

Mouvement Communiste

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HOW AND WHY SHOULD WE STRUGGLE AGAINST REDUNDANCIES ?

INTRODUCTION

The question of what to do when faced with redundancies and company closures regularly returns as the order of the day in the preoccupations of comrades. Why should we be surprised?

It's not that relocations are that much more numerous than they were in the past. Only those who only want to remember things on the scale of one generation can think in this way, because it has always been the case across industrial sectors, and not just during the last five or ten years. From the textile industry to iron and coal mining, from shoemaking to steel... Capital always reorganises its production, closing here and transferring there, abandoning technologies which have become obsolete so as to rush into new markets which become outdated in their turn.

This is the very nature of capitalism, its principal means of ensuring its survival throughout the cycles of development. There is no miracle. While capitalism dominates, it will be like this. And yet, despite this, tens of thousands of workers, hundreds of thousands at certain points, are confronted with problems of closure or displacement of their place of exploitation, and each time the same question is asked: what do we do to defend ourselves?

Because even proletarians who are the most conscious of the link between capital and business closures are certainly obliged to defend their skins when the bosses' decisions fall on their heads. It is capitalist society which is the cause, but while waiting for the chance to bring it down, it is certainly necessary to defend their means of subsistence today. We cannot content ourselves with general abstractions, however right they may be. It is necessary to survive. And the announcement to proletarians of the closure of the enterprise where they work, whatever the cause, is always felt as a heavy blow, and seen as a catastrophe!

WHY STRUGGLE ?

But there begins the real problem for workers. It is not the end, it is the beginning! Often the employees are distraught at the announcement of enterprise closures. Time and time again over the last few years we have seen men and women of our class really crying in front of the TV cameras which, no doubt, thoroughly enjoy the spectacle of proletarians in despair. This is the worst thing that can happen to us: not the closure of businesses, but proletarians who sink into despair. In this case, alas there isn't much to do. As always, if proletarians don't raise their heads, they are sunk. But there are also plenty of other situations in which our class brothers and sisters want to find a way out of the sorry situation they find themselves in.

And in this kind of situation, conscious¹ workers must not make any mistake about the objective. We won't see the end of business closures and redundancies without fighting against the capitalist mode of production, obviously! But when workers confronting this sort of situation want to take the bit between their teeth it would be a grave error to content ourselves with harping on about how there is no solution within the framework of capitalist society. Because here proletarians are not concerned with fighting to kill the system of exploitation, but with saving their skins. And they are right. If the struggle of proletarians commits itself resolutely against the closure of businesses, as communists we are resolutely on their side, and without reservations. But also without demagoguery.

It is not a question of snivelling like the trade unionist leftists² of all persuasions about "*the capacities of our firm, which is in a perfect condition to produce*" or "*our skills which will be lost*" or other nonsense which we unfortunately hear too often. The most important strength of the working class is its collective consciousness. In the first place, the understanding that, from the moment when the boss, in his permanent search for productivity gains, has made the choice to sacrifice this or that sector of production, this site of manufacturing, it means that it has nothing to do with "our competence" or with the fact that the site he has chosen to close is in a perfect condition; he really doesn't give a toss about that. He has worked it out and made his decisions. Our know-how, our skills, our past efforts... he doesn't give a damn. The skills of workers, the know-how, the perfect condition of the installation, or worse, the historic cradle of the firm, all that, the boss tells us by his actions, does not count in the making of the decision. And to be able to defend ourselves effectively after the blow of the closure decision has fallen, we have to learn the reasons of capital well, not to accept them

1 Of their class interests for sure!

2 They are not the only mourners but they are the most significant example of them.

but to be better able to fight against their concrete consequences.

As elsewhere, where the boss wants to transfer his production, there are skills, there is know-how, there are installations which are or will be at the height of technological innovation. To believe that we are irreplaceable here because we are the best is a stupid vanity which can only lead us to a dead end because it is to accept the game of competition between workers which the boss wants to trap us in. Those who travel this road want to prove that they are the best, that they are better than the others, that “our workplace” performs best, etc., and they are beaten before they begin. We have already seen this hundreds of times.

No, in the case where workers react angrily to closure, it is not these arguments which have to be put forward. They condemn us in advance. On the contrary, conscious workers have a duty to defend arguments which are both true and perfectly convincing.

“Honourable bosses, we workers have done the job that you asked of us. It is you who rules the firm and you who rules the world. You have power and the state at your service. And now, with more or less fallacious arguments which we won’t even discuss, you want to condemn us to poverty? You, Gentlemen, are going to switch to a new type of production. You are going to continue to make your capital grow on the exploitation of other workers elsewhere. But we, that you have exploited for so many years, have no other means of living than by our wages. The day will come, when we will have demolished your system, when it will be otherwise. But, for the moment, we only have our pay. It is you who has taken the fruits of our labour but as for us, we have no reserves. And do we have to accept the redundancies that you present to us as absolutely necessary and inevitable? Necessary for what and for who? For your capital, but surely not for the lives of us, the workers. Then we are going to make you continue paying us even if you decide that we no longer have a function. It is you who has taken the decision, not us; and therefore we do not have to submit to the consequences of your decisions. Whether we have a job or whether you have got rid of it, we demand our pay, and that’s final. Until when? That’s very simple, until retirement. This is something we will impose on you as you have imposed a job on us before retirement.” It is on the political bases of this reasoning that we have to build our defence, not on those of the economy and the enterprise.

Obviously, this only makes sense if the workers truly have the will to defend themselves. This is everything. Because this kind of position, if it is not to be only propagandist boasting, necessitates the conscious and determined struggle of proletarians. There is in effect an intrinsic link: no valid discourse without the class struggle, but no serious class struggle without valid and clear objectives. *A priori*, workers are not convinced that they can impose being paid without working, because, all their lives, morality, education, the way of life, teaches them the opposite: *“you must work conscientiously to get on in life and be respectable”*.

But the world which surrounds them is full of people who, like landlords for example, don’t work. And no one is shocked by that.

Why should we accept that when the boss decides that some sector of workers is no longer useful to him, proletarians will no longer be paid? By putting forward the necessity of pay, including when there is no longer any work, we are only in the end putting forward our means of survival in the society which we live in. Proletarians must at least have the will to impose that.

Not being responsible for the calamities of capitalist society, they do not have to accept it as obligatory to submit to its consequences. Obviously, this frankness of language, which is the only way to face workplace closures, if the workers really want to defend themselves, must be accompanied by another truth, not easy to hear. We must have the honesty to say to our class comrades that this objective necessitates proletarian struggle on a high level. We will not make them pay us, including when there is no more work, by petitions, resigned trudging through the streets or by trade union snivelling but by a determined fight to make the bosses tremble. And better if possible, to march towards the overthrow of the system of exploitation.

SOME EXAMPLES

In the examples which follow, we will see “the unions” cited as actors in the struggle. The idea that the unions can be, once again, organs of struggle created and run by the workers is a long way from our point of view³... But in considering the type of struggle, it often turns out that the union militants in a workplace (including the union delegates) participate, even launching the struggle against redundancies while defending the idea and the practice of selling their skin more expensively, to the great displeasure of those who think that trade unionism is “all black” or “all white” without seeing the infinite shades of grey which arise during a struggle.

There is no point in hiding the fact that, in France, whatever may be the workers’ will to struggle (and whether the nature of the struggle is offensive or defensive), there have not been examples (apart from the Renault strike in April-May 1947 or a few workplaces in May-June 1968 and then only for a limited time) of the creation of workers regroupments doing something other than “honest”, base trade unionism, and transforming themselves into political committees capable of thinking of the struggle before during and after as going beyond the horizon of capital and putting into practice the necessity of revolution. And in this situation, the “revolutionary” militants, by refusing to put forward this perspective, and by restricting themselves to the false

³ See MC Letter no. 11 “Trade unions and political struggle”.

alternative of base unionism today and councils (or the party, according to their ideology) the day after tomorrow, bear an important part of the responsibility.

Let's return to the examples, certainly few in number, during the last thirty or forty years, where the workers set out resolutely on the road of struggle against redundancies. From memory, we can cite Rateau at La Courneuve, near Paris. The bosses had announced in the years after May '68 that they wanted to close the place but they backed down in the face of the real threat of a conflict which would shake the whole of the Saint-Denis Seine. We should remember that at that time, in that district, as in the whole belt around Paris, there was a tremendous concentration of factories. The threat of the CGT-PCF replying to an eventual closure of Rateau by a conflict across the whole region had pushed back the bosses who knew that the Stalinist apparatus, at that time, possessed the means to carry out its policy. Rateau did not close. The bosses set about it in another way by taking decades to gradually remove the workforce and the production. Up until last year, when there was still a burst of activity at Rateau (now Alstom) in La Courneuve. Finally, the bosses have achieved the objective. But that, as long as capitalism survives is inevitable⁴.

Another example of a workers battle of this type is that of La Chapelle Darblay, a paper mill in Normandy that the bosses had decided to close in the 1980s.. For months the workers and the CGT union had conducted a guerrilla campaign: blocking roads, massive demonstrations, battles with the cops... That lasted two years without a break. The business was technologically obsolete but the proletarians did not accept being sacked. It was the French state which finally decided that it had to stop the waste of time. To preserve 1000 jobs, there was a billion Francs of investment. A million Francs per job preserved. There were some job losses, early retirements and negotiated departures. But a good part of the workers kept their places.

And still today, after many restructurations, buyouts, etc., the firm still has around 500 workers and produces a third of the paper for newspapers made in France. Even there, as long as capitalist society functions more or less long term, proletarians will not be able to prevent the search for gains in productivity.

The workers are not bound to be beaten when the bosses decide to close such or such a firm. They have to understand well that it is difficult, that the outcome is uncertain, that they can't scrimp on struggle, but, finally, for the worker it is a case of: are we ready to put the same energy into defending our means of existence that we put all year (and even decade) long into the service of the bosses in the process of exploitation? It is first of all and above all this question that we have to respond to. And if we are ready to respond in the affirmative, then, there is always a perspective.

And yet, very often, even in the red mist of anger against the bosses, proletarians feel that the outcome of the confrontation to save their jobs is blocked. But for all that, we don't have to give up. Because you can always sell your proletarian skin more or less dearly. From that moment on there is nothing more to lose.

We have to start from the real principle that society is rich and that the bosses have got the cash. What's more, the profitability of businesses, as they say, doesn't stop progressing despite even very severe cyclical hitches. And if it wasn't the case, as far as the workers are concerned it wouldn't ever be our problem. Whether it is the boss, the state, or his sister-in-law who pays, we want money to be able to live. It is only a question of the balance of forces.

The worker who cries or contents himself with symbolic protest will be unemployed without a penny. The one who rolls up their sleeves and fights will perhaps be able to impose leaving conditions which are not catastrophic. Everything depends on whether proletarians are ready to put sufficient energy into the fight to frighten the bosses and the state. There is no subtlety about it, it is the proletarian struggle in the strictest sense of the term.

"Boss, you want my skin. Perhaps you'll have it but I'm going to sell it dearly."

This is the only language that the bosses understand.

It is not shameful to demand money for redundancies. The worker has no other means of living than making the boss and the state pay the most possible. Therefore, why not for the highest possible wage for life? And in that area there are many cases where the workers, through their struggles, imposed leaving conditions greatly superior to what the bosses or the state were preparing for them, whether it is by acceptable redeployment, early retirement, higher redundancy money or something else. The worker must sell their skin as expensively as possible and stop at nothing to do that. Violence is one tool to consider. Those who are resigned to their fate will be beaten along with those who are afraid to fight.

It is certainly never guaranteed that by fighting we will obtain tangible or satisfactory results. Nothing is ever won in advance. On the contrary, what is guaranteed is that the resigned and the tearful will be crushed, capital being without pity for the weak. As we have said in a past letter⁵, without going back too far, the proletarians who have obtained the most have been those who have not stepped back from confrontation: the steel workers in the 1980s or the workers of Chausson Creil. Retirement brought forward to the age of 49 or 50 for example (as for the workers in the book trade, the steel workers etc.) is certainly not Nirvana, but for the worker concerned it saves his life and we only have one of those. Obtaining 40 or 50,000 euros severance pay,

4 As always it is but a single generation of workers who have protected their jobs.

5 See: lettre de Mouvement Communiste n°4, October 2002.

more in some cases, certainly doesn't stop the redundancy. It doesn't save jobs, but it allows the workers concerned to secure their everyday lives and gives them the time and other means to sort themselves out. It is their skin which is thus saved.

Alsthom, 1972

From this perspective, that of proletarians obtaining the least bad conditions possible, there are plenty of examples available. In the aftermath of 1968, an average firm like Delle-Alsthom, in Saint-Ouen⁶, was the talk of the town when workers' struggles were at a high level. In 1972, the bosses announced that the D.A. site of Saint-Ouen would close. There were 530 employees, and at that time redundancy payments were symbolic: one twentieth of a month per year worked.

In that place there was a young and combative working class. It was so badly paid that while the young changed bosses as soon as they could find something better, the old, most often hired after the war, only aspired to retire, and as soon as possible. At that time it was at age 65.

They launched the strike with an occupation to get some money. The demand from that time appears today to be incredibly modest: they wanted three months wages for everyone by way of redundancy money. It was the CFDT which ran the operations in this factory where the PCF was nevertheless hegemonic. A team of combative militants, excluded from the CGT in 1967, took refuge in the CFDT and acted in some ways almost as if they were an autonomous workers' committee.

A leaflet distributed all over Saint-Ouen at the beginning of the battle, signed by the secretary of the CFDT said: "...we cannot be certain that we are going to win, because the outcome of a struggle is always uncertain, but we are going to make them pay for their dirty tricks, etc." At least it was clear.

The strike was total, with workshops and offices occupied.... And victorious. By a whisker they got the three month payments, and the old, for one of the very first times in France, saw themselves offered the possibility of ceasing waged activity at the age of fifty seven and a half. Officially, the possibility of retirement at 60 came to be instituted, and with 30 months on ASSEDIC (paid at 80 %), that made 57 and a half years. There were also not bad redeployments for volunteers (there was very little unemployment at that time).

And yet this place was part of the CGE trust which prided itself on never giving in to strikers. But this strike took place at exactly the same time as that of Joint Français at Saint-Brieuc which was also an affiliate of CGE, and which made the front pages of the newspapers for having resisted an intervention by the CRS.

And when, at the end of 15 days of striking, demonstrations, sabotage operations (notably against the CGE stand at the electrical components fair), the situation was still blocked, a squad of strikers seized the PA system of the factory to announce that the strikers of DA would that very afternoon go down to the workshops of the other Alsthom de Saint-Ouen factory, la Savoissienne, where there were 1400 workers, to launch the strike. The bosses knew it was no joke and chose the very next morning to put forward proposals which led to results. The end of the strike was voted on with 80% of the workers present. It was unanimous less one vote and one abstention. The atmosphere and the results were such that the boys said "*if they finally announce that it won't close, we'll go back on strike for it to close*".

If the bosses no longer wanted that factory, the mass of workers couldn't stand the sight of it either. And during the months after the strike, the aggression of the workers waiting to be laid off knew no bounds. They had to move equipment, tons of archives and plans to the other factories in the group, and they managed to sell it instead. It was moved, but it wouldn't really be true say it was reused.

Steel Industry, 1979

Not so far back, and on a larger scale, was the fight of the steel workers of the North and East of France in 1979. Within the framework of the general reorganisation of steel production in Europe, the French bosses announced the closure of a good part of the steelworks, also including (which is nothing new) some brand new production sites.

For several months there were more or less violent demonstrations. During the rising in Paris, on 23 March 1979, the lads rolled tens of tons of rolled up sheet metal into the street. On another occasion, the Longwy police station was attacked with a bulldozer following fighting on a demonstration.

For sure, in parallel, the unions, political parties, mayors, priests and similar organised "dead town" days, which caused a striker to say on television: "*when are we going to replace the 'dead town' days by town in revolt weeks, and minutes of silence by appeals to struggle?*". This expressed the ambiance very well.

In the end, steel industry proletarians obtained guarantees never seen before, retirement at 49 etc. They did not stop the closure of steelworks – they couldn't do that and it wasn't their objective. This was put forward by the unions, but not by the workers.

Chausson, 1995

Even nearer to our time is an episode of the same kind which occurred when Renault and Peugeot

6 City close to Paris.

decided to liquidate their common affiliate, the Chausson factory of Creil in the Oise district⁷. Over the years there had been repeated planned redundancy schemes which had reduced the work force from more than 7000 to less than 1500. Finally there was the announcement of closure, with the resulting apoplexy of the comrades.

Much has been written about this closure, drawing out one or other aspect of it, but what interests us as militant workers, is the struggle. The fight only got going right at the end of the process of liquidation, and it took a lot of time for the workers to finally be convinced that they had to do it, because if they didn't they were going to be thrown out with just a few crumbs.

There was a mixture of radical trade unionism and rank and file worker reactions, with all the unions, but also with a more or less independent strike committee, with workers taking initiatives without going through the unions. The comrades did some pretty good actions: from taking the stage of the 8 o'clock television news on TF1 to often turbulent demonstrations in the region, from invading the Renault Flins factory and running in chain formation (with some bailiffs almost being stripped naked), to several occasions when glass was broken at the trade disputes court etc. We can remember the games of hide and seek with the CRS when the lads left Creil for some operations with false meeting places, bogus trips to disperse the cops, etc.

In short, the comrades did not sink into tearful petitions. This was left to the dead town unions (on the department or federal level) and co.

The comrades didn't do too badly and anyway did much better than was expected at the start of the liquidation. Workers retired at 50 and even 49 for some (at a time when it was normally more than 60) with compensation which, while not extraordinary, was far superior to previous planned redundancies, and reasonable redeployment to other factories, Renault amongst others, although the geographical location of the factories was a real problem in this case because they had to move to another region.

We could cite a number of other examples. But for us communists who are concerned with the independence of proletarians vis-à-vis unions and all the channels by which the state tries to make workers' contestation go away, these are the interesting ones because, on various levels, they involved the appearance of real forms of workers' autonomy, where the militants refused the siren songs of reformism.

Because there lies the trap for militants. Whatever is the objective workers fix when they enter into struggle, a choice immediately imposes itself: support committee or workers' committee and strike committee.

SUPPORT COMMITTEE OR WORKERS' COMMITTEE AND STRIKE COMMITTEE

The more or less combative trade unionists (there's no question there) and now almost all the militants who call themselves extreme left are creating or getting involved in support committees. Integrated as they are into the very heart of the state, their first preoccupation is to unite the various components: unions, political parties, MPs, mayors, regional councillors, priests and bishops if possible, so as to constitute a committee of support, claiming that it is to support the struggle of the workers, but always with the result that this is pushed into the background.

Unilever 2000-2001

Here is another exemplary case. A Lever firm, at Haubourdin close to Lille, went through several restructuring plans which reduced the workforce from more than 2000 to 453 employees in a few years. It was a firm belonging to the agro-food giant Unilever, which was engaged in a global battle against Nestlé and Danone and which confronted Procter & Gamble with its washing powder and cleaning products. Unilever had to restructure its use of production and rid itself of obsolete factories like the one at Haubourdin. In April 2000, they announced the phased closure of the site for December 2000. The reaction of the workers started out rather half-heartedly behind the CGT-CFDT-FO inter-union group, and began by looking for the support of political or trade union professionals.

Then a demonstration in Rotterdam, on 2 May 2000, to protest against the 25,000 redundancies across the world announced by the group was simply clubbed down by the Dutch police. From then on the nature of the struggle changed. The workers decided to intervene in all the public events of the Lille region (the Lille fair, various Inaugurations, etc..) so as to appeal to the good memories of the Socialist Party politicians (Aubry, Mauroy, etc.) and then made systematic visits to all the local firms, starting with those on strike, then all the others to explain the reasons for the struggle, and demonstrations at the French headquarters of Unilever in June 2000, at the Belgian headquarters in Waterloo in October 2000, etc.

Finally, rather than snivelling, as the *trade unionists* of Danone were to do later by appealing for a boycott of Danone products, the workers took over the supermarkets of the region and distributed the Unilever products free to the customers. They even got into the Auchan hypermarket at Vélizy in the Paris region at one point. During the struggle, between actions, the workers continued to work and thus got their pay, which reinforced cohesion. The majority participated in the strike or in actions, and even if the inter-union group was to the fore, the workers had the feeling of leading their own strike.

The result of events in April 2001: the redundancy payments were considerably increased (to around

7 50 km northwards from Paris

250,000 Francs) and 189 employees kept their jobs, the factory resuming work⁸. Even if demands like “*stop redundancies in firms that make a profit*” were put forward by the political militants, this struggle showed that, providing they display imagination and collective strength, workers can sell their skin dearly.

Danone, 2001

The best example that we can cite in this matter is what happened at the Lu factory of the Danone group in Ris Orangis⁹ when the management announced that it would liquidate the factory. Here are the facts. The closure project was revealed by the newspaper *Le Monde* of 11 January 2001. On 12 January in the morning an inter-union leaflet¹⁰ dated the 12th and signed by all the unions in the factory announced:

- A meeting took place at 11.00 between the Mayor of Ris, Mr. Mandon and the factory unions.
- A coordination of mayors of the municipalities containing the Lu factories was created on the initiative of Mr. Mandon and some members of the general council. A first meeting of this coordination took place in the offices of the general assembly. The aim is to meet the Minister of Labour. He has assured all the Lu employees of his most total support.
- A round table will be organised by the Prefect of Evry during the next week.
- A meeting of staff representatives of the Europe group on Wednesday 17 January.
- A meeting of staff representatives at the EU Commission on 18 January.

Thus, 24 hours after the announcement of the closure project everything is stitched up. All the meetings were fixed with the mayors, the Prefect, the Minister, councillors... The workers in the factory (which in this particular case were mostly women labourers) hadn't been given a single word in the matter.

The leftist trade unionists in the factory had made the choice not to organise the workers' response, not to involve the workers in decisions to defend themselves directly but to look for help from the state institutions. And everything which happened subsequently around Lu Danone, that is to say not a lot, was predetermined by this political choice to betray the workers' interests.

Because in this matter, the trade unionists had led the workers from demonstrations to rallies, had hammed it up in front of the media, had held “speak outs” as they called them, but at no point did they have the will to rely on the potential combativity of the workers. On the day of the EU Commission meeting, at the Danone headquarters, the anger was obvious amongst the workers who'd turned out in large numbers. The unionists went into meetings with the bosses lasting hours, leaving everyone in the street in the bitter cold, without bringing back even the slightest bit of information. Obviously, little by little, the participants in the gathering disappeared into the nearby cafés. And this choice was deliberate. It's a trick used time and time again by trade unionists to disperse gatherings without saying so, so as not to base themselves on the strength of the workers¹¹.

Two months later a demonstration was organised at Château-Thierry where there is another factory in the same group. At the rally in front of the (Socialist Party) town hall, there was not a single discordant note. The mayor and the puppets in sashes, with the factory delegates repeating exactly the same discourse of resignation with the leftists not even wanting to intervene, surrendering their place directly to the state apparatus. This whole little world appealing to the Left to pass a law against redundancies in firms that make a profit.

Because let's recall the situation:

- Danone, whose MD, Franck Riboud, is a personage classified as “on the left”.
- The government was left-wing, Jospin.
- The PCF was in the government.
- The MP for Ris Orangis, Mandon, was in the Socialist Party.
- The general council had a left majority.
- Etc.

And the whole little circle of leftist trade unionists ceaselessly drained the independence of the working class even before it had the slightest chance to show itself.

In the end, there was no struggle of the workers of Lu Danone, apart from a little strike at Calais. If the workers didn't do too badly from the point of view of redeployments and compensation, no one can say that it was the result of the non-existent struggle, but because Danone had called some of these places “social”, and paid for peace. The MD effectively declared: “*it's better to get on with closing sites now that the firm has the means to compensate the staff rather than wait because then it perhaps won't be possible any more*”.

8 In May 2003, when a buyer failed to appear, the 189 workers found themselves on the streets and began a desperate but still pugnacious struggle, at the same time as the movement against the pension reform.

9 25 km south-eastwards from Paris.

10 We have this text available. See also: *Bulletin Ouvrier* n°2.

11 *Translator's Note* – you might say “the cops use baton charges, the Left use MPs and union leaders”.

BY WAY OF A CONCLUSION

The attitude of conscious militants in the examples cited above has been very varied. At Chausson Creil, during the months and months before the closure, the mass of workers did not believe it and did not feel ready to fight. In this case the best political militants can't do much. Then, as time passed, the workers became conscious of what had to happen. During all that time the most conscious militants did not abandon the perspective of struggle. They did not walk into that treason of support committees with various components of the state, and when struggle became possible they did not do something else.

As for Alstom Delle at the time, the Trotskyists had launched a support committee in Saint-Ouen with the secondary school students and some political hacks. But the worker militants, who were then in Lutte Ouvrière¹², had been clear from the announcement of the closure that they would never participate.

And yet, there as well, the mass of the workers took some time to convince themselves that struggle was the only way out. Paradoxically, while this was a factory where the workers had a reputation for often being on strike, when the bosses announced that the factory was going to close, it took several months before the strike became possible.

And this fundamental difference between the advocates of support committees and the partisans of workers' and strike committees is as old as opportunism. A comrade who lived through the 1947 strike at Renault, told us how one day, at that time, when the strike committee ran things in the two departments on strike, a Trotskyist from another workshop, who was invited to the meetings of the strike committee, proposed the creation of... a support committee. The response of the comrades was clear and definite: "*no way. The strikers themselves must remain the masters of how their strike is conducted*".

It's enough to say that this opposition between revolutionary workers' politics and opportunism on the question didn't begin yesterday.

Nothing is certain in this world, the situation of the wage worker along with the rest. Today you have a permanent contract, tomorrow, perhaps in three or six months or in three years, you'll find yourself laid off. And it will always be like that as long as we haven't put paid to the capitalist system. Fear doesn't save the worker from this danger ! On the contrary, it weakens him and makes the threat seem more dreadful and concrete. It's all a question of the morale of the working class in the struggle against capital. Even when it is very pressing, the worst thing for the women and men of our class is not poverty, it is despair. Comrade worker, in the face of the bosses' blows, don't give in, fight back, it's your only hope.

Brussels-Paris, 26 March 2005.

For all correspondence write (without adding anything else to the address) to: BP 1666, Centre Monnaie 1000, Bruxelles 1, Belgium
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¹² *Translator's Note* - Lutte Ouvrière is an organisation (and a paper) similar to the SWP in Britain. It is a large, extremely populist and opportunist Trotskyist party. The only difference is that it has a tradition of being more critical of the unions than the SWP.