

Paris workers speak out against Syrian war, social austerity

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A WSWS team campaigned last weekend at the Sunday market in the Cité des 3000 council estate for a public meeting in Paris on September 29 marking the 15th anniversary of the *World Socialist Web Site*. The neighbourhood, situated in the Paris suburb of Aulnay-sous-Bois, close to the PSA Peugeot-Citroën car factory, is largely home to immigrant families from North Africa who have long provided much of the labour force for local industry.

WSWS campaigners handed out hundreds of leaflets of the WSWS article “French President Hollande backs US war against Syria”.

All car production will cease in October at the PSA plant and the total closure of the site, already well under way, organised with the complicity of the unions and the Socialist Party government of François Hollande, is scheduled for 2014. (See “France: How the Workers’ Struggle group is helping to shut down the Aulnay car plant”) With an unemployment rate of some 20 percent, double for under for those under twenty-five years of age, this is a disaster for the neighbourhood.

WSWS reporters interviewed shoppers on Hollande’s austerity policies at home and on his support for US President Barack Obama’s plans to launch a military strike against Syria on the pretext of the regime’s alleged poison gas attack on the Ghouta district in Damascus.

There was great interest in the Syrian question, which was clearly being followed closely. Not one of the many people who spoke to the WSWS supported any military attack on Syria by France or the US, nor did they believe accusations that Syrian president Bashar al-Assad had carried out the alleged gas attack. Some saw Western imperialism’s war plans against Syria mainly as part of an ethnic or religious conflict between

Muslims and Arabs and the state of Israel, while others were aware of French and US imperialism’s economic and geopolitical aim to control the strategic energy resources of the Middle East.

Cheik, an electrician in the private sector, expressed his opposition to Hollande’s war plans. “You’re preaching to the converted”, he said. “It’s to divert attention from his austerity policies here. It’s not for the good of the Syrian or French people. One missile costs one million euros, which could be spent on education and children.

“Right from the start Hollande has not had left policies. The right wing of the Socialist Party is in charge, people like [interior minister Manuel] Valls. I know many people well who worked at PSA. It’s bad, what are they going to do now?”

Abdelkader, a doctor and Algerian immigrant, is deeply hostile to Hollande’s war plans. “Syria was a stable country”, he said. “If Assad goes it will create confusion, like in Libya, with armed gangs running things. Everything that’s happening in the Arab world is about Israel. It’s to protect Israel. They’re fomenting a war between Shiites and Sunnis.

“They want to isolate Iran, which is the only power in the region capable of standing up to Israel, preventing its diktat over the Middle East, so they want to destroy its allies, first Syria and then Hezbollah. They can’t accept that Iran’s resources aren’t controlled by the United States like the other counties in the region”.

A worker said: “It’s all about controlling Iran, Syria’s only real ally. They want to crush Iran because it opposes Israel. I don’t think resources are the main issue”.

Mourad, a building worker and father of two, said, “I’m against Hollande bombing Syria. I don’t believe the accusations against Assad of using chemical

weapons. It's a provocation. It's about the wealth and resources. It's not about the people of Libya, Mali, Syria—or the people of France. The closure of PSA? Hollande has done nothing for the French people”.

An ambulance driver told campaigners that he considered former PS Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, now foreign minister, the most virulent supporter of Hollande's imperialist warmongering, to be a “murderer”. This was not just for his present role, but also for his role in the scandal of contaminated blood which infected many hemophiliacs with HIV in the 80s. He said that many of the people he transported suffered from great poverty and it was getting worse “I see it every day. Workers have no rights”. He told his daughter standing next to him, “The only way out is to get an education—education is power”.

Zora, a youth worker, and her son Nabil, who is studying science in his final high school, said that there was no excuse for the war. “The families will suffer”. She said. “Since the 1990s the war in Iraq has caused endless suffering. Why are they doing it? It's difficult to say. The TV goes on endlessly about the war”.

Nabil added, “There's no oil in Syria”. A WSWs reporter pointed out that the strategic goal was the reorganising of the Middle East so that the US and its allies could take control of its energy resources and achieve world domination, and that this could only be opposed by the international working class united in the fight for world socialism.

Zora condemned the closure of PSA: “It's sudden death! People have bought houses here. It's a terrible decision. There will be more and more job insecurity. For us here there's no social mixing, no equality. It's a daily struggle for subsistence. Freedom also means having a job. Then you can have freedom of opinions”.

Frank, an Algerian immigrant, said of Hollande's plans to bomb Syria: “It's based on lies. They're pulling us into a Third World War—it's really against Iran, China and Russia”. He added, “If they shut PSA it'll smash the local economy. Youth will be pushed into the drug trade and police repression will provoke a social explosion”.



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