

French unions discuss wave of sackings after presidential elections

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Going into talks Tuesday with newly-elected French President François Hollande of the Socialist Party (PS), union officials announced that dozens of plants are slated for closure, which would result in tens of thousands of job losses.

The General Confederation of Labor (CGT) said 46 companies were planning to shut operations, directly threatening some 45,000 jobs. According to the CGT, the total number of direct and indirect job losses resulting from these closures would be approximately 90,000.

Interim Labor Minister Michel Sapin commented, “This is a realistic number ... I cannot tell you within a margin of error of 100, 1,000, or even 10,000, but there are real concerns, there are emergencies in a number of enterprises, and those emergencies must be attacked through dialog.” Speaking of unemployment rates, Sapin added: “I would be surprised if the evolution is good.”

This sudden public revelation is the outcome of continuing talks between business groups and the trade union leaderships. As CGT official Mohamed Oussédik told *Le Parisien*, “We gathered all our member unions together last week to bring together all the ongoing cases in all regions of France.”

Industries and plants targeted for job cuts include the following:

- In the motor industry, PSA Citroën Peugeot, the largest French car manufacturer, plans to cut 6,000 jobs in Europe, mainly in France. At Aulnay-sous-Bois, a town north-east of Paris, 3,300 workers fear the closure of their factory when the production of the Citroën C3 is ended. The Valenciennes plant in the north is also threatened.

- Renault plans sackings in its Mabeuge and Douai plants, which make the Scenic and the Kangoo. A

General Motors factory with 1,000 workers is also threatened.

- The Arcelor Mittal plant in Florange is threatened with closure and the loss of 5,000 jobs, including 3,000 on permanent contracts.

- Air France has announced restructuring involving the loss of up to 5,000 jobs. Other job cuts are on the cards in the aviation and transport industries, including the National Corsica-Mediterranean Company (SNCM). Privatized in 2006 after negotiations with the CGT to become a Veolia subsidiary, it now threatens to cut 800 jobs out of 2,000.

- The big supermarket chains are planning large job cuts. According to the unions, Carrefour, Leclerc, Casino, Intermarché and Système U, among others, are planning some 12,000 job cuts in all.

- France’s three leading banks have announced 6,000 job cuts: Credit Agricole could cut 2,350 of its 160,000 world-wide labour force, including 850 in France; Société Générale, 1,580 job cuts, including 800 in France; BNP, 1,400 job cuts, including 370 in France.

- Other affected industries include oil refining (LyondellBasell), nuclear energy (Areva), tourism, and press delivery.

Since Hollande’s election, announcements of sackings in many sectors are on the increase. They had been kept hidden during the election campaign to facilitate the election of a “left” austerity government. Already 106 factory closures were registered in the first four months of 2012, as opposed to 66 in the same period in 2011. Since the beginning of 2012, there has been a monthly net loss of ten factories in France.

Figures published in *Le Figaro* showed projected losses of 307,000 jobs in the next two years, a figure that would increase the total number of unemployed by 10.6 percent.

As Hollande tries to win a victory in the June 17 legislative elections to form a longer-term PS-led government, the PS and its allies are trying to portray Hollande and the current interim government as the workers' best hope to ward off sackings. The unions appealed to Hollande to try to save all the jobs now threatened with termination.

Hollande has appointed Arnaud Montebourg to his interim government as "Minister for Boosting Production," a newly-created ministry tasked, according to the Official Journal with "preparing and implementing the policies for the economic competitiveness of France." Montebourg is at present doing the rounds of factories threatened with closure and sackings, trying to drum up support.

This promotion is entirely in bad faith. Hollande's goal is to extract the maximum amount of electoral support in exchange for vague promises to help targeted plants; after the elections, he will move to impose concessions to justify whatever state financial support will be on offer.

Despite the immense fortunes being amassed by the financial parasites in the ruling class, workers will be told that they can keep their jobs only if they accept wage and benefit cuts in line with the impoverished conditions dictated by the world labor market. The working class can defend jobs only through a class struggle against capitalism, directed in France against the PS and its political allies in other bourgeois "left" parties and the union bureaucracy.

Montebourg himself made it quite clear that he does not intend to use state resources to defend workers' living standards. During his May 25 visit to the Fralib plant near Marseille, also threatened with closure, he declared: "We don't intend to support artificially firms which would be condemned in advance."

This is widely understood in the PS and other bourgeois "left" parties. In a May 28 article titled "Mission: save French industry in distress," *Le Monde* quoted anonymous PS officials who said of Montebourg, "He's likely to become the minister of closing factories."

As for the unions, which supported Hollande in the recent presidential election, it is now clear that they did so well aware of the ongoing hemorrhaging of jobs and the anti-working class character of the PS's plans.

This includes the new law Hollande wants to pass this

summer in the name of the "struggle against offshoring." It would oblige business owners seeking higher profits abroad to sell their businesses to a buyer who would supposedly continue activity in France. This law, however, which does not protect the wages or working conditions of the workers, is essentially a protectionist measure. It does not question the ownership of the company nor impose conditions on the buyer, which will make the remaining operations competitive at the expense of the workers.



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