

French Socialist Party runs Florange steelworks union leader in European elections

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The French Democratic Labour Confederation (CFDT) chief union rep at the Arcelor-Mittal steelworks in Florange, Edouard Martin, will stand in the European elections this year heading the Socialist Party's (PS) list for Eastern France. His candidacy has provoked hypocritical reactions on the part of the political establishment and trade union organisations.

By promoting a union rep as its candidate, the Socialist Party (PS) is trying to present itself as a popular party close to the working class, while it also imposes social austerity and wages imperialist war. President François Hollande is the most unpopular president since the Fifth Republic was founded. The PS is relying on the unions, the petty bourgeois parties of the so-called "far left," and people like Martin to keep office.

Martin explained his decision as follows: "I don't have the impression of committing myself to politics, in the sense that I did not envisage making a political career. I just want to continue the fight that we have led for several years to maintain industry in France and in Europe, and I want to pursue this at another level, the European level, because that is where all the important decisions are taken which affect us."

In fact, Martin is clearly going in politics, and into those of a party violently hostile to the working class at that. His role will be to continue what he did at Florange: arrange the closure of factories while maintaining public order and stabilising the PS and the reactionary projects of the European Union.

The ties which unite the CFDT and the PS are not recent. The CFDT, France's second-biggest trade union, played an important role in the formation of the PS in the 1970s. *Le Figaro* recalls: "The CFDT actively participated in the Socialist Forums of 1974, with the mass of its collaborators joining at the time of [PS President] François Mitterrand's victory in 1981. It is estimated that 40 percent of his ministers under Prime

Minister Mauroy were union leaders, and one in five were members of the CFDT".

Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, in office from 1981 to 1984, initiated Mitterrand's "austerity turn" in 1983. The CFDT played a central role in Mitterrand's austerity—announced at the Presidential Elysée Palace by Edmond Maire, CFDT leader at the time—and the destruction of steelmaking in the east of France, where Florange is located.

Edouard Martin became a CFDT union representative in 1989, at a time when the working class had suffered heavy defeats at the hands of the trade union bureaucracy.

The experience at Florange shows the class role played by Martin. He led the all-trade union committee at the plant that worked to control the struggle between the workers and their employer Arcelor-Mittal, which lasted from 2009 to 2012. He sought to block the development of a wider struggle of the working class to stop the closure and to transform the workers' struggle on the site into a photo op for the PS and Hollande's presidential election campaign.

François Hollande visited the Florange site, meeting Edouard Martin to claim he would legislate to prevent the factory's closure. The lie, supported by Martin, was that with a PS government it would be easier to use pressure to stop the steelwork's closure.

This lie was shattered in a few months after Hollande's victory. The unions, the PS government, and Arcelor-Mittal reached agreement on a project for investment ostensibly designed to reduce CO2 emissions. This threatens the 692 jobs at the site and involves the shutdown of the two blast furnaces.

Walter Broccoli, a union rep for Force ouvrière (FO, Workers Force) at the Florange site commented: "Somehow, we have the impression that he [Martin] used Florange for his own personal ambitions."

Such comments only reflect the hypocrisy and

skulduggery that permeate the trade union bureaucracy. According to the daily *Libération*, Broccoli—having manifestly missed the chance of standing in the European elections on the PS ticket—is “seriously considering” joining the ticket of the right-wing opposition UMP’s (Union for a Popular Movement) Anne Grommerch.

Grommerch informed *Libération* that, “nothing is decided” before the lists are drawn in February. Although he initially denied reports that he was running on the UMP ticket, Broccoli later recognised that he had had contacts with the UMP.

The subordination of the workers’ struggle at Arcelor-Mittal to the unions’ promotion of the section of the bourgeoisie represented by the PS demonstrates that the working class cannot rely on any section of the bourgeoisie or the political establishment. The unions and the pseudo-left organisations systematically betray workers, because they fear an independent political movement of the working class against the PS.

The unions are empty shells which organise production in factories in line with the needs of employers. When employers’ measures meet with opposition from workers, the unions act as policemen for the bosses, maintaining order and ensuring continued production.

When for reasons of profitability, the bourgeoisie feels it necessary to close a factory as the example of Florange shows, the unions, organise the framework for the closure and afterwards are rewarded for services rendered. They are kicked upstairs—in Martin’s case, into the position of a leading candidate for the PS in the European elections.

The hostility of the union bureaucracy to the working class explains why personalities like Martin can run for a bourgeois party which tries to use their image to improve its own chances. The working class can only defend itself against the government’s attacks by breaking with the political and union organisations around the PS.



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