

Fujitsu strikers at UK sites speak about their dispute

Our reporters
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Workers at information technology conglomerate Fujitsu struck across various sites in the UK, Friday, in a 24-hour stoppage. They are protesting plans by the company to impose up to 1,800 redundancies and attacks on pension rights. Strikers are demanding that Fujitsu pays them a living wage.

Fujitsu employs around 14,000 in the UK, with up to 15 percent of the UK workforce threatened by the company's latest restructuring. Jobs are going at Fujitsu operations in other European countries, including 400 jobs in Finland. Between 400 and 500 jobs are set to go in Germany, among Fujitsu's 12,000 employees there. Those laid off will mainly be among information technology system and development services employees.

The strike was called by the Unite union, with pickets set up at Fujitsu headquarters in London and at sites in Manchester, Birmingham, Wakefield, Edinburgh and other towns and cities.

In Manchester, around 30 workers picketed Fujitsu's main UK plant on Northampton Road. *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to pickets and distributed the WSWs article "Fujitsu UK workers strike to protest job losses, attacks on pay and pensions". Reporters told pickets about the case of the 13 framed-up Maruti Suzuki workers in India, who have been sentenced to life in prison, and handed out copies of the International Committee of the Fourth International statement calling for their immediate release.

One of the pickets, Michael, explained, "I am striking because we've got to make a stand. We have already lost a lot of staff, and six or seven people have already left because of the looming redundancies."

When reporters explained that Fujitsu had operations all over the globe, employing over 150,000 and that what was required was a European and global offensive

to unite all workers against job losses, he said, "We're making it national, maybe global is the next step."

Another worker, Jack, who has worked at Fujitsu for 15 years said, "There comes a time when you have to look beyond your own circumstances and fight for the greater good."

Jack said some of his work colleagues are being "placed in really difficult situations," while others "depending on pensions are being fleeced."

He thought "corporate greed" was at the root of the dispute. Productivity was constantly being increased: "The whole task is becoming automated, and one person is doing three people's jobs. I'm not shying away from hard work, but people have enough on their plate."

When asked what he thought about the fact that Unite were accepting compulsory redundancies and negotiating for voluntary redundancies instead, he said the company was "going to get rid of people regardless."

Jack said of the need for a fightback based on uniting Fujitsu workers globally, "In theory it sounds like a great idea. Change has got to happen at some point. I just don't know how you'd get the ball rolling."

When reporters explained that the WSWs had mounted a campaign in defence of the Maruti Suzuki workers, Jack responded, "I'll definitely sign the petition in support. They're trying to stop someone's voice being heard, just fighting for basic things."

Michael has worked at Fujitsu for 30 years and said he had been a union rep for 20 years. He echoed the position of Unite, saying, "What is achievable is to mitigate the redundancies." Unite had devised a scheme whereby "someone who wants to leave can match up with someone who has received a compulsory redundancy notice." Unite had "e-mailed thousands of

staff about this,” but the company would not accept their proposal.

While supportive of Unite, Michael said that only striking at plants in Britain against a global corporation was “fighting with one hand tied behind your back.” He added, “The union are a little too friendly with the employers—but they’ve got to be pragmatic. They have made concessions to employers.”

Several Unite representatives mounted a picket line at the Fujitsu’s headquarters in Baker Street, London. Matt Whaley is a Fujitsu Service worker and the Deputy Chair of Fujitsu’s Shop Stewards Combine Committee. Asked what the main issues were in the strike Whaley said, “As you mention in your article there are the job cuts in the UK. There’s 1,800 jobs expected to be lost initially. The company have since made an announcement of other cuts to other teams.”

Another issue in the dispute was that of union recognition, said Whaley. He explained, “Unite only has recognition in Manchester and couple of other small pockets in the company and we are trying to get national recognition for the whole UK for everybody that wants it, in particular after the company terminated the works council [Fujitsu Voice]. We used to have a majority of seats on the works council.”

Of the Maruti Suzuki workers, Whaley said, “I wasn’t aware of this particular story but yes, I support them absolutely. And I am sure my colleagues will as well.”

He continued, “I’ve been involved with Amicus [one of the unions which merged to form Unite] and now Unite for a number of years, and I’ve heard a lot of shocking stories of multinational companies in India. They start up new companies for their global delivery quite regularly and the benefit of doing that is clearly that if you start up a new company in India, you are exempt from employment law for a period of time, so you can literally get away with doing whatever you want and then just start another company up.

“I believe that new companies are also tax exempt for a period of time as well so these employers are not giving any social benefit to the community, to the local people. They just exploit workers with low wages and no benefits.”

At Fujitsu’s site in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, a Unite representative attempted to prevent WSWS reporters from speaking to those on the picket line.



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