

LO, NPA block struggle against PSA job cuts in France

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The petty-bourgeois New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and the Workers Struggle (LO) group have reacted to the announcement of 8,000 job cuts at French auto firm PSA with an attempt to block a working class struggle against the cuts and tie popular opposition to the union bureaucracy. Their aim is to divert opposition behind toothless protests and create favorable conditions for PSA management to impose the cuts.

Jean-Pierre Mercier is the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) delegate at Aulnay, the PSA plant that is slated for closure, and was the campaign spokesman of LO presidential candidate Nathalie Arthaud. He cynically declared, “Philippe Varin [PSA’s CEO] has declared war on us, we will wage war against him.”

Nonetheless, he insisted that workers should “organize a struggle” that “will begin in September.” He did not explain why the working class should wait two months before mounting an offensive against these deeply unpopular cuts, planned in joint discussions between the unions, PSA executives, and the newly elected government of Socialist Party (PS) President François Hollande.

If LO is proposing a two-month delay before taking any visible action against the cuts, it is hardly that they have been caught by surprise. LO, the NPA and the unions have known about the cuts for over a year. Last year, the CGT published a leaked PSA internal document that outlined plans to close plants at Aulnay-sous-Bois (eliminating 3,600 jobs), Sevelnord in Hordain in northern France (2,800 jobs), and a plant in Madrid (3,100 jobs).

Workers at Aulnay have said that the plant is being gradually shut down and its inventory reduced, preparing it for closure. (See: “Inside a union rally at the PSA auto plant in Aulnay, France”)

In a July 12 article titled “PSA-Citroën: a declaration

of war against the workers,” LO describes the plan for cuts at PSA as follows: “It’s the end of the open secret. It’s a real crime, a social crime against the working class.”

For its part, the NPA declared, “After a year of beating around the bush, PSA management has confirmed what everyone knew: the Aulnay factory would close in 2014.”

The question that these comments raise is: if the CGT, LO, and the NPA all knew that these cuts were planned, why did they not prepare a struggle earlier and make this a political issue in the 2012 presidential elections? The answer is that they are hostile to mobilizing the working class in struggle against PSA management and Hollande, whose election both LO and the NPA supported, portraying it as a lesser evil compared to incumbent right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy.

LO and the NPA are trying to postpone action against the cuts until September because they hope to keep workers’ anger under the control of the trade union bureaucracy, which is negotiating social cuts and job cuts with Hollande. Representing an affluent middle-class layer divorced from the working class and politically oriented to the PS, they are trying to help Hollande impose the cuts.

LO and the unions are trying to disarm the working class by promoting illusions that Hollande will try to help the workers. Arthaud told France 2 television: “The government has proved itself to be complicit in the PSA affair, because it is passive.” She hoped that Hollande would declare PSA’s cuts “null and void.”

This is a pipe dream. In fact, the PS is working closely with big business and the unions to slash jobs and social spending in France and boost the competitiveness of French big business.

Even as PSA announces mass layoffs, Hollande is preparing to hand over more public money to the auto giants. Speaking of the layoffs, Hollande said: “The government has reacted as it should, nominating an expert to look over what has been presented and to formulate a plan for the automobile industry that will be presented during the month of July.”

Though the NPA and LO were well aware that the PS is committed to anti-worker policies, they unconditionally called for Hollande’s election in the lead-up to the May 6 presidential run-off.

Now, they are continuing to paint Hollande and the unions’ anti-worker “social dialogue” in bright colors. In a July 12 article, the NPA wrote: “Unlike the social summit and social dialogue, PSA is really declaring a social war.”

In fact, the mass layoffs at PSA are of a piece with the recent social conference Hollande held with the unions and employers’ federations, which agreed on deep cuts—including in the minimum wage, the financing of social spending, and on labor “flexibility” (See: “France: Social Conference outlines massive attacks on the working class”).

Likewise, the unions repeatedly engaged in “social dialogue” with former President Nicolas Sarkozy as he slashed workers’ pensions and imposed job cuts in the public sector, plant closures and attacks on education. The unions and petty-bourgeois “left” groups like LO and the NPA insisted that there could be no political struggle against Sarkozy, only brief protests organized by the unions.

They are totally silent on the role of the American United Auto Workers (UAW) in imposing even deeper cuts against auto workers in Detroit during the 2009 US auto bailout—plant closures, 50 percent wage cuts for new-hires, and cuts in health care and pensions. The UAW is now collaborating with unions at GM-affiliated auto companies across Europe, including Opel, Vauxhall and PSA.

As the unions are preparing a sellout at PSA, the NPA and LO are again trying to subordinate workers to the union bureaucracy. In a July 12 article, the NPA wrote: “Mobilization not only in the PSA corporation or the auto industry but of all the workers must intensify. All the unions, the social movements, and the political organizations must see to that.”

That is to say, the workers must remain under the political control of organizations determined to work with the government to push through deep cuts against them.

The auto workers face not only a struggle against PSA, but against the unions and their petty-bourgeois “defenders” like the NPA and LO, who are trying to disorient the workers and delay the outbreak of class struggles. The urgent task facing auto workers is to fight the cuts by mobilizing in political struggle against austerity, the Hollande government and its petty-bourgeois supporters.



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