enough with them to implement the cost-cutting plan. Another SNPL official noted, “If he had just put his cards on the table, everything would have happened fine, but we learned of his low-cost plans for Europe bit by bit. Then he tried to push everything through.”

France’s main trade union federations are isolating the strike and joining the propaganda campaign unleashed by the PS government and the media to denounce the pilots’ strike.

On Sunday, Transport Minister Alain Vidalies said Air France’s fate was “at stake” in the dispute. “The low-cost [strategy adopted by Air France] is not a choice, it’s an obligatory move, that’s reality. I think pilots are fully aware of this,” he said.

France’s union bureaucracy fears the strike action, which it knows could extend well beyond Air France into a struggle against the PS government; it has begun denouncing the Air France pilots. The head of the PS-aligned CFDT (French Democratic Confederation of Labour), Laurent Berger, denounced the strike as “indecent” and accused “pilots of endangering the entire Air France workforce.”

The Stalinist CGT (General Confederation of Labor) issued a reactionary statement declaring that while the CGT “does not condemn this strike movement ... it does not either support the ultra-corporatist content of its demands.”

The CGT’s denunciation of the strike as a corporatist action defending only higher-paid pilots is a reactionary fraud. It is not only pilots but all Air France workers who would suffer from the introduction of low-cost working conditions. Denunciations of pilots for not being employed at poverty wages, coming from overpaid servants of the banks like PS ministers and the bureaucrats of the CGT, reek of hypocrisy.



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