

UK TalkTalk call centre set to close

Our correspondent
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Nearly 400 jobs are set to be lost at the major UK telecom company TalkTalk. Some 390 redundancies were announced in April across three TalkTalk sites based in the UK. Jobs are being axed in Warrington and Preston in the north west of England, and in Northampton. The Northampton call centre is to be completely closed, resulting in the loss of 168 jobs.

In Warrington, 70 workers have been given 90 days notice. In Preston the company said, “Formal consultation for those affected by the proposed changes will run for a period between 30 and 90 days, with the first collective consultation meetings beginning on 25th April.”

A number of TalkTalk workers from Preston are either losing their jobs or having their contracts transferred to the outsourcing company Careline Services, also based in Preston. At the end of April, Careline, which also provides call centres for consumer goods conglomerate Unilever and the London Olympics, took on 60 TalkTalk staff after winning the contract to provide support services. Careline is taking over part of the site where TalkTalk staff are presently employed.

The jobs of around 50 TalkTalk staff employed at Preston’s TalkTalk site are still threatened. Careline would only state that “wherever possible”; it would recruit TalkTalk workers, but not all of them. The firm stated, “Our intention is to build up numbers to 200 and wherever possible we will be looking to transfer people over from TalkTalk.”

TalkTalk is planning to recruit replacement workers in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis as well as to move support services to India and Manila, the capital of the Philippines.

The company issued a statement saying, “There will be significant new opportunities for existing employees at Preston, Stornoway and Warrington, and TalkTalk will be working with affected employees to maximise

opportunities to transfer to new roles and thereby minimise job losses in a year that, ultimately, will see more UK roles created than lost.”

Many of the call centre workers affected by redundancy will either be ineligible for newly created engineering roles or face the unrealistic possibility of relocating to sites in Preston or Stornoway. According to a report in the *Lancashire Evening Post*, the Central and West Lancashire branch of the Communication Workers Union said, “some of its members had been told that not accepting transfers to other TalkTalk sites would constitute them resigning”.

But workers seeking any support in fighting the plans from the CWU have been told in no uncertain terms that no struggle will be waged. There has been no mention of fighting the job cuts, or even exposing them for what they really are—part of a wider and ongoing attack on the wages, working and living standards of the working class both in the UK and internationally.

CWU Deputy General Secretary Andy Kerr merely stated, “We hope that redundancies will be kept to a minimum and will be seeking redeployment opportunities wherever possible.”

Under conditions whereby workers fear that if redeployed elsewhere they may face a cut in their pay and conditions, the union has stated it will not mobilise its members in strike action to prevent this, but will instead appeal to the courts! Glenn Slater, of the Central and West Lancashire branch of the CWU, said, “If we do not feel that our members are being treated fairly, we will do whatever is necessary to defend them in the courts.”

Staff were told that planned redundancies were due in no part to cost cutting. As a further insult to workers, the motives for the planned redundancies were expressed as being part of a “simplification exercise” whereby employees would be concentrated into fewer locations. The benefits of “simplification” seemingly

outweighing the massive human impact of nearly 400 lost jobs.

The *Lancashire Evening Post* on April 27 cited comments from workers in Preston who feared the worst as a result of the cutbacks.

One worker said, “We have basically been told that unless we are picked to move over to Careline, we have to take our chances. There are other jobs available within TalkTalk, but that could be Warrington or even further afield and there are people here who cannot commit to travelling. What happens to them? They are just saying that there are opportunities for people within the group, no-one is getting any commitments.”

Another worker told the newspaper that staff had been “kept in the dark” for weeks before the announcement.

The redundancy announcement comes at a time when the company’s elite have benefitted from huge profits made by a demerger and sale. TalkTalk and Carphone Warehouse founder Charles Dunstone recently benefitted from demerging both companies and putting shares for sale on the stock exchange. This resulted in him being named the wealthiest digital and online retail multi-millionaire in last year’s Sunday Times Rich List.

According to this year’s Sunday Times Rich List, Dunstone’s wealth stands at an estimated £860 million, despite a fall in the share prices that his wealth is derived from.

The job losses come just a few months after an upgraded profits forecast was celebrated in February by TalkTalk’s Chief Executive, Dido Harding. On the news, the firm’s shares shot up by 11 percent. Harding is also a member of Prime Minister David Cameron’s Council of Business Leaders.

Western Isles Member of the Scottish Parliament and member of the Scottish National Party, Alasdair Allan, welcomed the announcement that 25 jobs would be created in Stornoway. He chose not to mention the 25 jobs created would be at the expense of hundreds of jobs axed elsewhere.

Workers across all TalkTalk sites should unite and take coordinated action to oppose these job cuts and rationalisations. In this struggle, no store can be placed in the CWU. TalkTalk workers must establish rank-and-file committees, democratically elected and independent of the trade union bureaucracy.



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