

UK: Fujitsu workers must reject Unite's nationalist strategy

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The following leaflet is being distributed to striking Fujitsu workers this week.

Fujitsu workers are holding a further series of two-day strikes over the next two weeks against plans to sack 1,800 UK-based workers.

Job losses in the UK and Ireland are among 3,300 redundancies planned throughout Europe in a restructuring operation. Some 400 jobs are to go in Finland and between 400 and 500 of Fujitsu's 12,000 employees in Germany are to be made redundant. Fujitsu announced 5,000 job cuts globally in 2013, with 3,000 of these in Japan.

The latest redundancies, to be implemented over 12 to 18 months, were announced last October, and are bound up with Fujitsu's Workplace Anywhere plan to shift the support and infrastructure services it sells to clients onto globally organised cloud-based platforms.

Fujitsu workers, who have repeatedly shown their determination to defend their livelihoods through strikes, pickets and protests, are no further forward in their struggle to oppose the job losses. Responsibility for this rests with the Unite trade union.

Striking Fujitsu workers in the UK remain largely isolated from Fujitsu workers around the world, and from the broad support in the working class that would otherwise be available to them. This is because Unite is not opposed to job losses in principle, stating its agreement with "voluntary" redundancies and more favourable redundancy terms.

Rather, its aim is to ensure that the union's role as a loyal ally of the company in the exploitation of Fujitsu workers is preserved.

This relationship has been called into question by Fujitsu's decision to lay off workers without going through the "Fujitsu Voice" union-management consultation forum, which was closed down

immediately prior to the job losses being announced. Unite's response has been to prove that it entirely shares Fujitsu's goals and is the best means of imposing them on UK workers, so as to pit them against their colleagues in other countries.

In its Q&A on the dispute, Unite boasts, "Fujitsu makes more profit in the UK than it does in either EMEIA [in Europe, the Middle East, India and Africa] or globally."

Unite regional officer Sharon Hutchinson emphasised that Fujitsu's "UK subsidiary" made "£85.6 million profit last year," and that the 1,800 job losses are "not good news for the UK economy as the company says that it intends to offshore many of these jobs..."

Unite's nationalist programme was summarised by the union's national officer, Ian Tonks, who complained on the UniteLive web site that the company policy of "trying to replace highly skilled workers with offshore staff who have yet to be recruited is extremely risky ... similar projects have not been successful for Fujitsu's competitors."

Tonks politely cautioned management, "The risk of offshoring could be multiplied by the company rushing through job cuts with minimal efforts at redeployment and retraining, leading to staff opposition rather than the cooperation needed to make it a success."

The union presents Fujitsu workers' dispute with the Japanese-owned company as one to prevent or delay "offshoring" of jobs to overseas locations, where wages and pension rights are lower. This nationalist program is a political dead-end.

The only viable basis on which to combat Fujitsu's assault is through a global socialist strategy based on the class struggle.

Fujitsu's transformation, from a nationally based producer of electrical equipment to a global IT and data

service provider, is typical of the globalised production processes developed over the past three decades, which has rendered the nationalist programme of trade unionism outmoded.

The company was founded in 1923 to build generators and electric motors in Japan. It expanded into switching systems and telephony, particularly after World War Two, and started building computers in 1956. By 1980, it was the largest computer company in Japan.

During the 1980s, Fujitsu was expanding internationally. It opened a semiconductor plant in San Diego, in the United States, in 1981; launched a commercial ISDN service in Singapore in 1988, and bought British mainframe computer producers ICL in 1990.

In 1999, it announced a global “everything on the Internet” strategy, while allying with Siemens AG to build desktop, laptops, handheld devices and servers.

At the same time, the company was moving into IT services. In 2007, Fujitsu signed a deal with Reuters under which Fujitsu ran Reuters’ own IT services, employing 300 Fujitsu and 200 Reuters’ contractors.

In 2010, it turned to testing cloud-based systems and now offers these from 25 data centres across the planet, in Japan, Australia, Singapore, the US, UK and Germany. Fujitsu’s data centres offer Infrastructure-as-a-Service, processing and storing vast amounts of client data remotely, allowing companies to slash their in-house IT costs. These globally integrated offerings, all of which can be tailored to the needs of Fujitsu’s commercial and government clients, wherever they are located, can be maintained from anywhere with trained IT staff and a decent Internet connection.

In 2005, Fujitsu Services, which operates in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, shifted its entire IT Helpdesk from the UK to South Africa, making a 20 percent reduction in its UK operational costs and achieving “significant staff reductions.”

Fujitsu now employs around 170,000 workers worldwide. The company’s IT service desks are globally distributed—in Poland, Malaysia, Costa Rica and the Philippines—along with 160 local service desks. Fujitsu’s main rivals such as Amazon Web Services, Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud, IBM Cloud and Rackspace operate and compete on a global basis.

Fujitsu workers are posed with great challenges, but

have immense opportunities to advance their struggle.

Taken together, these rival outfits, along with network connectivity and infrastructure providers, organise the communications and data services on which most of the globalised world economy and daily life depends. Their highly lucrative and cutthroat operations depend on the combined efforts of a potentially, extremely powerful group of workers.

To realise this potential, it is necessary to break entirely with the nationalist and pro-corporate tactics and strategy of Unite. Fujitsu workers must unite with the widest sections of workers and young people, all of whom face attacks on jobs, wages, pensions, health, housing, education and welfare benefits—threatening a return to the conditions of the 1930s. New rank-and-file organisations, independent of both company management and the trade unions, must be set up to take this forward.

A particular appeal must be made to IT workers in Europe and internationally. Modern technology makes this possible in ways that were unimaginable to previous generations, but workers’ techniques of struggle in the 21st century remain strangled by the trade union organisations built in the 19th century.

The class struggle is global in every aspect of its development, and workers’ efforts to defend themselves must be based on this reality.

Above all, a socialist perspective and leadership is needed. The services provided by these vast corporations are vital to daily life, health, education, science and culture, yet their primary aim is the private enrichment of a handful of billionaires. Any perspective, therefore, that aims to leave them under private ownership is doomed to fail. The Socialist Equality Party urges Fujitsu workers interested in taking up such a struggle to contact us today.



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