

Struggle against closure of Goodyear plant in Amiens, France at a crossroads

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The six-year struggle of workers at Goodyear's Amiens-Nord tyre plant against company threats of a plant closure and mass sackings is at a crossroads.

The critical issue facing workers at Goodyear-Amiens and other plants facing closure throughout France and Europe is how to mobilize mass opposition to plant closures in the working class and appeal to broad public sympathy for auto workers facing mass layoffs. The WSWs has supported the workers' refusal to bow to blackmail from management, writing on February 14: "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."

The WSWs has consistently opposed the treacherous policy of the Stalinist-led CGT (General Confederation of Labour) union, and its petty-bourgeois supporters such as the pseudo-left Independent Workers Party (POI), who seek to limit struggle to a court battle. This blocks any attempt to mobilize the working class in struggle against job and wage cuts now being imposed throughout the auto industry in France and in all of Europe.

Local CGT officials accepted the isolation of the Goodyear struggle and the CGT national leadership's collaboration with former conservative president Nicolas Sarkozy. This collaboration is now continuing under the bourgeois "left" Socialist Party (PS) government of François Hollande, whose election the CGT supported.

Amid the collapse of the unions' proposals on how to avert a plant closure, the only way forward is to build committees of action independent of the unions to organize a broader fightback against anti-worker policies and the class-collaborationist policies of the CGT.

On February 12, American agricultural tyre manufacturer Titan withdrew its offer to buy the farm tyres section of the plant, thus saving 500 jobs. What taking place now is only negotiations between Goodyear and the unions on what redundancy package will be offered—or rather, imposed—on the entire site's 1,273 workers.

These talks began on February 12 at the company's head office near Paris. The plant's CGT leader Mickaël Wamen came out of the meeting and told the demonstrating workers: "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."

In the intervening period, while workers sought to oppose the closure before the next round of negotiations on March 7, Wamen and the CGT legal adviser Fiodor Rilov proposed that workers should invest their redundancy money into a SCOP (cooperative) to buy the factory. Many workers have expressed justifiable scepticism, as this is tantamount to accepting its closure. On February 26 Wamen met the conservative UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) European parliamentarian Philippe Bouland, who said he would try to get a EU subsidy to finance the SCOP.

Wamen later virtually admitted that the SCOP proposal is a manoeuvre to strengthen the CGT's hand in legal actions over redundancy terms. Wamen told the *Courrier Picard*: "We'll see how management reacts. If they don't want it, then that'll enable us to go back to the courts and show how Goodyear prefers to close the factory rather than hand it over to its workers."

These manoeuvres are designed to break the morale of the Goodyear workers and push them to accept redundancy money—that is, the loss of their jobs, after 6 years of the company's running down of the plant and

cutting production to a tenth of its capacity.

No redundancy payment will compensate Goodyear workers for losing their jobs, under conditions where it is extremely difficult to find another. Amid the world's worst economic crisis since the 1930s, unemployment has risen for 21 straight months in France, reaching 3.5 million jobless. It is projected to rise for the foreseeable future in France and all of Europe, particularly in motor and manufacturing industries.

The WSWS has always opposed any selling of jobs for cash at Goodyear and called for a policy of the broadest industrial and political mobilisation of the working class against closures and sackings. It has consistently opposed all the CGT's attempts to present plant closures as victories by pointing to redundancy packages.

After the most famous such case, the 2009 closure of Continental's Clairoix plant, the WSWS wrote: "The unions at the Amiens Goodyear plant are treating the sell-out at Clairoix as an example to be followed."

For his part, the CGT leader at the Goodyear plant, Mickaël Wamen, praised the "very honourable" agreement "won in struggle by the Conti workers." Wamen said the aim was to get the job cuts withdrawn, but failing that, "€50,000 will be the minimum.... There's money at Goodyear. The group must open its purse."

In fact, the deal accepting the closure of Continental's Clairoix site was a filthy betrayal. Most of the sacked Clairoix workers have not found a job since. The deal—worked out between Continental, the unions led by the CGT's Xavier Mathieu, and the government—involved a union pledge to prevent Clairoix workers from intervening at other Continental plants targeted for closure.



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