

Macron turns France's labor decrees on auto workers

Alex Lantier**29 December 2017**

Yesterday, automaker PSA Peugeot-Citroën announced that it is preparing deregulated mass sackings, in the first use of French President Emmanuel Macron's labor law decrees in a major industrial firm. Talks with the trade unions, whose approval for the mass sackings is required according to the Macron decrees, are to begin on January 9.

The move by Europe's second-largest automaker is part of a relentless international assault on workers' jobs, working conditions and social rights. After the 2008 Wall Street crash and global crisis, as governments worldwide poured trillions of dollars into the coffers of the same banks whose speculation had caused the crisis, the French state paid billions of euros to bail out PSA and Renault. In return, the auto giants are sacking workers to funnel billions of euros more in wealth created by the working class into the pockets of the superrich.

The policy spearheaded by Macron, who is now broadly viewed with contempt and distrust in France as the "president of the rich," aims to throw the working class back decades. With PSA subsidiary Opel Vauxhall poised to cut 4,500 jobs in Germany alone, tens of thousands of PSA jobs across Europe are threatened. A decade after the Detroit auto bailout slashed the wages of newly-hired workers by half, the goal is to impose speed-up, increase flexibility of working times, and transition to a workforce largely made up of temporary workers, who in France are paid little over €9 per hour.

Internationally, the financial aristocracy is preparing a historic attack on the working class for 2018. Siemens is cutting 15,000 jobs in order to reap billions in profits, while GE has planned 12,000 job cuts. In Europe, governments are preparing a round of new social attacks to finance multi-billion euro military spending

increases and tax cuts to rival the one just passed in the United States, which funnels \$1.4 trillion largely to the wealthy, while devastating key US health care and social programs.

This onslaught will provoke explosive opposition of revolutionary dimensions among workers internationally, which will raise critical questions of perspective and strategy. A struggle cannot be waged based on a search for a nationally-based compromise with the capitalist class: none is on offer. It can only be victorious if it is waged as an international struggle against capitalism, armed with a revolutionary and socialist perspective, and opposed to the union bureaucracies and petty-bourgeois political parties which are aligned with the bourgeois state machine.

This emerges particularly clearly in the experience of the workers in France. Macron and his predecessor, Socialist Party (PS) President François Hollande, trampled public opinion to impose the diktat of the banks. Fully 70 percent of the French population opposed the PS labor law. Yet the PS repressed mass protests against it, invoking the state of emergency to send tens of thousands of police to assault student protests and crush strikes, while the union bureaucracy carried out a cowardly climb-down in the face of police repression.

Macron's policies lack any pretense of democratic legitimacy. Elected by default in May, amid broad disaffection with the contest between Macron, a reactionary banker, and neo-fascist Marine Le Pen, his Republic on the March (LRM) party won a legislative majority in June elections in which less than half of voters chose to participate. Yet LRM acted as if it had a broad mandate for its policies of mass sackings and the evisceration of social rights established by generations of workers struggles during the 20th century.

In addition to writing the key provisions of the state of emergency into the anti-terror law and pre-ordering a four-year supply of anti-riot weaponry, Macron imposed as decrees the most unpopular measures the PS had temporarily removed from the labor law in order to defuse protests. Macron's decrees include the provision for unregulated mass sackings PSA is now using. It allows firms to sack workers even if they are highly profitable, and to deny sacked workers training benefits or re-hiring privileges, even if the firm's financial situation improves.

There should be no illusions in the union bureaucracies and their allies in the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left parties: they will organize no effective opposition to Macron. They already agreed in July 2012 to a massive concessions deal at the Sevelnord PSA plant in northern France, now hailed in the press for establishing the PSA's downsized workplace of the future. Jean-Pierre Mercier, a member of the Workers Struggle (LO) party and union bureaucrat who oversaw the 2013 closure of the PSA plant at Aulnay, now leads the Stalinist General Confederation of Labor's (CGT) PSA work.

The Macron decrees make official the trade unions' evolution into organs of the capitalist state, that have lost their working class base and are largely financially subsidized and controlled by the employers. They help plan and provide legal sanction to mass layoffs, referendums on whether to accept pay cuts to keep plants open, and other attacks against their own members.

Strikes and protests by auto workers in Serbia and Romania, Siemens workers in Germany, and beyond are initial signs of a political counter-offensive of the working class that will bring it into headlong conflict with the ruling class and its various political agencies. Fifty years after the May-June 1968 general strike launched a wave of revolutionary struggles across Europe, the growth of workers' struggles will have a decisive impact on the situation in every country. It raises sharply the necessity of building independent organizations of the working class and its revolutionary vanguard.

Workers face the task of building their own organizations and committees in workplaces and neighborhoods—*independent of and opposed to the unions and petty bourgeois parties*—to discuss and

organize opposition to the attacks that will emerge from Macron's illegitimate decrees. Their activity must be connected to clear anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and socialist demands addressing the needs of the masses. After the ruling elites in 2008 pumped trillions of dollars virtually overnight into the banks, the claim that there is no money for these needs is absurd and must be rejected.

These organizations must fight to defend workers' social rights on a European and international scale. In a world of globally-coordinated production, auto workers cannot live decent lives in Western Europe if they earn €380 monthly in Serbia, or €140 in Tunisia. This underlines the bankruptcy of nationally-oriented policies of the unions and parties like LO, and the urgent necessity of a new political leadership in the working class: sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in every country, fighting war, austerity and dictatorship.

The ICFI will fight to promote the growth of independent workers organizations and to link them to an international, socialist and anti-war movement to take state power and reorganize economic life on the basis of social need, and to replace the bankrupt European Union with the United Socialist States of Europe.



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