

Air France pilots union signs concessions contract for low-cost subsidiary

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Three months after ending the strike against the formation of a low-cost Air France subsidiary Transavia-Europe, the National Airline Pilots Union (SNPL) suddenly signed an agreement last week with Air France on the development of Transavia-France. The deal lays out wage cuts for workers transitioning from Air France to Transavia-France.

This social retrogression is the inevitable consequence of the union's betrayal of the September strike against plans to introduce a low-cost airline named Transavia-Europe. The strike was on the verge of victory, with the company in financial difficulty and the government falling in the polls, when the SNPL suddenly ended the strike. They feared that a victory would provoke a wider outbreak of workers struggles and wage demands in France and across Europe, where other airlines also faced significant strikes, such as Lufthansa.

European workers are facing unprecedented attacks against their wages and social rights. The unions of Britain's Monarch Airlines imposed the loss of 900 jobs and 30 percent wage cuts to transform the firm into a low-cost airline. Lufthansa is preparing a similar deal. Other industries have been hit hard with job cuts and plant closures, such as the automobile sector with Opel and PSA, with the assistance and approval of the trade unions.

The SNPL's decision to end the strike because victory was in sight underscores the total bankruptcy of a perspective of relying on the unions to defend workers' rights and conditions.

Air France CEO Alexandre de Juniac was delighted at the deal: "The development of Transavia-France is very, very good news for passengers wanting to travel from Orly airport to destinations in Europe and the Mediterranean at good prices." Pilots "will work with

different conditions on wages than at Air France," that is, lower wages, because according to Juniac, "wage conditions had to be those of a low cost airline, otherwise we could not develop anything."

Pilots and cabin crew at Transavia are paid approximately 20 percent less than at Air France. Management has calculated that overall, Transavia workers cost 20 to 25 percent less, but spend 30 to 40 percent more time flying. The SNPL is thus opening up the road to a broad cut in wages and working conditions against Air France workers in the near term.

SNPL-Air France union president Philippe Evain defended the concessions contract with Air France, declaring that he "signed the agreement to send Air France pilots to Transavia-France after having received assurances of Air France-KLM CEO Alexandre de Juniac that the Transavia-Europe plan would be withdrawn."

These empty comments do not change the fact that working conditions at Air France will deteriorate sharply for workers as they transfer to Transavia-France—as they would have, had the initial plans for Transavia Europe opposed by the pilots strike been pushed through in September.

At the end of the September strike, SNPL-Air France official Jean-Louis Barbier, feeling that he was losing control of the strike and seeking to end it, called again for mediation from Prime Minister Manuel Valls—even though Valls had praised Air France's low-cost plans as "reasonable" and demanded that pilots "end the strike."

The pilots rejected these proposals, demanding that the Transavia-Europe plan be scrapped outright. The Valls government and Air France relied on the SNPL to crush the strike, which it did by ordering the pilots without any reason to return to work.

Air France management's decision to abandon the

plans for the low-cost airline Transavia Europe was not a partial victory, as the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left groups like *Lutte ouvri è re* or the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) claimed. It was a way to better impose Air France management's plans for cost cutting, while strangling the strike with the SNPL's aid.

The deal rapidly signed by the SNPL for the development of Transavia France aims to block any attempt by Air France workers to defend their social rights through strike action. The union fears that a new strike could draw in behind it broader sections of the working class in a struggle against the administration of French President François Hollande—the most unpopular since the founding of the Fifth Republic in 1958.

This exposes the class role of the unions. The SNPL was the main instrument to crush the strike and impose the dictates of management. It defended the profits of a French enterprise against international competition, aiming to boost profitability by cutting the wages of its members.

Having tricked and betrayed the Air France workers during the September strike, the SNPL signed the Transavia-France deal without any overt opposition from the workers.

This refutes the NPA's reactionary enthusiasm for the betrayal of the strike in September, after which it wrote: “New struggles will emerge, with the possibility of making new ties between the ground crew and the pilots. Thus, on Thursday September 26 there was a 'historic' visit on the invitation of the SUD-Aérien union (the CGT union begged off at the last minute) of five pilots of the Alter union in the engine works at Orly, which was very well received by the workers.”

Since then, the NPA has written nothing on the SNPL's betrayal of the strike, nor on its decision to agree to wage cuts.

Workers can expect nothing from the pseudo left and the unions, such as the SNPL, except similar betrayals. They are hostile to workers' social rights. Workers can only defend themselves by taking their struggles out of the hands of the unions, seeking to broadly mobilize the working class in France and throughout Europe in a political struggle against the austerity measures of the Hollande administration and the European Union, and in a struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.



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