

PSA auto workers speak out on French presidential elections

Alex Lantier in Paris
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WSWS reporters went to the PSA plant in Aulnay-sous-Bois, north of Paris, to interview auto workers on the outcome of the first round of the French presidential elections. The Aulnay plant is one of several PSA plants in Europe threatened with closure as part of PSA's planned corporate merger with General Motors.

Most Aulnay workers who spoke to the WSWs saw little difference between the two candidates advancing to the May 6 second round, Socialist Party (PS) challenger François Hollande and the conservative incumbent, President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Stopping on his way into the plant, Nouridine told the WSWs: "They [Hollande and Sarkozy] are the same, two bourgeois candidates. As for Mélenchon, he was a minister when he was in the PS. He has his fingers in the pie."

Nouridine noted that New Anti-capitalist Party candidate Philippe "Poutou came [to the Aulnay plant], but if the candidates come that does not change anything at all. Until there is a mass struggle, the workers will not be able to do anything."

The Aulnay workers were hostile to neo-fascist candidate Marine Le Pen, and split over whether the Left Front candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon's campaign had any symbolic value for defending jobs in France. However, none of them thought he could implement the program on which he was campaigning.

Messaoudi told the WSWs, "Whether it's Hollande or Sarkozy, politicians won't pay too much attention to the factory." Noting that the factory's union "delegates went to see Sarkozy," he shrugged: "As to whether that will change something, I don't know."

He said Mélenchon "defends jobs, but he did not get very far." He said he expected that "France's situation in the economic crisis will get worse." Asked if he believed in Mélenchon's slogan for a revolution

"through the ballot box," he replied: "I don't believe in it; things don't happen that way."

The WSWs also spoke to Ace, a young temp worker employed by a subcontractor working for PSA at the Aulnay plant. About the elections, he said, "They will change nothing at all, not one candidate more than the other."

He explained that he typically earned 600 to 700 euros (US\$791 to 923) per month as a quality inspector for electronic parts. He noted, however, that some temp workers could earn up to the salary of a full-time, minimum wage worker (1,398 euros), if they could work enough hours. Ace said he had just been told that there was no work, and he was going home.

Asked how a worker survived in Paris on 700 euros a month, he said: "Of course if you have to pay rent it's impossible. I live with my uncle. ... There are a lot of young people in my situation; people my age often stay with their families. The crisis is hitting a lot of people. People look for jobs but they don't necessarily find them."

He said that the workers he knew did not like Le Pen: "She's like her father [former presidential candidate and Holocaust denier Jean-Marie Le Pen]. She's up to no good."

Asked about Mélenchon's call for a monthly minimum wage of 1,700 euros, he said he could not support it: "Then workers' purchasing power would go up, and companies would be in trouble." He added, "Of course it would be nice, but there would have to be a revolution," which Ace said he did not expect Mélenchon to fight for.

He said he did not believe in Mélenchon's calls for revolution: "Things will not go that way. The workers, I don't know all of them. But there must be a collective struggle, of course, of workers in all the factories."

Lionel and a group of auto workers spoke to the WSWs reporters about the elections and workers' struggles in the international auto industry. They were interested to hear about the conditions facing US auto workers in Detroit and their struggles.

Lionel was concerned about the increase in Le Pen's vote: "There is more and more racism—she almost has 20 percent of the vote, it's too much. They go on too much on law-and-order themes. They are trying to put foreigners in everyone's mind."

Lionel said Mélenchon was "more for the workers, more for the population. It's too bad he did not advance." However, he did not believe in Mélenchon's "citizens' revolution," he said: "When they have forced everyone into low wages, then the people will wake up. It won't be pretty. When people don't have enough to eat, that's the way it is. I know a lot of people who have troubles, though they try not to show it."

Another worker said, "The factory is going to close. It used to be two shifts with two teams, now there is only one shift; the next stage is only one team. The factory closure is being prepared. We are against the closure, we want there to be jobs for all."

He objected to PSA's demand for tax advantages in exchange for keeping the factory open until 2016: "Each time they want more." He added, "Their goal is for the workers to be treated like beasts of burden—if we were bus drivers, they would be asking us to be on the road 24/7."



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