

FIGHT FOR AN INCOME, NOT TO STAY IN WORK! TO STRUGGLE AGAINST REDUNDANCIES AND POVERTY, WORKERS CAN ONLY RELY ON EACH OTHER

Under the pretext of globalisation and the crisis (but is it really such a serious crisis for the bosses?), the capitalists are speeding up restructuring, leading to an avalanche of redundancies. Almost always, as with the workers in Brittany, workers react aggressively and with determination to these blows struck by the ruling class. But their struggles do not succeed. The redundancies go through with some minor improvements in the form of woolly promises of redeployment, of endless retraining and, if all goes well, a little money in settlement. The principle reason for these defeats is easy to understand: the bosses attack together in concert with their state, while the workers respond in an isolated way. Divided factory by factory, office by office, warehouse by warehouse, they end up as dog meat.

Meanwhile, the state, the bosses' organisations and the unions take turns singing their hymns of lamentation against industrial desertification, unfair foreign competition and globalisation. All of them, in the camp of the dominant classes, call on the state, sometimes to sweeten the pill for the affected workers, sometimes to substitute itself for the failed entrepreneurs, sometimes for it to create legal barriers to the vile assaults of the foreigner. All, without exception, try desperately to defend national and regional businesses, the means of production so dear to the unions and to the bourgeois parties of the left and the extreme left, as to those of the right and the far right.

Most often the sacked workers fall for it, their defeat coming from them clinging to the machines and buildings, machines and buildings which capital no longer wants. Yet the tools of work, what were previously means of exploitation, become in the eyes of the affected workers a precious good that they must defend at any price. But this resistance proves pathetic precisely because the tools and the place of work have become superfluous, useless to the valorisation of capital. It is for that reason, and only for that reason, that capital gets rid of them so as to bet on activities, on production, which is more profitable. And too bad for the damage that this does to the social network.

**To defend the dismantled means and place of work, to try to stop capital fleeing elsewhere,
means to defend the system which sacks us and throws us into misery**

The workers booted out of the food processing industry in Brittany are the latest to fall into the deadly trap of a unity between the redundant workers and those who fired them. The four most emblematic cases show this.

DOUX SERVES AS A SCHOOL FOR DEFEAT

A signal was given in June 2012 with the announcement of the closure of several sites of the poultry company Doux, following cessation of payment. To relaunch the company the boss abandoned the "fresh products" division (with the loss of 1,400 jobs) to preserve the "frozen foods" division while increasing the pressure on producers (drastic reduction in purchase prices). In the course of the struggle the question was never posed of how to carry out actions which hurt the boss, such as blocking the sites which weren't being closed. Numerous pointless demos (Châteaulin, Vannes, Pleucadeuc, Quimper), the appeal to the state for financing, discussions about alternative buyers (a great trade union speciality which never works) ended up in defeat and a deep demoralisation, right up to the last project of rescue by Saudi capital. The unions obtained a little bit more for the redundant workers, and that's it. The workers thrown out of Pleucadeuc, whose average age is 53, will have to work full time at finding another job.

TILLY SABCO: SUPPORT THE BOSS ?

Based in Guerlesquin in Finistère, like Doux, this group specialises in frozen chicken exported to the Middle East. The bird flu crisis of 2006 led to voluntary liquidation. It was progressively taken over by one of its managers, Daniel Sauvaget. But, following the loss of European subsidies in 2013, activity fell by 40%. Tilly-Sabco has 335 employees and 150 to 200 breeders who supply the abattoir. On Monday 4 November the workers and breeders met in front of the Guerlesquin factory for a slow road blockade to the Morlaix prefecture. The Sub-Prefect agreed to accept a delegation of employees led by the CEO and the union reps. Outside, 200 workers and breeders destroyed the gate with the help of a tractor and rushed into the courtyard. The action was led by one of the firm's managers.

On 8 November, the minister Le Foll announced emergency aid of 4 million euros, principally to save the breeding livestock. On 22 November, the EU commission in Brussels announced support for French poultry exporters. The company was therefore "saved" for the moment (the closure had originally been planned for January 2014). What is the balance as far as the workers are concerned? The respite obtained is of the most precarious kind, even if the unions, bosses and state rejoice in the "victory". Placing itself from the outset on the terrain of unity between exploited and exploiters, the struggle above all acted in support of the new boss in front of the state. Can it really be true that in this case the workers only had the option of lining up behind one boss or another?

GAD: THE POISON OF WAR BETWEEN WORKERS

The GAD group in Lampaul-Guimiliau (Finistère) is a specialist in slaughtering, butchering and the transformation of pig meat. The Lampaul-Guimiliau site combines the production of edible fats for making lard, fat from bones, transformed animal protein intended for food processing industries and food for domestic animals on the French and European markets. This factory, which employs 850, is threatened with closure. The occupation strike began on 11 October. The blockade of the site had no impact. The boss didn't give a toss because he wanted to close the plant anyway.

Powerless in the face of the decision of the business to separate itself from them, some workers from Lampaul-Guimiliau found a convenient scapegoat for their troubles in the form of a hundred or so Romanians (employed in large-scale cutting) who were accused of accepting a wage of €600 per month. It was a completely false rumour because they were paid according to the SMIC (minimum wage). The FO union led the movement from the start, to its end on 31 October. Being aware of the uselessness of just blockading Lampaul-Guimiliau, on 22 October striking workers tried to extend the movement to the Josselin GAD abattoir in the Morbihan region. Without any preparation to make the workers at the other site aware of what was happening, the action ended up in a new failure marked by confrontations between workers from the two sites.

The failed attempt to blockade the Josselin factory shows that fighting unity between workers from different factories, even from the same company, is not something that can be guaranteed from the start. It has to be carefully prepared and, even when it is the case, cannot be created without frictions inside the very camp of the workers. The incidents at Josselin created the pretext for the boss and the unions to bring things to a close as quickly as possible. The signed agreement was for doubling the redundancy payments (400 euros per year of service, with a ceiling of 25 years), additional payments of 2,000 euros up to 3 years service and 2,200 euros after that (a sum which is still derisory). The strike days would be paid as well. The assembly of Lampaul-Guimiliau workers calmly approved the agreement. A final cherry on the meagre cake: 320 workers out of almost 900 would escape redundancy... but only for a year thanks to public funding.

MARINE-HARVEST: ANOTHER "VICTORY"?

The Marine-Harvest factory in Poullaouen (close to Carhaix) is a salmon processing plant. After ten days (from 4 to 13 November) of an occupation strike led by the CGT, the 287 workers obtained 80 redeployments in place of the 64 offered initially.

At the same time, the production workshops will stop as intended in May 2014 while logistics activity will cease in December 2015. In exchange for a few concessions, the Norwegian boss has

obtained a rapid return to work to deal with the big wave of orders over the Christmas period. On its side, the CGT, with a majority of members in the factory, was pressed to reach an agreement before anything got out of hand.

So, a great union victory? Hardly. Temp workers, who are heavily present during peak production periods like the present one, actively participated in the struggle but were excluded from the agreements. The concessions appeared attractive: a mobility payment of €15,000, to pay for the costs of moving for the workers redeployed to Landivisiau; additional compensation (which is added to conventional compensation) going from €20,000 to €94,000 according to years of service.

If these sums sweeten the pill somewhat, they are only really interesting for workers close to retirement who are thus going to lose their employment. The others are getting a pretty penny certainly, but they have a life of work in front of them. Jobs are scarce these days and while the funds will run out the costs of running a family will remain. And those who've been redeployed have to face the complications linked to geographical displacement to somewhere almost 50 km away. This perhaps explains why around a quarter of the workers changed their minds and accused the CGT of betrayal. They joined the "Committee to Maintain Employment in Central Brittany" which demands the right to "live, work and decide in the country".

THE RED BONNETS: A MASK FOR THE BOSSES AND THE SEPARATISTS

This Committee, whose political objectives overlap those of the Breton separatists /independentists, proposes to reunite Bretons of all classes against Parisian centralism. The idea is that it is necessary to live, work and, above all, decide in a country subjected to "foreign" dominant classes which must be substituted with local ones, who are supposed to be more sensitive to the demands of employees. Will the bosses from here be different to those from elsewhere? But where are the natives like the Doux, the Pinaults, the Bollorés, the Leclercs from? Created in Carhaix on 18 October 2013, and coming out of an assembly of 600 people, the Committee to Maintain Employment in Central Brittany is the main source of inspiration for the so-called Red Bonnets ("Bonnets rouges"). Like in the Committee, amongst the Red Bonnets, we can find representatives of the local MEDEF (Movement of French Businesses), the UDB, the Breizistance (extreme left separatist) and the FNSEA.

The colourful headgear was largely handed out for free by the company Armorlux during the demonstration on 2 November in Quimper (the real birth of the movement). The social forces which are gathered underneath it go from small bosses to peasants of all kinds (big as well as small), artisans, hauliers, certain sectors of workers and other road users. Their main common objective is the struggle against the ecotax, described as a toll imposed on Brittany by the centralised Jacobin state. The whole panoply of Breton legends has been brought out for the occasion so as to emphasise the protest. But as soon as the ecotax was suspended by the government, the three main bosses' organisations – the local MEDEF, the hauliers' association and "Brittany Products" – left the Red Bonnets. The workers who grabbed on to this rickety vehicle once more found themselves separated from their class brothers and sisters and manipulated by local exploiters and politicians in need of re-election.

THE UNIONS RUN AFTER THE RED BONNETS WITHOUT CATCHING THEM

FO is the only union to have supported the demonstration of the Red Bonnets in Quimper on 2 November. The other federations called for a gathering on the same day at Carhaix. Without the FO, which was firmly fastened to the Red Bonnets and the Committee, they also turned out in several Breton towns on 23 November.

The objective: to put forward an alternative to the Red Bonnets and the Committee which can relive the success of Quimper on 30 November.

Mission failed: on 2 November at Carhaix there were no more than 3,000 under the flags of the CGT, the FSU and the Solidaires group of unions; on 23rd there would only be 5,000 to 7,000 to pound the streets for the CGT and the CFDT. The anti-Red Cap unions explained that they didn't want to march with the bosses. This explanation should fool no one because they are always in the front line when it's a matter of inciting workers to defend factories and jobs, rather than their incomes, when the bosses lay them off. They are the ones who link income to employment, who want us to believe that without work there's no hope. They are the ones who call for general mobilisation after isolating the last struggles against redundancies. Finally, it's always them who call for gatherings around factories in struggle at the point where the main conflicts are over.

FOR AN INDEPENDENT WORKERS' ACTION

Let's recall the slogan of "living and working in the country", the antechamber of "true" regionalism, the way to independence. Who can seriously believe that the fact of deciding a bit closer to home will change the nature of this little state or autonomous region? Who can pretend that Breton bosses sack fewer people than the others? Who can think that capitalist social relations can miraculously disappear as soon as you cross the Vilaine river? Only those who aspire to nice positions in this virtual micro-state, not the workers who are laid off by "their" bosses, whether they are Breton, French or Norwegian.

Is it really necessary to attach ourselves to work places and defend living and working in the country? Certainly, the shutting down of a factory, a place of suffering for most of the workers, means straight away the loss of work and income. Yet it is precisely this link between work and income which needs to be severed by the collective and independent action of wage earners with or without work. What's really at stake for proletarians is not paying twice for the survival of capital: first by their exploitation, second by their expulsion from production and their fall into destitution. For this to happen it's not necessary for workers in struggle against redundancies and factory closures to think of themselves as better managers than the bosses by putting forward alternative proposals on the bosses' terrain.

On the contrary, they must proudly proclaim "*It is you who have taken the decision, not us; and so we have been subjected to the consequences of your decisions. Having had a job that you've got rid of, we demand our pay, and that's that. Until when? That's very simple – until we retire. And that, we are going to impose on you as you imposed a job on us before taking it away.*" How can this be achieved? By a struggle together of all the proletarians plunged into misery by capital and its state. A struggle capable of organising itself in areas to collectively take the necessities of life, by force if necessary: no longer paying debts to banks, or paying for transport, rent, electricity etc.; going to help ourselves together to what's in the supermarkets.

This is the condition to "live in the country" when work leaves. There is no real alternative to this type of collective and independent action against capital and the state. The defeats of recent fights are there to demonstrate it. But this is only possible if the proletariat is strong, capable of imposing its perspectives and its *agenda* as the bosses like to say. Proving their strength and their autonomy from all the other classes of society, the exploited in struggle will become a reference point, a torch lighting up the night for the most isolated workers and the poor peasants, victims as they are of the capitalist exploitation of the land.

COLLECTIVELY TAKE WHAT WE NEED TO LIVE FIGHT FOR A GUARANTEED INCOME ORGANISE INDEPENDENTLY TO FIGHT CAPITAL AND THE STATE

Mouvement Communiste/Kolektivně proti kapitálu, 29 November 2013

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