

# Hundreds of ABP meat packers in Dungannon, Northern Ireland facing redundancy

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6 February 2026

338 workers at Anglo Beef Processors (ABP) in Dungannon, Northern Ireland are facing redundancy following the company's announced intention to close its retail packing operation, based in the town's Glanville industrial estate.

Workers' livelihoods are to be sacrificed to maintain ABP's profit margins. An ABP spokesperson cited "market place conditions" and claimed "stream-lining our operations is a necessity to achieve operational efficiencies, maintain our competitiveness and strengthen our business for the long term."

The closure threatened plant was part of Linden Foods, taken over by ABP in 2021. ABP's Glanville slaughterhouse in the same industrial estate is to continue working, as are ABP operations in Lurgan, Newry and Lisnaskea.

Dungannon is a small town, population just over 16,000, and the closure will devastate it. A mental health charity worker, Glena McDowell-Kahn, told the local *Impartial Reporter*, "There will be a real knock-on effect on the town. We have a large Timorese community—many of whom work in the factory—as well as Polish, Lithuanian and local workers. Financially and emotionally, this will have a huge impact."

Dungannon was reported in the 2021 census as having the highest proportion, 34.5 percent, of foreign born residents of any town in the North of Ireland, many recruited in recent decades to work in the meat industry.

The workers are being sacked by one of the largest meat processing companies in Europe. Founded in 1954 by Larry Goodman as Irish Food Processors Ltd, the company expanded over the decades to its current position as a major supplier of meat and other food

stuffs to supermarkets in Ireland, the UK and Europe. The ABP Food Group site proclaims annual turnover of €5 billion, 14,000 workers, 45,000 farm suppliers, and 50 production locations across 9 countries, principally Ireland, the UK and Poland. In 2019, ABP was reported as carrying out 20 percent of all cattle kills in Ireland and 15 percent in the UK, proportions which are likely to have increased.

Goodman is one of Ireland's richest men, showing up on the list of Irish billionaires in 2020 with a personal worth, along with wife Kitty, and sons Laurence and Mark Goodman, estimated at €2.46 billion. At the time, Ireland boasted the fifth highest number of billionaires per capita of any country in the world.

As long ago as 1991, his operations were the principal subjects of a three-year tribunal, launched by the Irish government, following an *ITV World in Action* documentary into "allegations regarding illegal activities, fraud and malpractice in and in connection with the beef processing industry..."

Allegations investigated by the "Beef Tribunal" included re-packaging substandard meat, regulatory evasion, tax evasion, subsidy abuse and political influence peddling.

A 2019 investigation by the Irish Farmers Journal (IFJ) placed Goodman and ABP at the centre of a complex structure of private companies with no employees, based in tax havens across Europe, whose purpose was to provide loans to subsidiaries of the Goodman group. Goodman registered his companies in the same tax havens, ABP Group is itself registered in Jersey.

At the time, the IFJ estimated Goodman's operations as paying a tax rate of 0.3 percent, compared to

Ireland's nominal tax rate of 12.5 percent. Goodman stepped down in 2023 and has subsequently transferred much of the direction of his business empire to his family. The business retains interest in plastics, property, infrastructure and health clinics.

Workers in Dungannon are threatened with being pitched into unemployment by one of the wealthiest and best connected Irish owned corporations outside of the US owned tech giants which now dominate the economy in the South.

In the face of this, the political parties in the North showed a striking unanimity. Sinn Fein, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)—representing the Northern nationalist and unionist political establishment—wrung their hands and appealed to the wealthy company to mitigate the blow.

Sinn Fein MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, Pat Cullen, said she would ask the company to “prioritise redeployment”—forcing workers to move to the company’s other operations in the area. The Northern Ireland Economy Minister, Sinn Fein’s Caoimhe Archibald, appears to have said nothing, neither has her department even posted a public statement.

The UUP’s Diane Armstrong called on the “Economy Minister to urgently engage with ABP Foods, trade unions, and relevant agencies”. DUP deputy Deborah Erskine said, “I will be engaging with the company to ensure workers are supported and to understand the reasoning behind this decision.”

Hardline unionist Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) leader and MP for North Antrim, Jim Allister, suggested the closure was related to Brexit in that the company no longer imports meat from the UK to be processed and returned to UK markets. The company declined to comment on Allister’s claim. ABP has recently purchased Scotbeef’s operations in Glasgow and Bridge of Allan, near Stirling.

The Unite trade union, which organises sections of ABP workers, has thus far been completely silent.

Yet the basis exists for a powerful struggle by ABP workers in defence of their jobs. In March 2020, 60 workers in one of the Dungannon ABP plants refused to start their shifts in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic. Workers reported a “total lack” of social distancing measures on the boning line, in the canteen and at entrances and exits. Staff were reported to be still being allowed to work despite showing symptoms.

The Dungannon walkout followed similar actions at ABP’s Lurgan plant and at Moy Park, which processes poultry.

As recently as October last year, 150 meat packers, trimmers, distribution, kill line and boning workers at ABP’s Craigavon plant, 20 miles from Dungannon, voted to strike for a pay increase above the miserable 3.2 percent offered by the company. The strike was called off by Unite at the last minute following a promise of further talks and an “improved offer”. No outcome has been made public. At the time, Unite warned that major supermarkets including Sainsbury’s, Tesco and Aldi would face meat shortages as they are all supplied by ABP.

The refusal by the union apparatus to even make a statement points to their absolute commitment to preventing any struggle by ABP workers across the company’s sprawling international operation in defence of the workers facing redundancy in Dungannon.

If ABP workers in the Craigavon works alone can close down meat sales at major supermarkets, then a united struggle by ABP’s 14,000 workers in Ireland, North and South, the UK and Europe would instantaneously force a retreat. This will not come about through the Unite apparatus but poses the construction of independent rank-and-file committees in every ABP plant, committed to a united struggle in defence of workers’ jobs, living standards and rights.

Contact the WSWS today (form below) to discuss these vital initiatives.



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