

French Socialist Party government works with auto companies to attack workers

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The ongoing restructuring of French auto manufacturer PSA/Peugeot-Citroën's European operations, expected to result in €1 billion in cuts this year, will be vastly extended as a result of its partnership with General Motors and its subsidiary Opel. A company central committee meeting (CCE), expected to be held on July 25, will determine where the axe will fall. The timing of the CCE coincides with the holiday season in order to minimize the possibility of mass resistance from the workers.

Union officials on Tuesday, acting as messengers for PSA/Peugeot-Citroën's CEO Philippe Varin, reported his plans to increase the number of job cuts in 2012 from 4,000 to 10,000, the equivalent of 10 percent of the company's French workforce. The unions presented no plans to fight the cuts.

Most immediately threatened is the PSA factory in the Paris suburb of Aulnay-sous-Bois, with 3,300 workers.

Hit by the deep recession in Europe and the world economic slowdown, five-month sales of PSA passenger cars in the EU and EFTA (European Free Trade Area) countries have dropped 14.9 percent, compared with a 7.3 percent decline industry-wide, according to the industry organization ACEA. Many PSA factories are on short time.

Le Monde reported on July 3 that, with auto sales in Europe down to 13.6 million from a production capacity of 20.6 million, banks estimate that from 5 to 12 European factories would have to shut down. It quotes Alix Partners' reminder that, "faced with the 2008-2009 crisis in the automobile market, the big

American auto companies had shut 15 factories." It did not mention, however, the role of the unions, in collaboration with the companies and the Obama administration, in imposing the attack on workers.

The assault on US workers is now the competitive benchmark for the entire European motor industry.

Conditions for the maintenance of production at PSA Sevel Nord are, according to a union official, that, "The future K0 van will only be given to the factory if the workers agree to lengthen their working hours, and submit to greater flexibility and a wage freeze." At the same time, massive restructuring is being prepared behind the backs of the workers.

Les Echos reported on June 28, "This week the CEO of PSA, Philippe Varis, is preparing the ground, meeting with several leaders of the big union confederations, including Bernard Van Craeynest, of the CFE-CGC, and Jean-Claude Mailly, of FO [*Force Ouvrière*], to explain to them the economic problems of making segment B small cars, in the context of high labour costs."

Minister of Labour Michel Sapin and Minister for Industrial Renewal Arnaud Montebourg are engaged in continuous negotiations with PSA management and the unions on how to impose the massive job cuts, plant closures and destruction of working conditions involved in making the French company competitive and profitable.

The PS ministers and management refuse to divulge the content of their discussions. *Marianne2.fr* reported June 20, "Not a statement. Not a comment. Neither

from the Ministry for Industrial Renewal nor from PSA management... a terrifying silence.” At the “Social Conference” on July 10 and 11, the unions, business organizations and the government will make joint plans to impose a massive attack on the working class, inspired by the EU/IMF austerity measures that have destroyed the living conditions of the Greek masses.

The Socialist Party government is playing the key role in overseeing the attack on auto workers, employing the support of both the unions and the array of “left” parties of the French political establishment.

Marie-George Buffet, the Communist Party of France deputy and former leader of the party, issued a demand that Montebourg should be “at the side of the unions in confronting management so that a social dialogue can be started on industrial alternatives” to solve “passing difficulties.” Buffet is part of the Left Front group in parliament, which has promised never to vote against a confidence motion for the PS.

Such appeals to the pro-austerity PS government of Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault and François Hollande are merely designed to fool workers that the bourgeois PS will defend them from the banks. On Tuesday, Ayrault pledged to find up to €10 billion in cuts this year and €38 billion in 2013. The positions of the “far left” scarcely differ. A statement of the POI (the party of the late ex-Trotskyist Pierre Lambert) declares, “It’s a government whose task it is to forbid PSA from sacrificing the lives of thousands of workers and their families.”

Jean-Pierre Mercier, the CGT leader at Aulnay and a leading member of Workers Struggle, has never proposed a joint fight of all PSA workers to defend all jobs. This did not prevent his bluster to *L’Humanité* that, “We want to send a message to our bosses that they can form alliances between them. We, the workers, can form alliances between us too.”

His joint union committee published an open letter to former President Nicolas Sarkozy on December 15 last year begging for a special dispensation for his plant. “Mr President, we are asking you to intervene so that a tripartite government-PSA-trade unions meeting can be

had with the aim of coming to an agreement, guaranteed by the state, assuring the maintenance of all the jobs at the Aulnay plant, at least until 2016.” The concessions which the unions would make in order to outbid other sites were not mentioned.

All the pseudo-left parties and the unions supported the election of Hollande and the PS as an alternative to Sarkozy. In fact, the PS, loyal supporters of French capitalism, will go further than Sarkozy as the banks intensify their demands for austerity.



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