

CEO of US tire firm denounces French Goodyear workers

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27 February 2013

The vitriolic and reactionary letter by Maurice Taylor, the CEO of mid-sized American tyre manufacturer Titan, denouncing Goodyear Tires' embattled plant in Amiens-Nord has led to a public spat with French Industrial Renewal Minister Arnaud Montebourg.

In a now widely-publicized letter, Taylor rejected with contempt Montebourg's impotent pleas to "save" the Amiens-Nord plant, after Titan declined to buy the plant's agricultural tyre section. Such a purchase ostensibly aimed to save 500 workers' jobs—while allowing the car tyre section, with its 800 jobs, to close. Montebourg is now looking for another buyer for Goodyear's farm tyre production, failing which the company plans to close the plant with the loss of 1,173 jobs.

Taylor's letter crudely vented the fascistic sentiments that the ruling classes harbor towards workers not earning a poverty wage. He threatened: "Titan is going to buy a Chinese tire company or an Indian one, pay less than a one euro per hour wage and ship all the tires France needs. You can keep the so-called workers. Titan has no interest in the Amiens North factory."

Taylor also proceeded to insult the Amiens-Nord plant workers, absurdly claiming that they get "high wages... [they] talk for three [hours] and only work three hours."

Having apparently staked his corporate strategy on outsourcing to Asia, Taylor then incoherently denounced France's Socialist Party (PS) government, and the US government, for not slapping more tariffs on Asian imports. He wrote, "The Chinese are shipping tyres into France—really all over Europe—and yet you do nothing. The Chinese government subsidizes all the tyre companies... The US government is not much better than the French. Titan had to pay millions to Washington lawyers to sue the Chinese tyre companies because of their subsidizing."

Taylor's letter is, to be blunt, that of a swine. It speaks

to the dead end of capitalism, which in its death agony offers workers only unemployment or poverty wages. One hopes that Titan's Chinese and Indian workers go on strike for and win the 2,000 percent wage increase they deserve.

This entire reactionary incident is above all an exposure of the bankruptcy of attempts by the PS government and the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy to find private corporate buyers for the numerous auto plants now threatened with closure in France.

They are openly hostile to the only solution for the crisis-ridden auto industry: nationalization and operation of the industry worldwide as a public utility. The fight for this demand can only be waged by the working class, in a struggle against the capitalist class and its representatives in the bourgeois "left" parties like the PS, the union bureaucracy, and the petty-bourgeois "left."

For his part, however, Montebourg started a public exchange with Taylor, by turns offering up chauvinist bluster to criticize him and then cringing before him. Picking up on Taylor's threats to swamp the tyre market, he retorted that French customs officials would act "with redoubled zeal with your imported tyres. They will especially check for the respect for norms as to social, environmental and technical requirements." He added that he has many allies in the EU who support "reciprocal standards for trade and organise against dumping."

Montebourg's reply was designed to encourage chauvinist sentiments among workers, divide them along national lines, and divert them from united resistance to the social counter-revolution being imposed in Europe and internationally. The media have chimed in, witch-hunting the Goodyear workers for refusing to accept inhuman working conditions.

Ostensibly to criticize the views of Taylor, a Republican, Montebourg sycophantically praised the industrial policy of US President Barack Obama, a

Democrat: “I must tell you how much the French government admires President Obama’s measures. As the minister responsible for industry, I am particularly appreciative of his action for the bringing industrial jobs back to the US and for radical innovations. It happens even that our policies bear a certain relationship with those inspired by your president.”

The implications of this statement will not be lost on workers in Europe. Under Obama billions have been cut from Social Security and Medicare. He ordered the slashing by 50 percent of the wages of newly hired auto workers and a massive programme of plant closures and sackings in the motor industry. Corporate profits have reached record levels three years in a row.

This is essentially the same anti-worker program that the PS and other ruling parties are advancing against auto workers throughout Europe. This is what Montebourg is referring to when he boasts, in his reply to Taylor, that the PS government is making France “attractive” for investors, and that Titan could “learn and profit enormously from being located in France.” This incident also exposes the illusion peddled by the New Anti-capitalist Party, the Left Front, and the union bureaucracy: that the PS can be pressured to legally prohibit lay-offs by profitable firms, like Goodyear.

Thus, on the Titan-Goodyear issue, the Left Front declares: “More than ever it is urgent to have a law outlawing sackings and giving more power to workers. As well as maintaining employment, it will have another effect, giving protection against the vulture capitalism embodied to the point of caricature by the American multinational Titan.”

In fact, as Montebourg’s reply to Taylor makes clear, the PS sees itself as advancing the same plant-closing, job-cutting agenda as Obama. Workers can defend their jobs only in a political struggle against the PS and its allies and defenders.



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