

» [Print](#)

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only.

"Keep your so-called workers," U.S. boss tells France

Fri, Feb 22 2013

By [Emmanuel Jarry](#) and [Catherine Bremer](#)

PARIS (Reuters) - The CEO of a U.S. tyre maker has delivered a crushing summary of how some outsiders view France's work ethic in a letter saying he would have to be stupid to take over a factory whose staff only put in three hours work a day.

Titan International's Maurice Taylor, nicknamed "The Grizz" for his negotiating style, told the left-wing French industry minister in a letter published by media on Wednesday that he had no interest in rescuing a plant set for closure.

"The French workforce gets paid high wages but works only three hours. They get one hour for breaks and lunch, talk for three and work for three," Taylor wrote on February 8 in the letter in English to the minister, Arnaud Montebourg.

"I told this to the French union workers to their faces. They told me that's the French way!" Taylor added in the letter, which was posted by business daily Les Echos on its website and which the ministry confirmed was genuine.

"Titan is going to buy a Chinese tire company or an Indian one, pay less than one Euro per hour wage and ship all the tires France needs," he said. "You can keep the so-called workers."

Socialist President Francois Hollande might take some comfort in Taylor's view of his own country's business policies: "The U.S. government is not much better than the French," he said, referring to a dispute over Chinese exports.

Montebourg's office said the letter was an authentic response to Paris consulting Titan as a possible buyer of U.S. group Goodyear's Amiens Nord factory in northern France.

The minister refrained from an immediate reply: "'Don't worry, there will be a response," Montebourg told reporters on Wednesday after meeting Hollande. "It's better written down."

Union leaders were less cautious. CGT official Mickael Wamen said Taylor belonged more "in an asylum" than the boardroom of a multinational company.

DERISION

Taylor's comments are the latest blow to France's image after verbal attacks last year by Montebourg on firms seeking to shut ailing industrial sites prompted international mockery.

Combined with concerned over plans for a 75 percent "millionaires tax", Montebourg's antics drove London Mayor Boris Johnson to remark to an international business audience that it seemed France was being run by left-wing revolutionaries.

Montebourg has also lashed out at cheap imports of manufactured goods from low-wage countries like China and last year told the boss of Indian steelmaker ArcelorMittal he was unwelcome in a spat over a shuttered plant in France.

Despite having per-head productivity levels that rank among the best in Europe, economists blame France's rigid hiring and firing laws for a long industrial decline that has dented exports. Many also fault the country's 35-hour work week.

Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co's Amiens Nord plant employs 1,250 workers, who have been battling demands that they work more shifts or accept layoffs. The government said in January that the site faced imminent closure.

Talks with Titan over a possible purchase of the plant's farm tyre section fell through last September after a failure to reach a deal with the CGT union on voluntary redundancies.

Titan did not return calls on Monday evening for comment, but the company's website says that Wall Street analysts have dubbed Taylor "The Grizz" for his tough negotiating style.

His letter to Montebourg accuses the French government of "doing nothing" in the face of Chinese competition.

"Sir, your letter states that you want Titan to start a discussion. How stupid do you think we are?" he wrote. "Titan is the one with the money and the talent to produce tires. What does the crazy union have? It has the French government."

(Additional reporting by Christian Plumb and Elizabeth Pineau; Writing by Catherine Bremer; Editing by Alastair Macdonald)



© Thomson Reuters 2011. All rights reserved. Users may download and print extracts of content from this website for their own personal and non-commercial use only. Republication or redistribution of Thomson Reuters content, including by framing or similar means, is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Thomson Reuters. Thomson Reuters and its logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of the Thomson Reuters group of companies around the world.

Thomson Reuters journalists are subject to an Editorial Handbook which requires fair presentation and disclosure of relevant interests.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only.