

Workers ignore token union protest against French Socialist Party's cuts

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The Stalinist CGT (General Confederation of Labour) held small street protests in cities throughout France last Thursday.

They aimed to allow workers to let off steam without threatening the reactionary Socialist Party (PS) government's austerity measures and its "responsibility pact" with employers. This pact, announced in January by President Hollande, abolishes employers' contributions of €30 billion for family benefits.

The demonstrations in 150 towns and cities, numbering in each case just a few hundred or thousand, were ignored by broader masses of workers, who correctly sense that the CGT and the pseudo-left parties are accomplices of the PS. Even in Paris, protesters only numbered 3,800 according to police, or 16,000 according to the CGT. In Marseille, France's second biggest city, marchers numbered 3,000 according to police and 35,000 according to the CGT.

The protest in Rouen included delegations of workers from the Mory Ducros road transport company, which faces liquidation. Nearly 3,000 workers have been laid off at the second biggest road transport company in France, which employed 5,000 workers at 85 locations.

The company declared bankruptcy in November. Arcole Industries, its main shareholder, has got the go-ahead for a takeover preserving only 2,210 jobs at 50 sites.

Most of the unions, led by the CFDT (French Democratic Confederation of Labour, close to the PS), signed away the 3,000 jobs for €10,000 in compensation payouts per worker. The French Communist Party (PCF)-aligned CGT did not sign, but called off the strikes against the sackings.

Mory Ducros is the biggest industrial bankruptcy in France since 2001, when 4,000 workers of the Moulinex electrical appliance company lost their jobs.

Current CGT leader Thierry Lepaon harnessed his "negotiating skills" to facilitate that shutdown.

Minister for Industrial Renewal Arnaud Montebourg claims to have obtained a "moral commitment" from other transport firms to employ 1,500 laid-off Mory Ducros workers. The fact that similar empty promises were used to minimize opposition to plant closures at Goodyear Tires Amiens and the PSA Aulnay auto plant underscores the utter worthlessness of Montebourg's claims.

The NPA (New Anti-capitalist Party) wrote that the CGT protest "must only be a first step...to make the government retreat". It issued an open letter calling for "a weekend of revolt by the left" and inviting "all the political and trade union organisations which do not participate in the government majority...to act together."

This is a political fraud, as the union bureaucracy and pseudo-left parties such as the NPA—which called for a vote for Hollande in the 2012 elections—will not fight the PS' austerity programme. They fear and oppose the consequences of administering a defeat to the badly weakened and deeply unpopular PS government. They have emerged as the principal obstacle to the mobilization of the working class against the despised and reactionary Hollande administration.

The CGT has responded to an offer from the Force Ouvrière (Workers Force) union to protest on March 18 against government policy. But, like last Thursday, it will be an operation to let off steam while jobs are destroyed. Lepaon commented, "I want the left [i.e., the PS government] to succeed, I want France to succeed."

Lepaon's claim that "France" will succeed if the PS succeeds only underscores the total integration of the bought-and-paid-for CGT bureaucracy into the austerity policies of finance capital. While it issues a few demagogic criticisms of the PS, with whom it

continues to negotiate attacks on the working class, it denounces all political opposition to the PS as aiding the neo-fascist National Front (FN) of Marine Le Pen.

In a January 21 *Le Monde* interview, Lepaon complained that the PS was “in a state of civil marriage” with Pierre Gattaz, the leader of the Medef employers’ organization, adding: “We have the feeling that Pierre Gattaz is the Prime Minister.”

In the next breath, however, Lepaon indicated that he supported Hollande, demanding that workers call the reactionary PS regime a “left” government. He said, “To tell left-wing voters that they believed they voted for a left [President] Hollande and that they have a right-wing Hollande—that leads to a dead end. It would be irresponsible on my part. To make criticisms is not to be in sterile opposition.” According to Lepaon, any opposition that makes criticisms of the PS “leads to the National Front.”

This vile slander echoes the line of the Stalinist CGT three-quarters of a century ago, when it justified its support for the Moscow Trials, Stalin’s Great Purges, and France’s Popular Front government by denouncing Trotskyists as fascist “Hitlero-Trotskyites.”

In reality, it is the CGT and its petty-bourgeois pseudo-left allies that are today the principal artisans of the FN’s rise. They do everything they can to block the growth of opposition from the left, in the working class, to the reactionary policies of the PS and the banks. Under these conditions, the FN can pose as the only political opposition to the banks and attract a rising number of votes.

The CGT and the rest of the union bureaucracy continue to negotiate and help impose austerity measures, which they support. While raising empty tactical criticisms of Hollande’s “responsibility pact,” the CGT has accepted in principle €30 billion in cuts to employers’ taxes to pay for family benefits. It is only complains that the employers are refusing to guarantee the creation of an increased number of new jobs in exchange, as requested by the PS.

Indeed, the CGT, which claims to be a force for “proposition not opposition,” now boasts of its role in pushing through the PS’ free-market cuts against the working class. Contrasting his behavior to Charles de Gaulle’s “empty chair” policy of blocking European negotiations by refusing to attend them, Lepaon stressed that the CGT’s policy is “not leaving an empty

chair.”



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