

Nearly 200,000 jobs lost in the UK amid pandemic

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Nearly 200,000 jobs have been lost in the UK in just over three months. According to research published Monday by the *Daily Mail*, 59 major companies have shed more than 195,000 jobs since lockdown began in March.

Workers have been laid off particularly heavily in the retail, travel, hospitality, and manufacturing sectors. In the last days, the high-end retailer Harrods, as well as Café Rouge, Bella Italia and Topshop-owner Arcadia have announced a further 14,000 redundancies, with at least 10,000 going in just two days, on July 1 and 2.

On Monday, sandwich chain Pret a Manger announced that 30 of its shops will close permanently, with the loss of 1,000 jobs.

The Centre for Retail Research revealed that 24,348 roles have gone at insolvent UK shops and businesses so far in 2020. These include brands that had a presence on the High Street going back decades, such as Laura Ashley and Debenhams. Others making thousands redundant include Monsoon, Accessorize, Cath Kidston, Quiz, and Victoria's Secret.

The 2,123 stores of 38 large and medium-sized retailers forced into administration in the first six months of 2020 is already more than the total in the whole of 2019 (2,051 stores run by 43 retailers). This year's administrations affect 49,200 workers, with 45,500 employees affected last year.

With the Johnson government allowing cafes and restaurants to fully reopen from July 4, Pret has reopened 339 out of its 410 UK shops. The UK cafes are part of 550 outlets that Pret operates globally employing 13,000 staff, including 8,000 in the UK. Along with the job losses at the 30 stores, the number of workers in Pret's other shops will be reduced due to sales being down 74 percent on last year.

Pret chief executive, Pano Christou, told the

Financial Times that the firm faces a "significant restructuring of the business" and that job losses "could be 1,000 plus" unless it reached sales of 50 percent to 60 percent of pre-coronavirus levels by September. Pret closed two shops in the north east of England last week, in Newcastle and Gateshead, with the loss of 28 jobs. In a further cost-cutting measures, Pret "has also put its 30,000 square foot central London office on the market" and "will look to relocate to a more suburban London location." The company is struggling to pay rent on its shops, with the newspaper noting it had "paid 10 percent of its March rent bill and 30 percent in June" and "would be negotiating with the chain's more than 300 landlords individually."

Pret's announcement followed SSP Group, which runs rival food-to-go chains Upper Crust and Ritazza. The group plans to axe 5,000 jobs—more than half its UK workforce. Another two parent groups, The Restaurant Group that owns the Wagamama cafe chain, and the Casual Dining Group, which owns Café Rouge, have announced 4,600 job cuts between them.

The UK's oldest department store chain, John Lewis, warned last week that it plans hundreds of job losses, with some of its stores to remain permanently closed. The *Daily Mirror* reported, "One of two head offices in Victoria, normally home to 450 staff, will reportedly close under plans to encourage flexible working."

Managing Director Michael Ward of Harrods, the "The World's Leading Luxury Department Store," told staff by memo that due to "devastation in international trade" and the "ongoing impacts of this pandemic, we as a business will need to make reductions to our workforce." Around 700 jobs will be lost at the London store, equating to 14 per cent of its 4,800 workforce.

The Clarks shoemaker is to cut 700 jobs worldwide

over the next 18 months, with 100 to go at its Street HQ in Somerset where it was founded in 1825. Fashion firm Mulberry will axe around 500 jobs. Collapsed furniture store Harveys is making 240 redundancies. Even larger job losses are taking place at Oasis and Warehouse, which have gone into administration with 200 immediate job losses and 1,800 put at risk.

Shirt maker TM Lewin is to close all 66 of its UK shops, with most of its 700 workers laid off. The firm, founded in London in 1898, is to take all its sales online.

On Monday, Rugby Football Union announced it would reduce its workforce by nearly a quarter, with 139 jobs at risk. It cited projected losses of up to £107 million due to the pandemic.

Further job losses have been announced in manufacturing. Last month, rail manufacturer Wabtec announced that up to 450 jobs were threatened at its rail refurbishment factory in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, opening up a 45-day consultation period for redundancies. The famous Flying Scotsman locomotive was built on the site. On Sunday, Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers' union (RMT) leader Mick Cash said, "The company have now said that it will actually make 760 posts redundant, including all 682 manual graded staff, still cutting the 450 posts from the workforce but forcing the remainder into newly created posts with different contracts of employment and associated terms and conditions."

The plant is owned by the Wabtec Corporation based in Pittsburgh in the US. The employees in Doncaster are part of a global workforce of 27,000 spread across 50 countries. The firm has an \$8 billion turnover supplying components and services to the rail industry.

Magellan Aerospace is proposing to shed 100 jobs and close one of its two sites at Poole and Bournemouth, where it employs around 250. Magellan is headquartered in Canada and produces parts for the aerospace industry, primarily for Airbus and Boeing. It is imposing the cuts due to the knock-on effect of cuts at Airbus, which is shedding 15,000 job cuts worldwide, with 1,727 to go in Britain.

Far more job losses are being planned by the corporations. Many thousands who have already lost their jobs were being paid 80 percent of their wages under the government's furlough scheme. This will come to a tapered end beginning next month and

withdrawn altogether in October. These corporations have already received £25.5 billion from the public purse to pay wages.

According to a poll by Opinium on behalf of the Bright Blue think-tank, 44 percent of 500 businesses signed on to the furlough scheme said they intend to make more staff redundant when it ends. The survey found 65 percent of medium sized firms employing between 50 and 249 workers expect redundancies.

The one constant in the massive wave of job losses is the refusal of the pro-corporation trade unions to fight in defence of a single job. Their main gripe, even when they bother to comment on the gutting of workers livelihoods, is that they are being denied a role in imposing the redundancies—as is the case with the Communications Workers Union and British Telecom.

At Wabtec, RMT leader Mick Cash complained, "Additionally—and even more outrageously—the company has stated that if it does not achieve its aims through consultation and negotiations with the union, then it will dismiss all staff and re-engage those it needs to continue the business."



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