

New Anti-capitalist Party, Lutte Ouvrière hail union sellout of Air France strike

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A week ago, as Air France reeled from the financial impact of the pilots' strike and France's unpopular Socialist Party (PS) government feared growing popular sympathy for the walkout, the National Union of Airline Pilots (SNPL) abruptly ordered pilots back to work. Strikers received no guarantees about their main concern: fear that Air France would exploit the creation of low-cost Transavia subsidiaries to slash wages, pensions and conditions.

Even as details of this grotesque sellout continue to surface, pseudo-left allies of the PS such as the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and *Lutte Ouvrière* [LO, Workers Struggle] are hailing it as a victory.

LO, for example, in its October 3 article entitled, "End of the Air France strike, retreat by management and the government," writes: "Despite the media frenzy, despite the statements of [Prime Minister Manuel] Valls, who tried to have the last word with aggressive comments to make people think he had not given in, pilots forced management to back down on its plans for Transavia Europe ... Whether they have a comfortable wage like senior pilots, or if they are on minimum wage or unemployed, workers face everywhere the same attacks. Thank goodness there are reactions."

The NPA also cited Air France's claims that it would abandon plans for a Transavia Europe subsidiary as "a first victory that all workers will salute ... The strike thus opens a breach to mobilize other categories of personnel threatened by the Transavia project: flight attendants, ground crews assisting passengers in the airports or airplane maintenance."

The pseudo-lefts' praise of the betrayal of the pilots is a pack of lies, echoing the misleading communiqués of Air France management. First, Transavia Europe has not been withdrawn and, moreover, the pseudo-left

parties and the unions are concealing management's plans for sharp new attacks by setting up various subsidiaries and shell corporations.

The SNPL ended the strike so as to avoid "irreparable" harm to Air France's bottom line. Management is repaying the favor, paying union officials for days worked during the strike, while insisting that it will not pay the pilots for the same days.

The day before LO published its article hailing the supposed withdrawal of Transavia Europe, the news magazine *Marianne* published corporate documents showing that Air France is stepping up its plans to shift employment to low-cost subsidiaries.

As of October 1, two days after the return to work began, Transavia Europe was still registered in Portugal. Listed as entry 513 237 810 in the registry of Portuguese commercial enterprises, it is still on the books, waiting to be brought into action to hire pilots at lower wages than in France.

Air France-KLM CEO Alexandre de Juniac is setting up a web of Transavia subsidiaries and shell companies to do an end-run around promises he made during the strike. Juniac had said he would expand employment at the Transavia France subsidiary, though he indicated he might tear up the guarantees and bonuses currently given to Air France pilots who fly at the low-cost airline.

Juniac, however, was clearly not negotiating in good faith with the strikers. In a bizarre maneuver reported by *Marianne*, he legally turned the corporation that runs Air France-KLM's frequent flyer program, Mileshouse, into an airline, Transavia Company, during the strike. As of September 19, Air France's frequent flyer program can thus lease airplanes, hire staff and evade the guarantees currently granted to Air France

pilots working at Transavia-France.

When *Marianne* asked Air France to comment on its findings, airline officials responded with a cryptically worded confirmation of the report. It stated, “Like any conglomerate, Air France-KLM is in possession of juridical entities that can be activated in accordance with its needs for partnering, financing and development.”

No amount of sugar-coating by pseudo-left groups can conceal the fact that the first major struggle of the working class under the unpopular PS administration of François Hollande has ended in a shameful sellout.

The reason for this defeat was not the pilots’ bargaining position, which was very strong. Some reports even suggest Air France deliberately under-reported the loss it suffered from the strike, which was closer to €350 or €400 million [\$US438 or \$500 million] than to the €290 million it was admitting to. The defeat came about because the SNPL supported Air France management against the pilots and feared that their members might win a victory.

Pilots immediately found themselves involved in a political struggle against the state and the officials of other trade unions, who were openly hostile to the strike. Prime Minister Manuel Valls publicly denounced strikers as “egotistical.” This extraordinary statement reflected the fear shaking the PS and the entire French ruling elite.

Valls’ government, which has said its goal is to restore French industrial competitiveness by slashing labor costs (i.e., workers’ wages and conditions), was terrified that the strike could trigger struggles against the austerity agenda it has worked out with the European Union (EU). With President François Hollande at an unprecedented 13 percent approval rating, the likelihood that an event like the shutdown of France’s airports could trigger mass protests or a general strike, as in 1936 or 1968, is growing by the week.

With popular anger over austerity at explosive levels throughout Europe, the strike and the risk of broad protests was closely followed by the international press, with the German financial daily *Handelsblatt* even acknowledging the pilots were in a very strong position.

Under these conditions, it is left to the affluent middle class charlatans in pseudo-left parties like the NPA and

LO to try to spread the maximum amount of discouragement and confusion, praising a defeat as a victory. In that, they are not only defending France’s union officialdom, in which many NPA and LO members have positions, but the tottering Hollande administration, which they campaigned for in the final round of the 2012 elections.



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