AIR FRANCE WORKERS RIP SHIRTS FROM TOP MANAGERS IN JOBS PROTEST

News / Airlines

Air France executives were forced to flee with their clothes in tatters after workers stormed a meeting at Charles de Gaulle airport in protest at 2,900 planned job cuts.

Human resources chief Xavier Broseta and Pierre Plissonnier, head of long-haul flights, scaled an eight-foot fence to escape, aided by security guards. Broseta emerged shirtless and Plissonnier had his suit ripped to shreds.

Violence erupted Monday as Air France told its works council that 300 pilots, 900 flight attendants and 1,700 ground staff might have to go after failed productivity talks with flight crew. The protest, in which agitators chanted "naked, naked," is just the latest to turn physical in France, where managers at Michelin & Cie. and Sony Corp. have been held hostage over firings, irate farmers have blocked city streets with tractors and manure, and more than 100 Uber Technologies Inc. taxis were smashed up by rival drivers.

"Scandalized"

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"These attacks were made by isolated and particularly violent individuals as the demonstration by personnel on strike was going on calmly," Air France said in an e-mailed statement, adding that a complaint had been filed for aggravated violence.

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls said he was "scandalized" by the levels of violence, adding that "nothing justifies such outbursts."

HR chief Broseta said on Europe 1 radio that he was "personally shocked and disappointed" by his ordeal, though didn't blame the workforce as a whole, and that a return to labor talks was still "possible." Air France unit head Frederic Gagey told RTL radio that seven people were hurt, including a guard who suffered a head injury.

The carrier postponed the meeting and said it won't be deflected from cuts that could include the first forced dismissals since the 1990s.

Under the savings plan announced today, Air France's fleet would be reduced by 14 jets to 93, with orders for Boeing Co. 787s scrapped and aging Airbus Group SE A340s phased out. The Air France-KLM Group unit indicated there was scope for compromise should unions come forward with serious savings measure.

Air France said last week it was planning cuts to jobs, jets and routes in the absence of a deal with pilots, who had been asked to work more hours for the same pay to help end annual losses that began in 2011. Government ministers had urged the sides to continue talking so that jobs could be saved.

The changes would require a shrinking of Air France's network, with the termination of five routes and the elimination of 35 weekly frequencies by 2017. Asia, where competition is toughest, would be worst affected.

Job cuts couldn't be implemented before mid-December at the earliest, given French legal requirements, leaving about two months for the two sides to agree an alternative way forward, should negotiations resume.

Chief Executive Officer Alexandre de Juniac has forced the showdown with pilots after last year being defeated in plans to establish a low-cost airline outside of France when crews walked out for two weeks, costing the airline EUR 500 million (US$564 million) and prompting the government to intervene.

Air France hasn't recently fired workers outright, relying on attrition and early retirement packages to reduce the payroll by 9,000 over three years. The last time it sought to dismiss staff, in 1993, weeks of walkouts cost the job of CEO Bernard Attali.

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