



AIR FRANCE VIOLENCE A NATIONAL EMBARRASSMENT - MINISTERS

News / Airlines



Violent acts by workers at **Air France's** headquarters are **a national embarrassment** that reinforces the very image the country wants to shake off, French political leaders said.

"This image hurts our country," said Prime Minister Manuel Valls, as pictures of senior Air France officials with their shirts ripped and torn off adorned newspaper front pages around the world.

Valls was named Prime Minister last March as President Francois Hollande sought to put across a more business friendly image, and to show that France has the stomach to implement free-market reforms.

Since then, however, French farmers, taxi and truck drivers, ferry workers and others unhappy with the impact on their business of globalisation, the digital revolution and eco-friendly taxes have been involved in violent protests - in some cases securing concessions and policy U-turns.

The workers involved in Monday's actions were protesting against the airline's attempt to get more work out of its pilots and cabin crew for the same pay.

Like other European carriers, Air France faces harsh competition on short-haul routes from low cost airlines and on long-haul routes from Gulf-based carriers.

Air France officials say failure to secure the air crews' agreement for the plan has now forced them to come up with a more draconian one, which cuts 2,900 jobs and pulls the airline out of 10 percent of its long-haul routes.

"It would be a drama for our country if a business so symbolic were to find itself in trouble because a minority refuses to adapt to a changing world," Valls said on a visit to the airline's headquarters near Charles de Gaulle airport north of Paris.

Hollande, who is receiving a group of venture capitalists this week to encourage investment in the euro zone's second-largest economy, showed that he was also embarrassed by the scenes.

"This has consequences for the attractiveness of the country," he said on Twitter.

NO TO NATIONALISATION

Earlier in the day, Transport Minister Alain Vidalies said talks aimed at resolving the dispute should be resumed as soon as possible.

"I think the best French response would be to respond to those abroad who see a caricature, that these events are not France, and that we can get back on track by talking," he said on RTL Radio.

A security guard was left unconscious for several hours in Monday's melee as angry employees broke up a works council meeting.

Air France has launched a legal complaint over Monday's incident, which has been condemned by management, unions, and government officials alike. Vidalies said there should be penalties for those involved.

Asked whether the Socialist government should intervene more directly in the dispute given its 17 percent stake in the business, Vidalies said nationalisation was not on the cards.

"That (stake) is the result of history... The state is a shareholder (but) we are not in a situation today where the solution will be nationalisation of Air France. If it is that behind your question, then the answer is no."

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