

LDV workers: “80 percent of the lads here think the union is a waste of time”

Robert Stevens
16 June 2009

The 800 workers made redundant at LDV, the Birmingham, England-based van maker, returned to the plant on June 11 and 12 to seek advice from public bodies, including Jobcentre Plus, Birmingham City Council and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. They were asked to attend in order to receive information about their outstanding wage and holiday entitlement, as well as information about claiming Job Seekers Allowance and other social benefits. (See “Britain: Van maker LDV sacks more than 800 workers”)

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to workers attending the advice sessions.

Colin Higgins has worked at the plant for 14 years in the tracking section. He said, “They are a great set of lads in there. I only live three miles down the road. The workers are all down. For a lot of them it looks like they’re going to really struggle to find anything wage-wise of this sort of calibre. A lot of them are going to have to retrain. Quite a few of us are doing other things. We’ve had no choice. We sort of saw this coming.

“I just think it is shame as there are some really good workers, and we’ve had no help. It’s been the same for a long time. People at the top are just helping themselves, and nobody looks after the workforce.

“I’d say that 80 percent of the blokes would probably say that the union has been a joke. I could hold my hand up and say 80 percent of the lads here think the union is a waste of time. All we saw all the time was the same thing; the gaffers getting looked after while the workers—who were the backbone of this place—were doing everything the company wanted. Everything they said, we would do. And we never saw any benefits from any of it.

“Before Christmas, we were churning out vans. They

might as well have had a whip out saying, ‘More, more, more!’

“I’m on the electrical side. I’ve got a few options open and care work as well. I’ve done quite a few things, so I’m alright. But some of the lads don’t know what they are going to do.

“What can you do? It’s alright them saying there’s retraining, but there are bills to pay.

“The amount of money they were asking for to keep the plant going, they are now going to spend it on dole money. It’s ridiculous. Then you have the cost to this community as well.

“I thought at one point why don’t the government just step in, pay the money and say we own it?”

Asked why he believed the unions had not conducted a struggle to keep LDV open Colin answered, “That is a hard question. It is something that started quite a few years ago, probably from Thatcher’s era. It all started from then, with her getting the unions onto her side. And now we are just in that circle.”

Pete was an office engineer at the plant. He said, “I’ve only been working here about seven months. It’s a shame for Birmingham, and it will have a big knock on for everyone else. I feel sorry for the youngsters. You always hear the government talking about going into science and engineering, but there are no jobs there anymore.

“Birmingham took over as the area of the highest employment at the end of last year and to be honest I only see it getting worse. It’s all down to the engineering base of the city and the fact that production has taken a bit of a bashing all round. Then there was all the automotive industry around here.

“To be honest, I don’t think I’ll find a job within an hour’s drive. I would have to look a long way away or even look abroad. I think people have just accepted this

is what has happened. And to be honest I feel that the people on the shop floor should have been treated better. I've not heard about the union, so I think people just accepted it as that is how it is.

“The thing is once we lose these jobs we can never get them back, and we can't all be shopkeepers. This is what's been happening since Maggie Thatcher took over the country. I know one thing—at the age of 39 I can't see myself working in engineering until I'm 65 in this country.”

Max Manza worked in the international sales team at the company. He said, “I've just worked here a year. I started last June. I think things were OK here until February. We had signed up new countries like Poland and Turkey and were selling to Malaysia as well.

“But since the credit crunch it has been quite bad. We were all in limbo really. No one knew what was going to happen. Everyone was trying their best, but the mood wasn't great.

“It is quite difficult these days to find a job. I have already applied for 30-plus jobs, and only one replied, which is not very good. I'm just hoping for the best.

“It is dreadful. The whole Labour government is a circus. The government is saying we don't need manufacturing here, and it's just not fair.”



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