

# PSA, GM prepare further attacks against auto workers

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In recent weeks French automobile manufacturer PSA has ramped up pressure to impose layoffs, cuts in wages and social benefits, and speed-up on workers in its European factories.

In the framework of its alliance with US auto manufacturer General Motors, PSA is accelerating its downsizing, eliminating production capacity that overlaps with that of GM (Opel) in Europe. According to trade union sources, there are plans to eliminate gearbox production that was planned for a Valenciennes plant bought from GM. A project for a new vehicle will not be started in Rennes, but in a GM factory. The Madrid factory will be cut to one shift, with corresponding layoffs.

Corporate “synergies” are attacking workers at both companies. On the one hand, PSA is already considering in the medium term the closure of plants in Europe: at Aulnay-sous-bois and Sevelnord in France and in Madrid. At the end of 2011, PSA announced the elimination of 6,000 jobs in Europe, including 5,000 in France.

The *Wall Street Journal* last week announced the imminent closure of factories by GM in Europe—Opel in Bochum, Germany and Vauxhall in Ellesmere Port, UK.

On March 22, a demonstration took place at the Aulnay-sous-bois factory northeast of Paris against the announced shutdown of the plant by Peugeot, which employs 3,100 workers. (See “Inside a union rally at the PSA auto plant in Aulnay, France”) However, the unions did not call for a joint international struggle of workers at Peugeot and GM, nor for measures to defend workplaces threatened with closure.

The union leaders who spoke at the rally called for government intervention or an increased presence of factory union representatives on the board of directors

of companies.

Such a perspective in no way commits the unions to a defense of workers’ interests. On the contrary, it aims to put the unions in a better position to aid the management to attack workers’ social rights, as shown by the activities of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union in the US—with whom the French CGT (General Confederation of Labor) announced its collaboration in 2008, bound up with the recent PSA-GM alliance.

The UAW played a central role in imposing brutal attacks on auto workers in the US. It was in collaboration with the UAW—which now has, as a shareholder and manager of GM pension funds, a direct financial interest in increasing the exploitation of workers—that GM imposed the massive reductions in wages (by half), the deterioration of working conditions, and plant closures.

In 2009, GM was pushed into bankruptcy by the Obama administration, only to resume its activities by imposing “concessions,” i.e., massive cuts in wages and social benefits of the workers. These concessions were systematically accepted by the UAW, even when workers voted overwhelmingly against them in union-organized ballots.

PSA and GM, like other auto corporations, are using the imposition of poverty wages on auto workers in the US to impose them now on European workers.

Bob King, the UAW president who openly praised the role played by the union in helping management to increase GM profits, currently sits on the Opel oversight board—where he was introduced with the support of the German IG Metall union. He aims to lead attacks against Opel workers. As King was quoted as saying on TV in the US, “Our view has changed. We understand that the people who have the most at stake in the long-term success of these companies is our

membership.”

The unions’ motivation for promoting corporate “success” is not the same as that of the workers to defend their jobs and wages. The union bureaucrats are above all interested in the defense of *their* jobs and the maintenance of their position as the employers’ intermediary at the national level, on the health and retirement boards, and in joint union-management factory committees. If a company therefore threatens to either cut wages or offshore production, the union bureaucracy seeks to impose the cuts.

The unions seek to keep order in the company. The CGT (General Confederation of Labour), like the CFDT (French Democratic Confederation of Labour), FO (Workers Struggle) and SUD (Democratic Union of Solidarity) all act as “responsible social partners”.

The unions reacted to workers’ demonstrations in France against social cuts demanded by President Nicolas Sarkozy not by mobilizing to defeat and bring down the government, but by meeting Sarkozy at the negotiating table—including when he attacked the right to strike and launched the CRS riot police against strikers. The result was the systematic defeat of the struggles engaged by workers.

The ex-left group *Lutte Ouvrière* (Workers Struggle), which leads the CGT at the PSA factory in Aulnay-sous-bois, does not warn workers as to the intentions of the union bureaucracy, that is, to prepare a defeat. As LO showed at the Clairoix Continental tire factory closed in 2009, (when it accepted layoffs in exchange for severance pay), LO was only carrying out the union bureaucracy’s policy in the auto industry.

LO’s “radical” rhetoric serves to cover the fact that it has the same perspective. Obtaining a meeting with government representatives and praising this as a great step forward—as does the union delegate at Aulnay, LO’s Jean-Pierre Mercier—can only serve to encourage illusions in the role of the government and PSA, and thus demobilize the workers.

An essential condition to fight redundancies with the aim of succeeding is carrying out a struggle that is totally independent of these organizations and their nationalist program and their negotiation of cuts with the employers. Only an unconditional defense of all jobs and wages can confront the offensive of the automobile manufacturers, and the introduction of levels of exploitation that workers in Europe have not

seen for generations.

Such a struggle can only succeed if workers in the many factories of diverse automobile manufacturers unite across national borders and fight together, particularly with their class brothers and sisters in the US. The objective must be the defense of all jobs. Such a struggle necessitates the building of rank-and-file action committees to organize a common fight for the defense of jobs in the various factories slated for closure.



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