

French Goodyear workers protest against closure of Amiens Nord plant

Antoine Lerougetel and Pierre Mabut
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On Tuesday, some 800 workers from the Goodyear Tire plant in Amiens Nord, supported by more than 1,000 workers from other parts of France, protested outside the company's French headquarters at Reuil Malmaison in Paris. The protest was called to coincide with a meeting at which union officials were told details of the company's plans to close the Amiens factory in northern France, eliminating 1,173 jobs.

The Goodyear workers have waged a five-year legal battle to keep the plant open after rejecting company demands that they accept an inhumane four-shift system or face layoffs. At the sister Dunlop plant next door, workers accepted the speedup scheme after unions capitulated to company closure threats. Since 2009, there have been one suicide and four attempted suicides at the factory.

Goodyear sought to sell off its agricultural tyre section at Amiens Nord to the American group Titan, but talks fell through last September after the French General Confederation of Labour (CGT) demanded a five-year guarantee of continuing production. On Tuesday morning, workers heard that Arnaud Montebourg, the Socialist Party government's minister of industrial renewal, had announced that Titan was definitively pulling out of talks with Goodyear over the plant.

Many workers wore sweatshirts with the slogan "Goodyear Rogue Bosses" on the back. A banner read: "Hollande...What are you playing at? You owe us that law." The banner slogan reflected the Amiens Nord CGT leadership's perspective of pressuring the Socialist Party government of President François Hollande to pass a law banning sackings.

Participating in the rally were small contingents of workers from a number of companies, including the pharmaceutical giant Sanofi, PSA, Ford and

ArcelorMittal. It was clear that, despite a call from the Goodyear CGT branch for a national mobilisation, the national union had made no attempt to bring out large numbers of workers. No national trade union leaders were present, despite wide media coverage for several days of the announced closure, which will cause a social catastrophe in the area.

In line with Minister of the Interior Manuel Valls's recent instructions to crack down on workers fighting the social crisis (see "French government prepares repression against workers"), all roads leading to the building had checkpoints where people were allowed through only after their bags had been searched by armed police in riot gear. The demonstrators were prevented from approaching the building by lines of riot police behind high fences. Their police shields were splattered yellow from eggs that had been thrown at them. They kept the protesters at bay with tear gas spray and baton charges.

Amiens Nord CGT factory delegate Mikaël Wamen claimed, on emerging from the negotiations, that the closure could still be fought in the courts, saying, "We'll bring out the heavy artillery in the courts. We haven't yet brought out 10 percent of our legal arsenal.... If the government is trembling now, it will continue to do so."

Workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* gave these statements little credence. One said, "I've had enough of being strung along. I just want to know what the verdict is." Another said, "We're stunned, that's the main feeling." Some workers could not speak about how they felt.

Young Goodyear worker Jean-François, when asked whether he thought the Socialist Party government would save the workers' jobs, said: "I voted for Hollande. He is not responsible for the situation at

Goodyear, which has been going on for six years. But he's the same as Sarkozy. They both support the capitalist system. The factory branch of the CGT is putting up a fight, but I don't believe in the law against sackings that [CGT lawyer Fiodor] Rilov and Mikael Wamen are proposing. A law does not provide investments for the firms.

"The national union has done nothing for us. [CGT general secretary] Thibault wanted us to accept redundancy with €50,000. It's hardly more than two years' wages. Where is he today?"

Another worker said: "I'm bitter. For nine months management has had nothing to offer us. Titan's offer to buy was just humbug. It's either everyone's job or nothing. Thibault wanted us to sign. He's a bastard."

Jean-Yves said: "I've worked at Goodyear for 42 years. I'm retiring in a few months, but there's nothing for the youngsters. They haven't been investing—they've let the factory go to rack and ruin. Money rules everything. Goodyear is profitable, they take advantage of the system. They're pitting workers from different countries against each other. The Chinese workers have got unions now and are fighting for a decent wage.

"It's all just finance. Workers should get their share. Look at the billions Total is making.

The politicians have a high living standard. They can't be at our level. Left and right, they're the same, and we're made out to be work shy. We need people who understand things from the workers' point of view."



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