

Airbus seeks aid to minimise job cuts as workers fret

2 July 2020, by Tom Barfield



Airbus' unions in France will begin talks with management next week on planned job cuts

European aircraft builder Airbus dangled a lifeline Thursday for some employees menaced by 15,000 layoffs planned worldwide over the coronavirus, saying government aid could rescue thousands of factory workers fearing for their livelihoods.

"We could preserve up to 500 jobs if the German government supported us via its programme to develop hydrogen drive for planes. Prolonging shorter hours schemes to 24 months could save 1,500 more," chief executive Guillaume Faury told news weekly Der Spiegel, adding that "talks are already under way on this".

Some 1,500 posts could also be saved in France, he said.

Germany and France have complained in recent days at around 5,000 layoffs each set to hit their countries, with Berlin urging fair distribution of the pain while Paris blasted the cuts as "excessive".

Faury told Spiegel that with around two-thirds of

the world's jet fleet grounded by the pandemic in recent months, "the impact of the coronavirus crisis on the air travel sector was and remains catastrophic".

Airbus plans to slash production by 40 percent this year and next compared with previous plans.

"We can stabilise the company, but it's necessary to adjust the number of workers," Faury said.

From boom to shock

Airbus' plans for 15,000 layoffs were "excessive and disproportionate," said Jean-Francois Knepper, who represents workers organised in Force Ouvriere (FO)—the largest union inside the plane maker's French operations.

"We don't know where we're going. It's a brutal shock," said David Neff, a 26-year-old technician at one of Airbus' factories in the Toulouse area.

"Before the Covid crisis, we were in the middle of a boom... we were planning to hire new people."

Airbus employs around 49,000 people in France, with 25,000 working for the giant group and its subsidiaries around Toulouse.

"We're worried. No one knows who's going to be knocked out. Some of us are paying off debts, if we lose our income, it's going to get complicated," said Ludovic Beller, a 29-year-old mechanic who has worked for Airbus for seven years.

Workers "will sit at the negotiating table... we're starting on Monday morning and it will last for four months," union representative Knepper said.

Unions have called on Airbus employees to demonstrate Wednesday at the company's Toulouse headquarters.

They plan to call for early retirements, voluntary redundancies, long-term shorter hours schemes and training to minimise the number of layoffs.

Faury said that as well as [government aid](#), Airbus is discussing options like a four-day week "to spread the work among more employees", although "that won't solve all our problems".

With a 15-billion-euro (\$16.9-billion) war chest to weather the crisis, "we see no need for a bigger state stake" in Airbus, Faury said—unlike German airline Lufthansa, rescued with a nine-billion-euro package from Berlin.

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