

French auto parts workers at GM&S threaten to blow up plant to block closure

By Anthony Torres
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After several months of futile, demoralizing negotiations, the 279 workers of auto parts supply company GM&S Industry, the second largest employer in the Creuse district of central France, destroyed two machines on Thursday. They are threatening to blow up the entire plant, which has been placed in bankruptcy, if it is not kept open.

The workers aim to pressure GM&S' main clients, automakers Renault and PSA, who they assert are blocking talks on a resale of the plant to other buyers. They have wired gas cylinders and gasoline cans to detonate. Trade union delegate Vincent Laboursse said, "It's enough. They are attacking us for being radicals by attacking our machines, but we are not any more radical than they were: they took away our orders by having the parts made elsewhere and threw us into the hands of another buyer who is incompetent."

Renaud Le Youdec, the court-appointed crisis negotiator named in April, blamed Renault and PSA: "French automakers are responsible when they pull out orders they have made with French companies, in order to find parts suppliers elsewhere." According to Le Youdec, the automaker's position is all the weaker in that his proposals for GM&S "are entirely coherent and reasonable given the improvement we are seeing in the stamping sector of the industry."

The ruthless position of the automakers underscores the bankruptcy of the strategy proposed by the trade unions. They isolated the GM&S workers, did nothing to mobilize workers in solidarity and in defense of GM&S workers' jobs and capitulated to all the reactionary demands of company management.

The only way forward is a broad mobilization of workers to defend jobs at GM&S and beyond, in a political break with the union bureaucracies, which support newly elected French President Emmanuel

Macron.

Le Youdec recounted all the give-backs the GM&S workers made in a fruitless attempt to persuade the corporations not to launch bankruptcy proceedings and try to close the plant. "Since I arrived here," he said, "workers made real efforts. They continued to produce and pledged not to protest. Moreover, and it was not clear they would do so, but they accepted the principle of layoffs and even took my advice to respond favorably to an urgent request from Renault to make more parts, because those that had been made were blocked [in Brazil]."

Renault and PSA have taken the position that the negotiations did not go far enough to save GM&S. Labrousse said, "For six months, we let the negotiations proceed. A week before the hearing in Poitiers, we can only conclude that the French automakers took us for a ride from the beginning to the end. They knew very well, when they found other suppliers for the same parts, that they were condemning us to asphyxiation. And a week from the final deadline, they are continuing to play with our future."

These passages are an exposure of the role played by the unions, who block workers' struggles against the attacks they are facing, while at the same time negotiating layoffs and other reactionary measures with big business and the state.

The attack on GM&S workers continues the broader onslaught against autoworkers in France and internationally since the beginning of the international financial crisis in 2008. This process has seen the destruction of thousands of jobs in France, and far more internationally. In the US, autoworkers saw a massive cut in wages negotiated by the UAW and the Obama administration, in order to improve the companies' profitability.

The French automakers' moves to destroy jobs at GM&S are reportedly a cold-blooded and vindictive decision to punish them for having organized strikes in the past. According to Le Youdec, "What the corporations blame them for is a social protest that cut off the supply of parts several years ago, as well as negative decisions by potential buyers."

This is a warning that the bourgeoisie intends to deal ruthlessly with social opposition. The May 7 election of Macron, the former Rothschild banker, as president underscores the fact that the social counterrevolution is picking up steam. Macron was a minister of a Socialist Party (PS) government that carried out war and austerity, and also suspended democratic rights under the state of emergency, in order to brutally repress protests against PS policies.

The new president is preparing to destroy the Labor Code and to slash public and social spending in France, as the European Union did in Greece, to boost French corporate competitiveness.

In the second round of the presidential elections, Macron had the support of virtually the entire French political establishment, including the trade unions. They refused to mobilize workers more broadly in solidarity with GM&S workers, as they have at plant closures across France over the last decade, as this would have cut across Macron's presidential bid.

There is explosive social anger in France and across Europe against layoffs and austerity. But only a politically independent struggle of the working class on a socialist and internationalist platform, breaking with the trade unions' support for Macron, can mobilize workers against the social attacks now being prepared.

The role of the unions, as demonstrated at GM&S and beyond, will be to delay as much as possible and then to finally launch isolated struggles under the most unfavorable conditions possible, in order to avoid destabilizing Macron's unpopular government. The only way forward for workers is to take their struggles out of the hands of the trade unions, set up their own independent rank-and-file organizations and take up the political struggle.

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