

## SYNOPSIS:

# CONTINENTAL CLAIROIX: Son of a struggle

Photography by

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March 11<sup>th</sup> 2009. German leading tires manufacturer Continental closed its factory in Clairoux in Oise, a department in the north of France. 1120 people were laid off. Since 2007, the employees had accepted to work 40 hours per week (instead of the legal 35 hours per week), in order to protect their jobs.

In front of the factory, we can still see a big banner: «*Antisocial continental. The crooks must pay* ». Disappointed, bitter and angry, workers and trade unions have united, and nearly all of the 1120 ex-employees took part in every demonstration and general meeting.

April 21<sup>st</sup>, the «Contis» (people who used to work for Continental) met in the sub-prefecture of the Court of Sarreguemines (where the head office of Continental France is located) which dismissed their demand of cancelling the mass layoff. They vandalize the offices of the Prefecture and the entrance of the factory. The production of tires stopped and the struggle intensified.

April 23<sup>rd</sup> they headed to Hanover, Germany, for the Continental shareholders' meeting. The result: 23 hours of train, a six-hour demonstration, and a motion read by the workers in front of all the Continental executives. Karl-Thomas Neumann, Continental Chief Executive Officer at the time, was called an "asshole" by the workers.

From then on, the « Contis » came to the forefront of media attention having the sympathy of the public opinion. They became a symbol of resistance for all the other French factories in jeopardy (Goodyear, Lear, or Michelin), and became a symbol of dignity facing the anonymity of mass layoffs. They showed how there are human beings behind the words « human resources. The message was clear for everyone, but the negotiations with Continental were blocked.

May 6<sup>th</sup>, the « Contis » arrived in force in Sarreguemines (east of France), and stopped another Continental factory production. Negotiations progressed, but demonstrations went on in order to get the attention of the media. A demonstration took place in front of the MEDEF headquarter ("Movement of the French Enterprises"), the Paris Stock Exchange and the Ministry of Finance. May 30<sup>th</sup>, Continental gave a 50000 euros bonus to each discharged employee and promised to maintain their salaries until December 2009, as well as other advantages. Everything is signed on June 25<sup>th</sup>.

The last fight of the « Contis » was to support 7 workers accused of destroying the prefecture. September 1<sup>st</sup>, the court of Compiègne pronounced its verdict. Only one person is discharged, while the 6 others are condemned to prison with despite for 3 -5 months. « We are not the crooks » yelled the workers. The struggle may not be over, as they are still yelling.