

# France's New Anti-capitalist Party sabotages fight against Ford Blanquefort plant closure

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On Monday, Ford Motor Company confirmed that it plans to close its last remaining assembly plant in France, rejecting a final offer by Belgian manufacturer Punch Powerglide to purchase the factory at Blanquefort, just north of Bordeaux. The plant employs more than 800 workers, with thousands more jobs dependent upon it throughout the region.

The decision is part of an international restructuring announced last month by Ford, involving the destruction of up to 25,000 jobs across Europe, to funnel billions of dollars more into the pockets of its shareholders and investors. Large job cuts are expected at the Saarlouis Assembly Plant in Germany and the Bridgend Assembly plant in South Wales, and closures threatened in Veszolozhsk (2,700 workers) and Naberezhnye Chelny (1,000 workers) in Russia.

The US-based automaker is responding to an increasingly bitter struggle among the automotive transnational corporations for profits and markets, under the impact of economic slump, declining global sales and a shift toward electric-motor vehicle production. In December, General Motors announced its plans to close five plants in North America, destroying 15,000 jobs, and another two internationally.

In each country where these attacks are taking place, the automakers rely on the trade unions to suppress opposition among workers and prevent them from organizing a common struggle against the destruction of their livelihoods.

In France this role played by the unions is backed by leading New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) member Phillippe Poutou, who is a Ford employee at Blanquefort and is also the local delegate of the Stalinist CGT (General Confederation of Labor) union. Poutou was the NPA's candidate in the 2012 and 2017 presidential elections. He specializes in issuing radical-sounding demagogic statements and is routinely trotted out at union demonstrations to provide a "left" cover as they prepare rotten sellouts.

Since Ford announced the closure last year, Poutou has received prominent coverage by the corporate media to

denounce the company's greed. The French ruling class knows it has nothing to fear from Poutou and the NPA, and that the unions, discredited by decades of betrayals, badly need such a left façade.

In deeds, however, Poutou has acted as does every other union bureaucrat when a closure is announced. His statements absolutely preclude the possibility that workers could organize a struggle against the closure, including strikes and occupations, and appeal to their allies among Ford and other autoworkers across Europe, who face the exact same assault, for a united counteroffensive.

Poutou has insisted that workers must instead place their faith in sordid backroom deals between himself, the other union federations, Ford, and the Macron government, centered on the negotiation of terms for Punch Powerglide or another competitor to repurchase the plant.

These negotiations, which accept the "right" of Ford to close the plant and destroy the livelihoods of thousands of workers, are presented as a struggle to save jobs. In reality, they are discussions in which every party supports the corporations against the workers and are focused on how to attack workers' conditions without provoking a rebellion.

In December, the unions and the Macron government negotiated major cuts to conditions as part of any purchase by Punch, saying this was necessary to save jobs. Macron's economy and finance minister Bruno Le Maire boasted that these included "more difficult conditions of work, suppression of the RTT [35-hour work week limit], longer working hours, and frozen wages over a number of years."

The fact that workers felt they had no choice but to accept these changes is a damning vote of no confidence in the unions and the NPA, which workers knew would not organize any fight. Poutou defended the cuts on the grounds that it was the only choice available.

The NPA has functioned as little more than a propaganda outlet for the Macron government. While holding continuous backroom discussions with corporate executives and government ministers, Poutou promotes illusions that this viciously anti-working-class government, led by a 41-year-

old ex-banker known as the “president of the rich,” is on their side.

In a January 9 statement on the CGT’s Ford website, Poutou reported on the outcome of recent discussions: “The state has reaffirmed its willingness and even its determination to save the factory.” This statement was published the same day that Macron’s police were assaulting workers and youth taking part in “yellow vest” protests against social inequality and shooting protesters’ eyes out with rubber bullets.

The NPA’s main demand has been that Macron intercede to temporarily keep Ford from closing the plant, by delaying the formal ratification of a required financial document to give more time to find a buyer. Poutou also called for the government to purchase the plant temporarily.

Now that these appeals have been rejected, the NPA is trying to demoralize the workers, declaring that the plant will close and nothing can be done to stop it. In an interview with *Marianne* published Wednesday, following Ford’s latest decision, Poutou declared: “Ford will obtain what it wanted: the closure of the factory. Nonetheless, we maintain our battle.”

Now, he said, “we only hope that work will begin on a plan to save the jobs of the employees and avoid too large job losses in the region,” and that other companies will carve up the factory site. “An industrial project must be put in place to put companies in this sector in contact to take possession of the 12 hectares of the Blanquefort site,” he said.

Poutou added that “the government promises possibilities of employment, through relocations to one or another enterprise. Leaving a large factory, and taking account of our [public] exposure, it is possible we will receive job offers. But there is nothing concrete on the table for the moment.”

Poutou’s statements directly follow those of the Macron government. Le Maire announced on Tuesday that “we have created a group of local elected officials, the government, [and] trade union representatives, to work on the future of the site.”

The same empty promises have been heard by hundreds of thousands of workers countless times over the past 30 years in the lead-up to factory closures. They invariably amount to nothing, while working-class communities that depend on the plants for the livelihoods of not only the present generation, but those of their children, are torn apart and driven into destitution.

Poutou’s role at Blanquefort is the product of the program and class basis of the NPA itself. While occasionally using left rhetoric, it is a faction of the union bureaucracy and the political establishment, particularly oriented toward the big-business Socialist Party. It articulates the social interests of a

privileged stratum of the middle class hostile to any struggle of the working class.

The Socialist Equality Party advances a fundamentally opposed perspective for Ford workers to fight the closure of the plant. In a statement published with our sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International in Britain and Germany on January 15, we stated:

“The way forward for workers is to break free of the organizational stranglehold of the unions and wage an independent, international struggle. Workers need new organizations—rank-and-file workplace committees, democratically controlled by the workers—to unify and mobilize the workers internationally in defense of the social right to a job.

“Such a fight by autoworkers would win immense support in the working class amid growing opposition among workers to social inequality, militarism and austerity and the big business policies of capitalist governments internationally ...

“The critical task confronting workers is to develop an independent political struggle, in opposition to all the parties and organizations that defend capitalism. The ruling classes in every country today offer the populations a future of austerity, trade wars and ‘great power’ military conflicts, growing social inequality, and a turn towards police-state repression and dictatorship to suppress popular opposition.

“The answer is the taking of power by the working class as part of the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe, and the reorganization of economic life by the working class to meet social need, not private profit. This will include turning the giant automotive corporations into public utilities under the democratic control of the workers. The European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International are intervening in the European elections to fight for this perspective.”



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