

BAE Systems to cut 3,000 jobs across England

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8 October 2011

Last week BAE Systems, the UK largest defence and security firm, announced that almost 3,000 jobs are to be axed at three of its main manufacturing sites.

The majority of the 2,942 jobs (2,307) are to go at three of BAE's plants in England. These are Samlesbury and Warton in Lancashire and Brough in Yorkshire.

BAE said the cutbacks are required due to a fall in government orders for the Eurofighter Typhoon jet fighter. The Typhoon is jointly built by BAE, the Italian conglomerate Finmeccanica's Alenia Aeronautica and the Netherlands-based defence manufacture EADS. Parts of the cockpit are built in Samlesbury and the final assembly of Typhoon jet is completed at Warton.

BAE cited cutbacks in defence spending in developing economies that have resulted in a slowdown for its building programme for fighter jets. Most orders for Typhoons are placed by the governments of Germany, Spain, Italy and the UK. However, there is uncertainty about how many orders are to be placed in the final tranche of the contract. At present the only other two governments planning to use the Typhoon are Austria and Saudi Arabia.

Another factor cited by BAE for the job losses is slower production on the F-35, a stealth fighter jet that is still in development.

The remaining 600-plus job losses will go at smaller sites and are being imposed due to the fall in workload required for the Tornado fighter jet and the decision to retire the UK's fleet of Harrier fighter jets. This was announced in the government's 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review.

Under its plans, BAE is to end manufacturing at the Brough plant, with almost 900 employees set to lose their jobs. Hawk jet production takes place at the site as well as the construction and repairing of Typhoon fighters. According to a BBC report, staff at Brough were told by email they were to be made redundant.

The Warton plant in Lancashire will lose 822 posts and Samlesbury, also in Lancashire, will lose 565. The job losses represent a reduction of more than 7 percent of the group's 39,000-strong UK workforce.

The redundancies will have a devastating effect in Lancashire and Yorkshire, both areas blighted by high rates of unemployment and their attendant social ills for decades. According to the research group Oxford Economics, a further

5,700 jobs could be at risk at suppliers and related firms as a result of the "knock on" effect of the BAE redundancies. If anything, this is an underestimation.

In Lancashire the job losses announced at BAE mean that in the last period 6,474 jobs have gone from the county's major employers as a result of the governments' austerity programme and the continuing layoffs in the private sector. These include 1,300 jobs at Lancashire County Council and 300 at the Leyland-based entertainment company, MBL Group.

The job losses at BAE also point to changes in the production of warfare aircraft globally, as rival nations seek to establish a degree of military independence from the major powers. A *Financial Times* article explained, "The sudden axing of thousands of jobs at BAE Systems provides the clearest sign yet that the industry the UK has excelled in for so long is changing before its eyes."

A central issue facing BAE, said the FT, was that "emerging market customers increasingly insist that, instead of shipping finished products over from the UK, their manufacture should take place in their own countries, as part of a so-called 'offset' programme".

It noted that "the most significant portion of the job losses announced on Monday were those at Brough, in Yorkshire, where almost 900 positions will be axed. The facility formerly made Hawk trainer jets, but Hawk customer—such as India—are now seeking domestic assembly, creating jobs abroad, but leaving no need for a UK manufacturing workforce."

These job losses follow BA's axing of 15,000 jobs from its global workforce of around 100,000 in the previous two years. These include hundreds of jobs in the UK.

BAE has only been able to carry out these mass cuts due to the role of the trade unions. Unite is the largest union at BAE. It has only raised concerns at the job cuts from the standpoint of the overall interests of British capitalism and the viability of BAE being able to compete effectively in the increasingly cut-throat global defence spending market.

Ian Waddell, Unite's national officer for aerospace, said, "These job losses would be a hammer blow to the UK defence industry, which is already reeling with the consequences of the government's 'buy off the shelf' policy".

No action has been or will be proposed by the union to prevent any job losses. Waddell continued, "We will be seeking urgent talks with BAE Systems to try and clarify where these

jobs are under threat, and to work with the company to avoid compulsory redundancies wherever possible.”

“Avoiding compulsory redundancies” is the well-worn euphemism for Unite and every other trade union to negotiate away workers’ jobs. The fact is they do not oppose job losses, compulsory or not. In the last few years Unite has secured whatever jobs cuts are required by BAE. In 2009, 450 jobs were lost at the Brough plant.

Earlier this year the union negotiated several hundred more job losses. Waddell said in March, as BAE and Unite were in talks over the loss of jobs, that “BAE Systems has done everything possible to avoid sacking people, but the enormity of these cuts is such that compulsory redundancies are now inevitable.”

It is this unbroken record of Unite collaborating with BAE to impose hundreds of job losses over the last decade that has led to the company announcing the complete end of manufacturing at the Brough plant.

Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey was at the Labour Party’s conference in Liverpool when the BAE job losses were announced. He utilised the occasion in order to beat the war drums on behalf of BAE, and British imperialism’s war machine.

Opposed to any action by workers to halt the redundancies, he stated that the prevention of job losses was “in ministers’ hands”. “The government must abandon its blinkered procurement policy,” said McCluskey. “If they don’t, UK taxpayers’ money will be spent on American equipment instead of supporting UK jobs.”

The Unite leader then demanded from the Ministry of Defence and the government that more technology immediately be primed for use in the Typhoon, in order to help the firm sell it. “They need to press ahead with radar developments which would make the Typhoon more exportable. They need to stop dithering on the contract for unmanned aerial vehicles and place it with the UK defence industry, including BAE Systems.”

Unite’s call to fortify the Typhoon and its demand to “buy British” testify to its fervently nationalist programme; one that is completely hostile to the interests of the working class.

It should be noted that the Typhoon and Tornado fighters that McCluskey hails have been used to devastating effect to kill and maim thousands in Britain’s war against Libya this year. The *Financial Times* was sure to note that despite the job losses recently announced, “BAE’s traditional kit still remains in strong demand”. It commented, “Tornado and Typhoon jets flown by the RAF were used ... against the Gaddafi regime. Meanwhile, in March the Saudi Arabian National Guard used a fleet of BAE’s Tactica armoured vehicles in an incursion into Bahrain to suppress the embryonic pro-democracy movement.”

McCluskey also sought to boost the pro-big business Labour Party leader Ed Miliband as being a friend of working people, stating that as he was meeting with a number of Unite shop

stewards, this “showed which side he was on”.

Last week, the union’s campaign focused on an 82-mile bike ride from Brough to the Conservative conference in Manchester. There the workers were met by right-wing Tory MP David Davis, who has made statements alongside fellow Hull-based MP and former Labour Home Secretary Alan Johnson, advancing themselves and their parties as the friends of BAE workers.

To rely on nationalist appeals by the trade unions and spearheaded by such individuals is a dead end. Instead BAE workers must elaborate an independent strategy to defend their jobs.

Not a single job cut must be accepted, based upon appeals to sustain the profitability of BAE. Instead an industrial offensive to defend jobs must be based on the adoption of a new political perspective, centred on a struggle against the capitalist profit system and its defenders, the Tories, Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party.

A rebellion must be mounted against the trade union bureaucracy that acts as an arm of management. New rank-and-file organisations, democratically elected and controlled by the workforce, must be formed. These committees should prepare for strike action, uniting workers at BAE and those workers who are in the supply chain of the company. They must champion a united offensive at BAE with all those workers facing the same attacks throughout Britain, Europe and internationally.

Central to such an independent perspective for waging the class struggle against the employers must be to insist that every worker employed in the defence industry is guaranteed the right to a secure, decent-paying job through the conversion of Britain’s armaments industry to socially useful production. This demands above all the bringing down of the coalition government and the formation of a workers’ government pledged to implement socialist policies, under the leadership of the Socialist Equality Party.



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