

French unions back closure of PSA Aulnay auto factory

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7 May 2013

On April 29, the PSA Central Works Council approved the redundancy plan for PSA Peugeot Citroën, which calls for 11,200 job cuts and plant closures such as that of Aulnay, which is slated to close in 2014.

Eighteen of the 20 union representatives approved the plan announced nine months ago by PSA. According to *Le Monde*, “only the CGT union (General Confederation of Labour) opposed the plan, while Force Ouvrière (Workers’ Force), CFTC (French Christian Workers Confederation), CFE-CGC (Middle Managers union), CFDT (French Democratic Workers Confederation) and SIA (Independent Auto Union) authorized the redundancy scheme. As soon as the plan is in place, the corporation will go into overdrive to increase the competitiveness of its factories. Negotiations must open in May for an agreement to be signed in October.”

Le Monde reports the arrogant words of the FO delegate Christian Lafaye, who applauded the plant closure and the destruction of thousands of jobs: “Reason is prevailing over passion. A great majority of workers will probably be relieved, and a certain serenity will return.”

Contrary to the FO delegate’s cynical claims, it is hard to imagine that Aulnay workers could be relieved to think that they could lose their jobs amid a deep economic crisis.

If the CGT did not sign the redundancy scheme, it is only because it did not need to: the signatures of the other unions were sufficient to guarantee its passage as planned by PSA and the union bureaucracy.

The CGT has never had any intention of leading a serious struggle against the plans to close Aulnay. No union attempted to mobilise the working class as a whole to fight the plans of PSA and of President

François Hollande. The strike launched by workers at Aulnay was isolated by the CGT, once again confirming the treacherous role played by this supposedly “militant” union.

That is confirmed by the record of Jean-Pierre Mercier—the CGT leader at Aulnay, who is a member of Lutte Ouvrière (Workers Fight) and was the spokesman of LO candidate Nathalie Arthaud during the 2012 presidential elections. He stated, “If the management wants to rush into closing the factory, it has to pay, it has to come up with the cash.”

Mercier’s cynical bluster highlights that the CGT accepts the management’s decision to close the factory and attempts to present the closure as a victory if the management pays a minimum sum to organize the layoffs.

In fact, from the beginning of the conflict, the unions, including the CGT, did everything they could to strangle the workers’ opposition. The unions did not want the PSA workers’ struggle to trigger a wider conflict bringing the working class into a confrontation with freshly-elected President Hollande and his Socialist Party (PS).

The unions, including the CGT, are closely tied to the state and the employers. The state and employers provide over 90 percent of their revenue, according to data published in the Perruchot Report, and consequently the unions do not oppose the bourgeoisie. They seek to serve the interests of the capitalists in workplaces, including smothering all working class opposition.

Jean-Pierre Mercier’s criticisms of the government are dishonest. “All the same, it is a left government which is authorizing, with its law on flexibility at work, the right of employers to increase working hours and lower wages. Even [President] Sarkozy did not dare to

do that,” he said.

This only further underlines the complicity of Arthaud and LO with Hollande and the PS’s anti-worker policies. LO and the CGT implied that it would be easier to pressure a PS government rather than another right-wing one, and that they favoured a vote for the PS, even though they were not explicitly calling for one.

The CGT played an important role in the austerity policies carried out by Hollande’s right-wing predecessor, President Nicolas Sarkozy. Having negotiated repeated pension cuts with Sarkozy, the CGT obtained in exchange its closer integration into the state machine.

However, the union bureaucracy supported François Hollande’s candidacy for president, knowing full well that he intended to lead an offensive against the working class in the name of French competitiveness. During the election campaign, the press reported that mass layoffs would occur in France, and that jobs at PSA were threatened, as PSA documents confirmed in 2011. The CGT and LO did not make a political issue of it during the presidential election campaign.

After the official announcement in July 2012 of the destruction of 8,000 jobs and the closure of the Aulnay plant, Mercier did not seek to mobilize the workers. He waited until September to call some action, to coincide with the start of negotiations between the government, PSA and the unions. While automobile workers throughout Europe face attacks like those at PSA, the CGT was hostile to the unification of the workers’ struggles in the European automobile industry.

Mercier’s perspective was to isolate the PSA Aulnay workers, until they would be forced to accept the closure of their factory.

This redundancy scheme is the starting point of more ferocious attacks by the bourgeoisie against automobile workers, which are spreading to all sections of the working class in Europe. PSA has planned talks in May to negotiate competitiveness in its factories. As the CGT has done in other companies—the most recent example being Bosch, where it signed a freeze on wages and flexible working hours together with the SUD union (Solidarity, Unity, Democracy)—the CGT will impose social regression on the workers.

The betrayal of the PSA workers by the unions and the pseudo-left underlines the necessity to break from

the unions and the cynical, anti-worker policy of organizations like LO, and create action committees fighting to unify independent struggles of the working class against austerity and job cuts.



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