

Macron's Labor Law in France: Unions organize 3,000 layoffs at Carrefour supermarket chain

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23 May 2019

With the support of the trade unions, the Carrefour supermarket chain in France is set to destroy up to 3,000 positions over the next year, utilizing measures contained in the Labor Law imposed by the Macron government at the start of its term in 2017. The company signed a so-called Collective Breaking of Contract (*rupture conventionnelle de collective*—RCC) with the Workers Force (FO) and the CFE-CGC union federation this week, allowing it to force through thousands of “voluntary” redundancies.

The agreement was negotiated over many weeks between the company and the unions. While 1,230 jobs are to be destroyed, the company and unions clearly anticipate pressuring far more workers to resign, with an upper limit of 3,000 layoffs as part of the agreement. The General Federation of Labor (CGT), the third union covering Carrefour workers, did not sign the RCC—not because it did not support it, but because its signature was not needed to push it through, given that it had already been passed by FO and the CFE-CGC. The CGT has therefore fraudulently postured as an opponent of the destruction of jobs.

All the unions have worked to sabotage any struggle by Carrefour workers, who mobilized last year in opposition to the company's cost-cutting plans. They are creating the conditions for further attacks, not only on Carrefour workers internationally, but on workers at Auchan and Casino, which are also carrying out major restructuring operations. The urgent task confronting supermarket workers is to organize a struggle independently of the unions on an international scale.

The redundancies at Carrefour will particularly affect workers in jewelry departments, multimedia, payroll, administration and service stations, which are subject to

competition from online commerce and specialized retailers. The company will seek to reduce 15 percent of staff in its 46 supermarkets, in addition to attrition from retirements.

The management is seeking to increase the profitability of the chain as rapidly as possible by laying off staff.

With the disguised layoffs of 3,000 Carrefour workers, the Macron government is collaborating in a major offensive against jobs taking place on an international scale—including hundreds of job cuts announced at Ford on Monday, and the liquidation of British Steel this week, eliminating 5,000 jobs and threatening 20,000 more. These attacks underscore the pro-business character of the unions' “social dialogue” with the corporations.

The negotiations have nothing to do with improving the conditions of the working class but are aimed at organizing the destruction of jobs and lowering labor costs in order to boost profits and competitiveness of the giant corporations against their global rivals. The RCC, introduced as part of the Labor Law as a new mechanism for mass layoffs, and requiring that the unions sign off on any restructuring, demonstrate the ever more direct incorporation of the unions into the attacks on the working class.

In an interview with the newspaper *Les Echos*, Macron's minister of labor, Muriel Pénichaud, declared that the Labor Law “is beginning to yield its fruits, we are in a good dynamic with the new measure, which meets our twin objectives of developing the social dialogue and juridically protecting it.” Since the decrees that created the RCC came into force in December 2018, 96 RCCs have been initiated, and 60

signed by the unions. More than half have involved large corporations, according to the Ministry of Labor.

The labor minister added that 142 supplementary collective agreements on pay and working time, which can take precedence over employment contracts, had been concluded by March 31.

At Carrefour, the RCC is part of a transformation plan seeking to increase the exploitation of an already super-exploited workforce. To justify this action, CEO Alexandre Bompard announced that “after a year 2017 that was globally difficult because of market competition, 2018 will be a year of struggle, because it will be the first stage of the Carrefour 2022 plan.”

Under this plan, begun at the start of last year, the company expects to save €2 billion off the backs of its workforce. As Bompard announced his plan, Carrefour posted an enormous profit of €773 million.

The allies of the workers in France in their struggle are workers internationally. Carrefour initiated its assault on workers in Asia and Latin America, before beginning its restructuring in Europe. It has already destroyed 4,400 positions, through so-called voluntary redundancies in multiple countries and the closure of Dia stores in France.

These attacks are only possible due to the complicity of the trade unions, which have isolated the Carrefour workers who went on strike last year from other sections of the working class, including railway workers in France and their fellow Carrefour workers around the world. While the year 2018 was marked by an upsurge of working-class struggle around the world, including the “yellow vest” protests in France, the unions have been even more determined to sign off on further layoffs in order to prevent any united fight against the company.

The RCC, as opposed to previous mechanisms for corporate restructures, does not require that the company even formally invoke a difficult economic situation, present or in the future, as justification.

Jean-Phillippe Dubs, of Alès Group, a specialist provider of cosmetics that laid off 80 workers using an RCC, described its advantages to *Le Monde*: “It permits us to improve our accounts internally in a less traumatic way than a social plan. We carried out our restructure as a family, without any experts or procedures of consultation, as it should have been the case for the Plans for Saving Jobs or Plan for Voluntary Departures.

The unions adopt without any ambiguity the point of view of the corporations. The FO and CSC-CGE declare in the letter announcing the RCC that the “workers are aware of the necessity of transforming the supermarkets.” They propose certain symbolic measures, including the “putting in place of a commission of local follow-ups” and a “procedure of prevention and evaluation for the organization and workload.” But it is the unions’ own policies that will lead to the increase in workload.

To fight against Carrefour’s restructuring, workers must organize independently of the union apparatuses that are orchestrating this offensive. Workers need their own independent rank-and-file action committees to coordinate a fight with their co-workers, including internationally. This requires a political struggle against the Macron government and its political allies, waged on the basis of a socialist and international perspective.



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