

France: PSA Aulnay unions admit no solidarity action planned to defend jobs

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Jean-Pierre Mercier, the secretary of the Stalinist CGT (General Confederation of Labour) union at the PSA car factory in Aulnay-sous-Bois spoke at a mass meeting of workers of Goodyear plant in Amiens last Friday.

Mercier came at the invitation of the Goodyear CGT secretary Mikaël Wamen, who had convened the meeting to discuss workers' four-year fight against the closure of the tyre-making plant. CGT officials at both Aulnay and Amiens have avoided any appeal for broader working class action to fight corporate plans to shut down operations.

A PSA document leaked last year revealed a redundancy plan at the Aulnay plant for 2013, which would lead to its closure in 2014. Plants were also threatened at Hordain, near Calais in northern France, and at a Peugeot factory in Madrid—threatening in total some 9,500 jobs. At Aulnay, the unions concentrated on asking former President Nicolas Sarkozy to intervene.

Since the discovery of the document, the unions at Aulnay organised monthly protests, but Mercier complained that “only 800 of the 3,500 workers participated.” Denouncing workers as skeptical, he justified the union's decision not to develop a broader struggle “because we are not strong enough.”

The reasons for Aulnay workers' skepticism with regards to Mercier soon became clear. He told the Goodyear workers the CGT had not tried to contact other PSA plants or workers at other carmakers' factories, “because we have not done enough.”

Mercier did not seek to explain why the unions had not “done enough,” but continued by blustering: “There's an enormous crisis. We'll have to give them a hell of a fright!”

This is simply absurd. Mercier has not sought to

“frighten” Sarkozy, but to negotiate a deal with him. Mercier sent Sarkozy a letter, asking him to obtain promises from PSA management to keep the plant open until 2016, when production of the C3 car will end, and “discuss” a new vehicle to replace the C3 to keep the plant open “after that date.”

The unions clearly envisaged an arrangement to boost Aulnay's profitability compared to other PSA plants—the conditions under which PSA would consider keeping Aulnay open. This could only be achieved by attacking working conditions at the plant.

Mercier told Goodyear workers “it took us 10 months to meet [Industry minister Eric] Besson and to agree to a tripartite meeting” in which the unions met PSA management and state officials.

The speakers at the meeting all described competition between French industry and China, Eastern Europe and other low-cost countries. None suggested a common, international struggle of auto workers against wage and job cuts.

Since the economic crisis broke out in 2008, dozens of factories have closed in France—including tyre maker Continental's Clairoux plant and the Sodimatex plant at Crépy-en-Valois. The unions isolated these struggles, carrying out plant-by-plant negotiations with the employers and the state. This allowed the companies and the state to shut down the plants, leading to repeated defeats for the workers; the unions repeatedly arranged “orderly closures” of the plants, with paltry severance packages for the workers.

These events underscore the political role played by the petty-bourgeois Workers Struggle (LO) group, whose nationalist line and integration into the union bureaucracy is reflected in its repeated decisions to isolate and sell out workers' struggles.

Unions at Continental-Clairoux, run by LO's Roland

Szpirko, agreed to a redundancy deal accepting the closure of the plant and committing the unions to preventing any attempt to disrupt the firm's closure plans elsewhere in Europe.

For his part, Eric Mercier was LO presidential candidate Nathalie Arthaud's campaign manager in the recent elections. It is clear from his remarks in Amiens that he follows the same class-collaborationist line as his co-thinker at Clairoix.

Such events highlight that a united struggle of auto workers internationally can only be organized independently of and in opposition to the union bureaucracy and the petty-bourgeois "left" parties.



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