

Paris CGT jobs protest dominated by nationalist politics

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Some 20,000 industrial workers from all over France converged on Paris last Thursday, in a protest against the wave of plant closures and sackings engulfing their sector, at the call of the CGT, the General Confederation of Labour.

Entitled “National demonstration for the defence of employment and industrial development,” it was dominated by the right-wing nationalist politics of the CGT, France’s largest union, which is close to the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF).

Many of the delegations of workers came from factories in the private sector operated by transnational companies involved in downsizing throughout the world: Continental Tires, Arcelor-Mittal, Michelin, Total, Alcatel-Lucent, Cognac glassmakers, Arsenal Cherbourg. From the public sector came railway workers threatened with losing 6,000 jobs in a restructuring of the national rail company SNCF, as well as hospital workers—all facing EU-wide privatisation policies.

The WSWs reporting team saw no banners, placards or slogans linking the French working class with their counterparts throughout the world, caught like them in the social disaster produced by the current world crisis.

In evidence were slogans that expressed the bitterness of workers at being made to pay for the crisis: “Sarkozy, you commit suicide” (in reference to the wave of work-related suicides at France Télécom, Renault and elsewhere), “Arcelor is making profits, but the steelworkers don’t see any of it.”

But nationalist slogans dominated: “Relocations kill jobs and the future of the youth,” “Worksharing throughout the country” (Continental), opposition to “relocations or new factories in low cost counties” (CGT), “For an industrial policy at the service of

employment and our regions.” The appeal to regionalism was also picked up on the march with slogans such as “Together for the industrial development of Nord-Pas-de-Calais” (a region in the north of France).

The clearest and most unabashed expression of the fundamental class collaborationist, nationalist politics of the demonstration’s organisers came from the leaflet of the hard-line Stalinist ginger group within the CGT, *Front Syndical de Classe* (Class Trade Union Front), claiming to be fighting for “a mass class CGT.” Justifying its opposition to relocations to low-cost countries by pointing out that this involves the workers being “super-exploited,” it asserts, “Therefore, to defend national production is not nationalism: it’s a class position against capitalist exploitation.”

The leaflet, of course, proposes no solidarity action with these “super-exploited” workers whose jobs the group wishes to sacrifice. Its most prominent slogan is the recycled PCF line from the 1980s: “For the defence of jobs and ‘produce in France.’”

Although they do not make such a blatant national-chauvinist appeal, the middle class “left” *Lutte Ouvrière* and *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (NPA) cover up for it by declaring that the initiative of the CGT is “a first step” towards “a relationship of forces at least at a national level” (NPA, October 22), or “The day of action called by the CGT for October 22 is not a reaction which meets up to the threat. But it may be a step in that direction.” (*Lutte Ouvrière* editorial by Arlette Laguiller October 22)

These “lefts” offer no socialist or internationalist perspective for a joint fight against the crisis of French workers together with their colleagues in Europe and the rest of the world also facing mass unemployment and the destruction of living standards. With a

European unemployment rate at around 10 percent and growing, the OECD's annual report published September 16 stressed, "The worst of the recession concerning employment is still ahead of us, especially in Germany, France and Italy."

No leaflets or political statements referred to these facts nor explained that the extremely patchy and fragile growth spurt in some EU countries, particularly in the motor industry, is due to massive injections of taxpayers' cash into the 'cash for clunkers' or scrappage schemes and will not stem the tide of unemployment. The schemes are being run down in many countries. Their impact will begin to come to an end in France in December.

A huge rise in state debt threatens the stability of the euro, and increasing pressure is mounting to recover the debt by massive cuts in wages and social rights. The only differences of opinion within the French and European ruling elites are when and at what pace to initiate these cuts. Holland has just announced plans to slash social expenditure by 20 percent.

WSWS reporters saw no leaflets or slogans critical of the CGT leader Bernard Thibault, who has been in constant contact and collaboration with President Nicolas Sarkozy since his election in May 2007 and is working with the president to impose his current austerity policies. There was no condemnation of his joint initiative with Sarkozy to develop tripartite discussions between bosses, government representatives and the unions in order to elaborate an industrial policy to enable French imperialism to compete on the world arena (See "France: CGT's industrial policy means workers will pay for the crisis").

Thibault, who had been bitterly criticised for refusing to visit workers at plants in struggle against sackings and closures, and has aroused particular anger at his lack of support for the six Continental workers being prosecuted for actions in defense of their jobs, ventured to address the demonstrators at Place Denfert-Rochereau a few minutes before they set off.

"The situation is extremely serious," he pontificated, "and this mobilisation is conceived as giving an alarm signal." He added, "20,000 jobs are going each month at present in the industrial sector, and 300,000 are under threat."

He was jeered and whistled at by groups of

demonstrators who shouted "Resign!"

Francis Thomann, a worker from Nexus, which specialises in the production and processing of copper, told the press that his company had just announced the loss of 240 jobs in Chauny, in the Aisne department in Picardy: "We don't see the trade union leaders at the factories except when the mass media speak about us. They're just there for photo opportunities, and the rest of the time, they're ensconced at the Elysée [presidential palace] or at Bercy [the finance ministry]."



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