

Quebec union seeks injunction over Air Canada maintenance job requirements

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MONTREAL - The Quebec Federation of Labour is seeking a permanent injunction to force Air Canada to conduct all heavy maintenance on its fleet in Canada.

The union filed its motion Friday with the Quebec Superior Court calling on the airline to respect its obligations under the 1988 Air Canada Public Participation Act to maintain heavy maintenance aircraft operations in Quebec.

The act also applies to Ontario and Manitoba.

The Quebec government launched the lawsuit against Air Canada after Aveos Fleet Performance, which did much of Air Canada's aircraft maintenance, closed in 2012 after Air Canada pulled the work. The move led to the layoff of 2,600 employees, including more than 1,700 in Montreal.

But the government agreed to suspend its lawsuit last month after the Montreal-based company signed a letter of intent to purchase up to 75 Bombardier CSeries planes.

As part of that deal, Air Canada (TSX:AC) agreed to have heavy maintenance work on the CSeries planes carried out in Quebec for a minimum of 20 years, beginning in 2019, but other maintenance work would continue elsewhere in Canada along with places like Hong Kong, Singapore and Israel.

In its 27-page motion, the union said the "secret deal" between the government and Air Canada doesn't absolve the airline from adhering to the federal law.

"We are obliged to take over from the government," QFL general secretary Serge Cadieux said in a joint news conference with the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. "The government decided to abandon jobs in Quebec."

He added that the union doesn't understand why the government didn't consult the union about something that impacts a large number of jobs in the Montreal region.

Air Canada declined to comment on the union's move or indicate if it will have any impact on the CSeries order.

David Chartrand of the IAMAW added he can't understand why the province changed its tune after being successful on more than one occasion before the courts and winning unanimous support in a 2012 vote in the National Assembly.

"Tell us what has changed for a party to decide to act differently?" he said.

Both union leaders added that the request for an injunction isn't meant to revive Aveos, but rather to force Air Canada to respect the law.

Federal Transport Minister Marc Garneau has said the end of the lawsuit would allow Ottawa to "clarify" the Air Canada Public Participation Act to avoid future litigation.

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