

Tens of thousands of steel, energy, retail, government jobs cut in the UK

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Thousands of jobs losses have been announced in recent weeks across the UK as part of a corporate European-wide assault on the working class, amid growing global economic turmoil.

Tata Steel announced last month that it is to slash 1,050 jobs in the UK. Around 750 of these job losses are expected in Port Talbot, Wales and another 300 jobs could be lost at steel mills at plants in Llanwern, Trostre, Hartlepool and Corby.

The Port Talbot plant, which once employed 20,000 steel workers, is a major regional employer and each job loss is expected to have an immediate knock-on effect of four job cuts in associated industries, businesses and supply chains.

There has been a haemorrhaging of jobs in steel production in the UK over the past year.

In addition, oil giant British Petroleum (BP) last month announced 600 jobs losses in the North Sea (one in five of all jobs). These are part of 4,000 posts BP plans to shed globally from its “upstream” oil exploration and drilling business. BP’s cutbacks form part of a major reduction in its global “upstream” workforce—those employed in oil exploration and production—from 24,000 to less than 20,000 by December 2017.

According to the industry body, UK Oil & Gas, an estimated 65,000 jobs had gone in the oil sector as of September 2015. The oil price is now at a 12-year low of around \$30 per barrel and expected to fall farther.

The BP cuts were announced a day after oil and gas services firm Petrofac said that it would be cutting up to 160 jobs to integrate its operations into a single business. The firm said this was to ensure it remained “competitive and sustainable against a challenging industry backdrop”.

British Gas is to make 500 staff redundant, with the

shutting of its loft and cavity wall insulation business. The cuts are part of 6,000 job losses announced by parent company Centrica. Some 500 of the jobs will go at sites around the UK, with 100 of them in Leeds.

Up to 300 jobs are also under threat at the Leeds headquarters of supermarket giant Asda. The retailer employs almost 3,000 staff at its head office in the city. The job cuts are on top of 1,360 middle management jobs axed in stores in 2014 as the Walmart-owned chain tries to lower costs by £1 billion.

The UK’s third largest supermarket chain is believed to have fallen behind rivals during the key Christmas trading period. Analysts expect Asda to report its sixth quarter of falling revenue and to have the worst sales performance of the so-called “big four” supermarkets.

Up to 300 jobs are threatened at London-based ready meals company Bakkavör Meals after it lost a contract to supply mashed potatoes to the UK’s top retailer Tesco. Bakkavör is one of the UK’s biggest ready meals companies and provides prepared foods from salad to pizza and stir fries to all the major supermarket chains.

Tesco is involved in a ferocious trade war with low-cost retailers Aldi and Lidl. In November, Carlsberg said it was to cut up to 100 UK staff after Tesco stopped stocking some of its beer. General Mills announced 265 jobs will go with the closure of its factory in Berwick, which makes pastry and cake mixes. General Mills began producing pastry at the site over 50 years ago.

Virgin Media is to cut 900 jobs from its UK workforce over the next two years. Tom Mockridge, the chief executive, said: “The proposed reorganisation will give us an even sharper focus on the customer, network expansion and business growth”.

Research by the GMB trade union found that than

25,000 jobs are under threat in local authorities nationwide, due to councils imposing central government spending cuts.

Councils in the North East of England are set to shed more than 1,500 jobs. Approximately 700 jobs could go at Derbyshire County Council, 400 at Plymouth City Council and the same number at Sheffield City Council.

Also in Sheffield, over 240 jobs are under threat at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Staff dealing with policy and corporate services have been told their office will close by 2018. Martin Donnelly, BIS permanent secretary, said the end of operations in Sheffield would be accompanied by the creation of a combined central headquarters and policy centre in London. “The unions are being consulted and will be involved throughout the process”, he said.

Up to 15,000 local authority jobs are set to go in Scotland under cuts imposed by the Scottish National Party (SNP) government.

In January, Edinburgh council approved 2,000 job losses, over the next four years. Scotland’s second largest authority, run by a Labour-SNP coalition, is imposing £140 million in cuts in that period. About 700 staff are already slated for redundancy. Up to £85 million in cuts will go through over the next year, with museums and galleries’ opening hours slashed, and grants to local organisations cut. Parking charges in the city will rise by up to 50 percent.

Dumfries and Galloway Council could shed 400 job losses as part of spending cuts of £21.1 million. Stirling Council could also cut up to 390 jobs over the next five years and 150 in the immediate future. Loss of unsocial hours payments and changes in terms and condition of employment are also under consideration by Stirling as part of £6.6 million in cuts this year.

Around 150 jobs are to go at Iceland’s manufacturing plant for frozen food in Gorton, Manchester. Management this was “as a result of a review into its business operations”. Iceland bought the site from Loxton Food Company in 2013.

Staff at the plant, speaking anonymously to the local media, fear the workforce could be reduced by up to two-thirds if another round of redundancies goes ahead later in the year.

One of the workers told the press, “The company farmed out manufacturing of ready meals to other

companies when Gorton got the contract to do the Slimming World meals. Now we don’t have enough work—that is due to a management decision. The managers say the redundancies are subject to consultation but we expect about 150 of us to go”.

Budget shoe chain Brantano went into administration last month—putting 2,000 jobs at risk. The collapse of the firm, which has 140 shops and 60 concessions, was blamed on a high street slump.

Education book publisher Pearson announced 4,000 redundancies worldwide, with most jobs going in the United States. Around 500 jobs are set to go in the UK. The shares of Pearson, who recently sold the *Financial Times*, rose 17.4 percent on the news of the cuts.

Barclays, under newly appointed manager Jes Staley, is initiating another wave of job cuts at its investment-banking arm, on top of the 7,000 staff sacked since 2014. Some 1,200 jobs losses have been announced, with Barclays issuing its second profit warning in three months. The job losses coincide with Barclays’ plans to pull out of Russia and close offices across a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region.



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