

France: Goodyear workers' fight for jobs threatened by union sellout

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Goodyear Dunlop Tires France (GDTF) management reached an agreement with the Stalinist CGT (General Confederation of Labour) union delegates on January 22 to end the strike and occupation launched a week previously. The unions, anxious to block a broader struggle of the entire working class against job cuts and plant closures, requested only an improved offer of financial compensation in exchange for the loss of 1,173 jobs at the Amiens plant.

A deal with Titan Tires is now set to go ahead, re-employing only 333 workers at the Amiens plant to produce agricultural tires, doubtless under punitive working conditions. Since 2007, when the company sought to impose speedup and flexibility through a four-shift system (4x8), which Goodyear workers rightly rejected, the company has withdrawn investment and run down production.

Now, according to the *Courrier Picard*, “the compensation remains, however, inferior to that which was envisaged in the stillborn 2012 voluntary layoff plan”. Workers with 5 to 9 years’ service will get up to €80,000, 10 years €90,000, and so on.

France2 TV reported that the CGT had tripled a previous redundancy offer, and that sacked workers would receive €120,000.

Starting on January 6, workers held the production and human resources directors hostage at the plant for 30 hours in order to force the beginning of negotiations. They were released unharmed, and the company has dropped all criminal charges, as stipulated in the agreement.

The CGT has agreed to drop all legal opposition to the closure, but agreed with the company to allow individual workers to appeal to the labour courts for more compensation. Such payments will be conditional on proving that Goodyear’s economic justification for

closing the plant was not valid.

A court decision at the beginning of January approved GDTF’s layoff plan and definitive plant closure, after fighting a seven-year CGT lawsuit against the layoffs. Mickaël Wamen, the plant’s CGT delegate, concluded: “Now that we can no longer save our jobs, we want to leave with the maximum of cash, for the sake of our families.”

Franck Jurek, the CGT joint secretary of the works committee, said: “We have lost all the court decisions, so we have changed tactics.”

The “change of tactics” to bring GDTF to the negotiating table and allow the factory closure to go ahead is an admission that the CGT strategy of relying on court rulings and its orientation to a reactionary Socialist Party (PS) government produced a failure. The working class can win victories only in a politically independent struggle against the PS.

This vindicates the principled opposition of the WSWS to political lies claiming that workers can rely on dealings between corporate management, the state, and the union bureaucracy to defend their jobs and livelihoods. The redundancy payments themselves will offer at best temporary relief, but no future prospects for workers or their children in a town with a 20 percent unemployment rate.

PS Minister for Industrial Renewal Arnaud Montebourg, whom the CGT initially presented as a possible saviour of the factory, haughtily lectured the workers. “You don’t find investors by practising a scorched earth policy,” he said. “That’s enough! Goodyear and the General Labour Confederation (CGT) must move towards each other. The Republic represents mutual understanding ... Goodyear must make a financial effort and the CGT must stop blocking the arrival of Titan [the prospective buyer].”

The basis of the entire fight of Mickaël Wamen and CGT lawyer Fiodor Rilov since 2007 was that the government could be pressured to support Goodyear workers, and that the courts could be used to prevent sackings and closure. The illusion was created by the CGT and pseudo-left forces that incoming PS President François Hollande would legislate against lay-offs in profitable companies. In fact, Hollande passed the opposite—his so-called job security law (ANI) law, giving companies the right to tear up labour code protections.

The CGT employed a succession of “tactics” which failed to stop Goodyear’s plans: court injunctions on technicalities; projects for a workers’ co-operative; and recently a fraudulent parliamentary enquiry led by local PS legislators to determine the reasons for Goodyear’s closure—a toothless consultative procedure with no powers to halt the plant shutdown.

This continued even after the PS government backed the firing of 3,000 workers through the closure of the PSA Aulnay car plant.

A CGT Goodyear statement issued on January 6 cynically accuses the government of a “veritable plot” against Goodyear workers. It admits that the CGT’s policy of support to a PS government, which it shared with the French Communist Party and pseudo-left groups like the New Anti-capitalist Party, amounts to signing the death warrant of the factory.

“By backing his candidacy [of Hollande for president] we have therefore backed the closure of our factory,” it writes, “because management (GDTF) only advances with the aid of Hollande’s government.”

This underscores the necessity of a broad political struggle to mobilize the working class against the PS government in France and the austerity measures of the European Union (EU). Such a struggle can only be waged in opposition to the union bureaucracy and the pseudo-left parties that backed Hollande, however.

The CGT Goodyear statement is not only an admission of political bankruptcy, however, but also an attempt to cover up the CGT’s role in pushing through the attacks on the workers. The PS’ intentions were not a secret to the union bureaucracy or the pseudo-left parties. Its priority was sacrificing workers’ conditions to enhance the competitiveness of French big business, having supported the imposition of EU austerity on workers in Greece and beyond.

Part of the unions’ alignment with Hollande was their promotion of a bankrupt, nationalist perspective of fighting closures plant-by-plant, while its negotiations with the representatives of corporate management and the state prepared the plant shutdown behind the scenes.

Abandoning the fight for jobs and merely negotiating redundancy compensation, allowing the corporate and governmental assault on the working class to continue, is a recurring strategy of the union bureaucracy. It has been employed at plant after plant with the same disastrous results: Continental Tires-Clairoix, PSA Aulnay, Florange steel and beyond.

The factory CGT accused Goodyear of transferring production to its new Polish plant, but made no appeal for a joint struggle together with Polish workers. Instead, the CGT Goodyear sent a letter to President Hollande last September 23 asking him only to “support our struggle in favour of industry and jobs in France.”



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