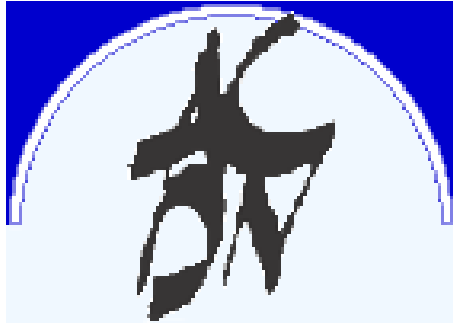


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No case for a new "Ayrault-Port" near Nantes, says veteran airline captain.

- Homepage - News - External sources -

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In a month when Europe and the world have learnt of Crimea being annexed by Vladimir Putin, the new "Tzar of all the Russias" - a serious political crisis that could spiral into war and possible nuclear war - it may seem futile to dwell on the fate of a tiny village in western France named Notre-Dame-des-Landes and its resistance to a planned new airport.

Clearly the matters at stake are not of similar size. The actors and contexts are very different.

And yet the same logic is operating in these two cases: the logic of imperial power.

As the pilot said whose testimony we copy below: "the solution lies not with politicians but with responsible action by ordinary citizens. Politicians, whether they are from the right, the left, the middle or the planet Mars, are not the solution; politicians are the problem."

Here is the question that deserves at least to be put to every politician, and to every human being too: "Are you using your talents, competences and abilities in the interests of peace and the general good? If you are misusing powers that are merely delegated to you, if you are seeking to satisfy your personal ambitions and nothing much else, well, you need to change your behaviour now, or else (as they said during the Arab Spring) : "Get out of the way!"

Placed online in French : 19 March 2014

TESTIMONY:

What if they listened to the people with the technical experience?

I'll soon be 70, I've had 40 years in aviation, 15 as an airline captain, with 14500 hours of flying time. Although I don't know all the world's airports, I know a few, indeed a great number.. Yet when I try to understand the current debate [about Notre-Dame-des-Landes] I have to proceed as other people do - by comparisons.

They say that Nantes airport is dangerous because the planes overfly the city. Really! I've spent my career as a pilot overflying cities on low flight-paths, both in landing and taking off, following specific procedures in each place. Here you have to turn as soon as you reach a safe height, there you have to reduce power, elsewhere the rules focus on gradient... In short, without going into details I can say there are very few airports where the pilots have the chore of managing their own approaches and take-offs however they please. And very few cities which don't have planes flying over them.

I know Nantes well, I flew there several times per week a few years ago, and I remember nothing unusual being specified. If Nantes counts as a dangerous airport, then thousands around the world ought to be closed, with Chambéry the first to go. Yep, Chambéry in the French Alps! Its airport is squeezed between two mountains, with the Lake at one end and the City at the other. And yet big jets land and take off there without scandals or debates. And let's not mention Hong Kong: before 1998 it was a constant spectacle, it was crazy! Nantes was a total lack of craziness.

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Let's look at the second argument being pushed, the increase in activity. Once again the reasoning is specious and crazy. They say that this airport with 3.5 million passengers in 2011 is "too small" and that we must prepare for the future, that the infrastructure is reaching saturation point. Well, figures don't really talk until one makes comparisons, and so people might be at first inclined to agree.

Remember that erupting volcano in Iceland? Nantes was clear of the zone affected, and so for several days it had much greater traffic, yet everything went well. Airports the size of Nantes are the most numerous, and we just have to make comparisons to see what nonsense is being talked. For example Geneva. Last year over 12 million passengers went through Geneva, that's right, nearly 13 million. Yet there's just one runway, and there are similar constraints to Nantes in the size of the field and the proximity of the city. The Swiss are admittedly democratic and resistant to having the wool pulled over their eyes.

The world champion airport in this class is San Diego in California : one runway, a much smaller field than Nantes, incredible constraints from the environment and limits on use at night - yet it had 18 million passengers last year. Oh my dear greenie friends, five times more than Nantes.

OK, I must give credit to the professionalism of the US air-traffic controllers and pilots. But French controllers are good too and French pilots are not bad, yet we hear claims that Nantes would reach saturation point in 2020 with five million!! Is that all?? Who on earth is making those predictions? What are they based on? If they're no more serious than the other stuff, we have a right to be dubious. The figure may be well out. At the moment the figure is under four million.

Since hardly anyone in France listens to greenie arguments, I think other arguments should be used: mind-striking arguments like those I have jsust given. Wouldn't they achieve the result? Saving arable land and habitat for little birds is fine, but since nobody is listening let's change the tune we sing!!

How about this: let's not spend half a billion euros in a piece of lamentable stupidity to glorify a few politicians who will have disappeared in the smoke of stuff-ups by the time the project is unveiled in its full dumbness. Let's not squander resources during times which (we're told) will get harder. Those arguments should be enough to convince the deafest of ears, and send the bulldozers back to their garages, shouldn't they?

The alternative is to go on putting up with the oligarchy, tolerating the corrupt system of allegedly representative pseudo-democracy, honouring 577 MPs, flattering 350 senators, and indulgently letting them give their names to edifices built with public money. For the new Nantes airport I suggest the name "Ayrault-Port" [after the PM].

But I also hope that one day the people of France will discover that the solution lies not with politicians but with responsible action by ordinary citizens. Politicians, whether they are from the right, the left, the middle or the planet Mars, are not the solution; politicians are the problem.